

Making rands and sense - the case for PR and digital advertising to work together

By Kaz Henderson

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While it may be paradoxical for PR companies to consider advertising as a tool and downright frightening for advertising agencies to see PR dabbling in their territory, the truth is, the lines are already blurred.



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Although no brand would dream of entrusting their mega budgets to a PR agency to place on advertising, there are plenty of companies who do not have the big bucks to have an agency manage their spend, but do have the requirement for targeted communications, which can now include integrating PR with digital advertising (as well as content marketing).

Digital advertising is a powerful medium for actioning messages across a broad variety of sites, yet it remains misunderstood and as a result, underutilised. One of the biggest hurdles for everyone in the communication chain (media buyers as well as brand/marketing managers) to overcome is understanding how it works and therefore the attendant real benefits.

Digital advertising simply explained

Online advertising can be divided into two sectors: Premium adverts and programmatic.

Premium – where publishers control their own inventory and sell this space on their sites at a ‘premium’ rate (or employ agencies to sell this for them).

Programmatic – simply described as the automatic filling of vacant or remnant inventory on these sites – space that has not been bought by premium adverts – against a set of pre-programmed criteria that deliver targeted audiences verticals across multiple sites. All in the blink of an eye.

Translating awareness into action

While premium online advertising is possibly best deployed by advertising agencies, PR companies with their limited budgets can take full advantage of targeted programmatic spend. Here’s how:

We recently had the privilege of working with one of South Africa’s leading comedians. Launching a brand new concept and a whole different direction for comedy took some guts, as did our decision to take our client’s hard-earned budget (it makes it personal when you know just how much hard work has gone into deriving that budget...) and spend it on an online advertising campaign to support the PR efforts.

The hardest thing for us was to let go and trust in the clever tech and algorithms employed by our programmatic trader to deliver the results.

Setting the parameters

Define your objectives – in this case, create awareness that would sell tickets.

Point people to the right place – we needed to create an awareness around the new concept so needed people to visit the website to learn more and then buy tickets, rather than sending them directly to the ticket outlet.

Website basics – installing a conversion tracker on the website (at the suggestion of our programmatic trader), meant we could track and measure the interaction with the site and the subsequent ticket sales.

Timing is everything – this particular campaign needed to take several factors into consideration. School holidays, public holidays, Easter weekend and pay day, not to mention three other shows and a major music festival occurring in the same week. Working with our programmatic trader, we split the limited budget into three, and even refined this during the campaign to ensure we maximised every cent.

Audiences – like any other campaign, it was important to qualify our target market. For *Power Struggle* this was broadened by the subject matter. However, the beauty of conducting an online advertising campaign and in real-time, is that one can monitor and adapt. With such a limited budget we couldn’t be all things to all people so we took the biggest audience grouping (as statistically defined by AddSuite’s insights and data access) and limited the location/geographic exposure to Cape Town and surrounds – not national (PR and Facebook took care of the broader audience awareness in this instance).

Revenue split vs fees – agency commission is applicable on digital advertising deals, but we have also worked with clients where we have waived the commission for a percentage of sales generated from the campaign. With the right planning and digital advertising partner, this can be a no brainer as seen in the results of this particular project.

The results

Return on objectives – with over 3,000,000 impressions and close on 2,500 direct clicks to the website, the awareness of the project was definitely achieved, which was also represented in the number of tickets sold.

Return on investment – 9:1 – need we say more?

Future-planning – the statistics we have been provided with have allowed us to better define our future marketing and communication efforts for when the show returns in December to Cape Town. It has also helped with planning for the production run in Johannesburg in October. Not only that, but the insights our programmatic trader furnished have also allowed us to start mapping our communications plans for when the show plays in foreign territories.

Insights – these included the types of devices that the adverts were viewed on, as well as the geographic locations. This in particular, was surprising and revealing, as the actual audience reach was much broader than first anticipated. This will help with future PR efforts, targeting those publications and outlets that reach those markets.

Client satisfaction – 100% and a bigger budget for future campaigns.

In conclusion, I believe there is significant benefit to be had from a PR company working together with the right programmatic partner, particularly on short-term projects. The PR company's insights into the types of audiences their project needs to reach, coupled with the effective strategy used by an online advertising specialist to drive accurate programmatic targeting and delivery, will ensure results and help focus future promotional efforts.

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ABOUT KAZ HENDERSON

Kaz Henderson is the founder and director of possibilities at Network PR, whose offices are in Cape Town and Johannesburg...
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