

COLUMNS

How to boost holiday media without overindulging in redundant ads

November 25, 2015



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By **Shachar Orren**

The holiday season is upon us, and over-spending does not just happen at the mall. When it comes to brands' media budgets, the wallet tends to be wide open during the fourth quarter sometimes with more dollars flowing than expected.

But do not feel bad it is reasonable to increase ad spend during the season of cheer to ensure you stand out amongst your rivals and do not get lost in the flood. Not to mention, my experience shows that user engagement with online content tends to be lower during the holidays as many are traveling and focused on being with loved ones. This makes the fight for consumers' attention fiercer than ever.

Whether it is because your budget needs to get used up before the New Year, or because you want a cut of the consumer holiday spend pie, I suggest keeping the extra spending this time of year to a minimum. The key: spend it in the right place.

Users are getting more sophisticated when it comes to avoiding ads, and less patient towards bad user experiences.

Just because many are willing to stand in line for hours to nab a Black Friday sale does not mean they will click a mobile banner on a publisher's site that completely blocks the story they want to read. Just like your holiday shopping, your ad spend should be smart not reckless.

This year, increase media without overindulging in redundant ads that spoil holiday fun. Here are three solutions to ensure your ad spend actually makes an impact on your audience.

1. Branded content > online ads

Replace online ads with branded content for increased engagement.

When the ad is part of a clever content item and clearly marked as an ad, it provides a much more compelling experience for users, versus when it is misleading or bouncing up and down on the page. Not to mention, it is far less likely to get blocked than the standard display ad.

Increasing user engagement with enriching content formats means less need for multiple ads per page.

Instead, publishers can become profitable from a few, well-produced sponsored content items compelling enough to pull your audience away from their busy holiday schedule.

Keep in mind that your digital advertising presence does not need to be disruptive and intrusive.

2. Relationship with no compatibility issues

Make sure your content is mobile-friendly. I know I am stating the obvious.

However, I have seen one too many Web sites not optimized for mobile devices. If you are one of those Web sites, I suggest investing in working with a third party to remedy the situation.

Remember, when your users are away from the office and their computers, spending time with family, mobile will likely be their main way to consume and engage with content.

Therefore, you want to not only make sure your site is mobile-friendly, but that your content is, too.

Mobile consumers tend to gravitate towards bite-sized, interactive experiences that compel them to engage while consuming content, not just passively scroll through texts and pictures that could have easily been printed on a piece of paper and do not use any functionalities that our devices have to offer.

Publishing engaging content that urges a user to interact is not only a richer content-consumption experience, but also a great way to overcome the obstacles we face when serving content to mobile consumers who are constantly bombarded with multiple text messages, notifications and even phone calls.

In today's digital age, with many not reading an article all the way through, interactive content has proven to get much higher completion rates, winning over our short attention spans and tendency to be easily distracted.

3. Talk turkey

I want to over-stress the importance of making your content optimized for social consumption, the place where content discovery typically happens nowadays, especially if you are targeting a younger audience.

It is important to note that over the holidays, though users might spend less time online than usual, when they are online their time spent will most likely be dedicated to social, mobile interactions, including via applications.

You want to make sure content shared on all of your mobile channels social and app is appealing enough to get your users' attention.

I suggest posts with questions, inspirational, festive quotes or relatable statements.

Try to focus on the topics that will be at top of users' minds such as gifts, turkeys, annoying family members you name it.

Remember, creating something that is relevant to what your users see most on their social feeds makes it more likely for them to want to engage with it, and then share it with their online communities.

Even when creating sponsored articles, your users want to feel that the content is not about a product, but that it is about them.

IT IS ESSENTIAL to deliver powerful storytelling across many channels, specifically mobile.

Follow the above and you will be sure to avoid being the content Grinch of the season.

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