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Better brand marketing through attribution analytics

By Brian Lesser and Brad Terrell

Article Highlights:

- Use a data tracking system that collects every interaction between advertisers and individual consumers
- Once you identify events that create the best response, click-throughs and conversions are irrelevant
- If the branding goal is to undermine the competition, compare visits to a competitor's site versus those that have not seen the branding message

The advent of digital media and advertising has provided marketers with new abilities to precisely manage and measure the online success of direct response campaigns. Tracking the effectiveness of brand marketing through digital channels, however, hasn't always been so simple.

Marketers can remove the guesswork and risks associated with direct response campaigns to measure the effectiveness of specific marketing initiatives and improve future ROI. Many marketers, on the other hand, still struggle with tracking the value of online brand marketing.

These marketers may be surprised to learn that measuring and enhancing the effectiveness of online brand marketing is easier than ever.

Collecting the data

The first step in measuring the effectiveness of online brand advertising is data collection. It's critical to track and analyze all of the elements in the marketing mix that are driving brand messages.

Tracking the relevant data -- from impressions and page views to display ad clicks, search keywords, and cookies -- is a daunting challenge, especially considering the ever-expanding array of [digital marketing](#) channels and consumer touch points. Gaining the necessary insight requires collecting and analyzing many terabytes of audience data.

The right solution requires the capability to manage large volumes of data and scale with growing audience [engagement](#). Systems exist that allow marketers to collect user-level information by capturing every interaction between brand advertisers and individual consumers and storing the information in a database.

Analyzing the data

Once the data has been collected, the next step is analyzing it to pull insights. Best-of-breed analysis tools are crucial.

A variety of branding campaign goals can be measured, including how a campaign reaches an audience beyond the advertiser's core customers, how it lifts brand awareness and recognition, and how it drives traffic to the website.

Marrying the success of how campaigns are meeting such goals with these attribution analysis capabilities is the secret to successfully uncovering insights that will lead to more effective online branding campaigns. Marketers can now identify the campaign events that are most likely to trigger the communication of a brand message.

More importantly, the click-through and conversion metrics that are central to measuring direct response campaigns are almost irrelevant for most branding campaigns.

Measuring the effectiveness

Effective brand advertising isn't always about driving sales. In some cases, it's about reinforcing the message of a trusted brand name. In other cases, it's about gaining mindshare while destroying a competitor. Apple's Mac versus PC campaign was a good example of this.

Surveys and panel-based research are the most effective tools for determining the effectiveness of brand advertising. The good news is that these measurement techniques are even easier to implement online than they are offline.

Brand advertisers can also leverage cookies and other tracking methods to observe how consumers behave and also gain visibility into which sites these consumers visit after experiencing a branding message, advertisement, or offering. This is one area where digital marketing far outshines television, print, and other media.

Advertisers can track not only the sites their prospects visited, but also learn the granular details of where the mouse moved, when it paused, and how long the consumer was exposed to specific brand messages. Armed with information about how different user segments respond to and interact with different creatives, advertisers can adjust the campaign creative mix or targeting approach for better results.

Understanding the behaviors of users who view or respond to brand messaging and subsequently demonstrate interest by visiting the advertiser site for a certain period of time or frequency or by taking a certain action also provides advertisers with valuable

insight. They can use this insight to target and reach similar users who would have an increased propensity to respond positively to the brand messaging.

If the branding goal is to undermine the competition, one can compare visits to the competitor's site versus those that have not seen the branding message. If visits to competitor's site stop after seeing your brand advertisement, it's clear that brand marketing is making an impact. Similarly, advertisers can measure keyword search volume for their own brand versus their competitor's brand and correlate that data with exposure to their branding campaign.

Improving online brand marketing

Digital advertising provides advertisers with measurement capabilities that other media do not. These capabilities can be used to enhance brand marketing efforts in much the same way that they have enhanced direct response marketing efforts.

There is an abundance of data available to brand marketers, yet few use it to their advantage. The truth is that tools exist for marketers to translate brand messages into positive performance statistics. It's time to start using them.

Brian Lesser is vice president and general manager for WPP's Media Innovation Group.

Brad Terrell is vice president and general manager of digital media at Netezza.