

Online advertising is not just for clicks

Web advertising sales teams that have focused exclusively on click-through rates as the major metric for success in online display advertising have done harm to the digital publishing industry.



By [Attila Bernariusz](#) 29 Jan 2013

Publishers, agencies and advertisers need to look at a wider range of measures than click-throughs when considering the success of an online campaign.

For the past 15 years or more, advertisers have heard about how measurable the Web is because of how trackable it is. The result is that many ad buyers have become obsessed with "performance" based metrics to the exclusion of other measures of success. This is not only harmful to publishers, but also prevents brands from optimising their return on investment in online display advertising.

Money well spent?

Click-through data has been positioned as a silver bullet by online reps, who have for years sought to measure returns on advertising spending to justify the money spent on their campaigns. In the process, many marketers have forgotten the value of other metrics they tracked in the past.

Media spend has always been measurable, though in traditional media some of the metrics may have been hard to track. In the past, advertisers looked at metrics such as brand recall, brand awareness, brand favourability or purchase intent to justify spending (to name a few).

In the online world, many of these measures have been disregarded in favour of the click-through. The reason for this is that most online display inventory sales reps and publishers are not able to quantify brand awareness metrics to advertisers, but they can easily track engagement.

Online display advertising is undervalued as a brand-building medium. The result is that the majority of advertisers don't appreciate or pay for the impact that online display inventory has on their brand building efforts. Few optimise their campaign strategies and messaging to drive brand building, and fewer have an appreciation of how online display inventory complements other brand building efforts. The opportunity here for marketers, strategists and planners to differentiate and excel is to gain an understanding of the branding effects of online display advertising.

Measure results

There are tools from the likes of Nielsen or Effective Measure that can measure branding effects of display inventory campaigns, but these are expensive - as is most good research. In South Africa, brands seem uninterested in investing in understanding how online display affects brand recall, brand awareness, brand favourability or purchase intent.

In more developed markets, media owners in partnership with advertisers have invested heavily in attribution modelling, and can show their clients proof that removing online display ads has a negative impact on brand awareness, search, traffic, and brand engagement, as well as overall campaign performance. But local buyers dismiss these international stats and case studies as not being relevant to local market conditions here in South Africa.

Almost everyone wants information, but few seem prepared to pay for it, or to embark on the campaign that will make them the reference case study. The result is that we remain fixated on the performance metrics and have an underdeveloped understanding of the real impact of display ads on brand-building efforts.

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