COLUMNS

Tackling mobile's challenge: Cross-device mapping and attribution

March 19, 2015

Ben Plomion is vice president of marketing at Chango

By Ben Plomion

As many students of history will recall, the Romans in the time of Julius Caesar had a German raiders problem. They would attack and retreat at will, and unreliable and inefficient river crossing technology meant that the Romans could not fight back and often resorted to bribing Germans to keep them at bay.

Caesar needed a more effective and permanent solution. Being one of history's greatest problem solvers, he took an innovative approach that created a strategic advantage: he built a bridge. This was an unprecedented feat of engineering, ingenuity and willpower that allowed Caesar's forces to cross the Rhine into Germanic territory for the first time in Roman history and directly address a problem that had caused many headaches for Rome and the kingdoms of Gaul.

Not to sound melodramatic, but a similar challenge is facing marketers today as they seek to gain a competitive advantage with cross-device campaigns and attribution. They have been stuck on desktop, unable to build a reliable bridge to mobile that would allow them to justify mobile spend during this period where the mobile conversion gap is real.

Atlas not shrugged
Marketers' best bets have been to trust statistical solutions that provide for a likelihood that they are talking to the right audience. That likelihood, however, cannot be verified today by the advertisers themselves, which is harder to defend up the ladder when the expectation is that everything can be measured and managed. Many ad-tech toll takers are, like the Germans, just taking from companies as they have no better solution at this time.

This is changing around us all thanks to social channels and primarily Facebook.

I often wonder why more people are not chomping at the bit for what Facebook is re-architecting following its acquisition of Atlas from Microsoft in 2013.

Being able to tap Facebook ID for cross-device and platform targeting is the opposite of the statistical solutions of today it is deterministic and that is a game changer. When brand marketers can work with Atlas they will be able to verify the accuracy of what vendors are telling them about cross-device users. They should be starting to try to do that with their owned data today. However, that can require a lot of time and manual effort that not every marketing team is set up to embark on.

Facebook Atlas will solve that by allowing people to measure cross-device campaigns and target actual people wherever they are.

Building bridges

Today, we use Facebook as a bridge to mobile. We use Twitter as well, but it offers more basic permissioning at this time.

What I mean by a "bridge" is that once we find target audience on one device based on our proprietary intent data, we can message them on the original and the "bridged" device.

So, if we learn that someone is looking to buy a BBQ based on her intent signals on desktop, we can message her on both desktop and the "bridged" mobile device. Once the purchase occurs, be it on desktop or mobile, we will be able to attribute the conversion to impressions served on all "bridged" devices. This is known as cross-device attribution.

The best part about this is that the bridging is based on Facebook's user login and therefore the "maybe" that they are the right audience is removed.

THE HARDEST CHALLENGE we run into today is marketers' mindsets wrapping one's head around the fact that more than one-third of conversions are cross-device and that to understand ROI on media spend you have to be able to follow the people along that journey, which presents intense implications for how things have historically been done.

To that I say that if you want to control more budget, you are going to need to be able to measure cross-device attribution, so the sooner you get on board the better.

Just like Caesar, where the rest of the world saw a problem with nothing but inefficient solutions, marketers have an opportunity to tackle the problem of cross-device mapping and attribution head-on and show the world what can happen when ingenuity meets progress.

Ben Plomion is vice president of marketing at Chango, New York. Reach him at ben@chango.com.