

COLUMNS

## Mobile ads: Forget format and focus on value

August 24, 2012



By [Lars Albright](#)

Everyone has an opinion these days about how to make better formats for mobile advertisements.

The problem at hand seems clear enough: Mobile ad formats are borrowed from desktop screens, and it turns out that "do the same thing, only smaller" is not a winning formula. That is why 88 percent of users have said they ignore in-application ads, and 79 percent call them "intrusive."

So what is the solution? Bigger ads? Better banners?

None of the above. Success for mobile ads will not come from new kinds of formats. It will come from new kinds of value.

In mobile advertising today, value has to flow three ways: between publishers, users and advertisers. Giving better value, not buying better space, is where advertisers need to focus.

It starts with the audience.

Digital natives people under 30 who have grown up with smartphones and the Web are a new breed. They change screens 27 times per hour. They know what their attention is worth and they will not just give it away. They expect ads to be useful, entertaining or pull their own weight in some other way.

How do advertisers create this kind of value?

Various innovations have sprouted up to try and answer this question, and no one path has yet taken hold of consumers' hearts and minds. But a few key themes seem to be taking root:

Relevance is a must. Mobile users think not in minutes, or even seconds, but in moments.

Given the competing demands for users' time, mobile ad moments need to be more relevant than desktop moments, not less.

If I am looking at a travel app in the morning, I should not be seeing random ads for stock tips or cheeseburgers. Ads should be smart and meaningful moments, something to which users can even look forward.

We live in a reward-based culture. Humans like to feel appreciated, and digital natives even more so. Rewards offer that "thank you" for time spent.

The average U.S. household belongs to more than 14 reward or loyalty programs, spanning a variety of rewards such as miles, points, a gift card or exclusive content.

Rewards cannot make people pay attention to something they would otherwise ignore, but they will give booster

rockets to good content.

There is no perfect campaign. We have access to amazing data on ad usage now, but a lot of people still become paralyzed when trying to figure out "What's the perfect campaign?" before a launch.

Why wait when we can let customers tell us with testing? Launch faster and use data to optimize. The focus should be "What can we learn? What can we try that's new or different?" Then test, test, test.

THESE THEMES apply to all formats. Mobile ads need to be as vibrant and interactive as the mobile content of which they are a part. They need to be less like the in-your-face billboards in New York's Times Square and more like being part of the buzz of excitement and interaction on the street.

So, think less about the shape of your next mobile ads, and more about their value. How can you reward viewers for their attention? This is the future of mobile advertising: the three-way win for your consumers, your publishers and your brand.

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