

From broadcaster to coffee shop - the new role of the digital publisher

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Many marketers still think about advertising in digital media in the same way as they thought about placing ads in traditional media - consider the reach, look at the frequency, and then go with the vehicles that offer the optimal mixture of the two.

It was an approach that was fine for the days of traditional mass media, but today's more complex and fragmented market needs a new approach.

Before the arrival of the Web, we had few ways of measuring how people were engaging with our content, and we had only a sketchy understanding of who was listening to a radio station or buying a publication. Audience research was difficult and expensive to do, and often out of date by the time we got our hands on it.

And of course, the media owners, the broadcasters and publishers, were in complete control of the content and hence dictated the conversation. Given the lack of interactivity and insight into the audience, it made sense for marketers to try and reach as many people as possible through publishers' audiences.

Quality of engagement

Now, times have changed. In addition to the fact that we have a wealth of granular demographic and behavioural data to draw on about the audience, social media means that publishers aren't in complete control of the conversation anymore. Their content has been commoditised because anyone can quickly copy a breaking news story. And the audience, through comments - Twitter, Facebook, and so on, is contributing its own voice and content to the conversation.

And that has dramatically changed the role of the publication, with big implications for brands that advertise. No longer can publishers imagine that they own the audience and its conversations, instead, they facilitate it. Rather than broadcasting information, they engage in dialogue with their audiences. Instead of coming to them just for content, their readers and viewers are also there for the community and context that surrounds it.

In many ways, the quality digital publisher is becoming more like a coffee shop than a static publication. Rather than attracting people solely by the content on its menu, it also brings them in through its atmosphere, style, and the sort of patrons it attracts. This implies that we should no longer be thinking just about how many people visit a site, but also about who it attracts and the quality of the engagement it fosters.

Broader-based advertising

Do people love the site and linger over its content the way they would over a well-brewed mug of coffee in a bistro where they hang out with their friends? Or do they grab a quick paper cup of forgettable, muddy sludge, petrol station-style, before they're out the door? The quality and depth of these interactions should matter to media buyers as much as the size of the audience - a quality, engaged and defined audience on an influential site is more valuable than the fleeting page impressions on one that churns out low value content.

For this reason, we're seeing media buyers start to think about which communities they want to speak to and advertise on sites that have deep relationships with them. There is still room for broader-based brand advertising, sure, but many marketers are reporting that their best ROI comes from Web properties where the audience is relatively niche, but deeply engaged.

For example, sponsoring a specialist podcast may be low in cost compared to advertising on a big portal, but its audience will be passionate and dedicated. A brand associated with the podcast will get a great deal of appreciation from its community for sponsoring something they love. Quality publishers and their advertisers value this sort of bi-directional relationship.

They are not simply talking to an anonymous visitor who hits the site once or twice, they are attracting a reader who they want to have a long-term relationship with. Brands should therefore work with publishers who are able to talk about who their users are, what they're interested in and how they interact with the content on their properties, rather than focusing on impressive-sounding impressions and uniques.

ABOUT PIERRE CASSUTO

Humanz is one of the world's fastest growing AI companies focused on empowering valuable creators and the marketers that work with them. Each day, Humanz analyzes hundreds of millions of social media profiles and content pieces as well as transaction data from online merchants, to generate better benchmarks and predictions for social commerce ROI, while also improving transparency, motivation and access for creators and marketers.
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