

COLUMNS

Advertisers should consider audio mobile ads and premium experiences

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By AN AMERICAN MARKETER COLUMNIST

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With the recent celebration of the success of Facebook Mobile News Feed Ads, much optimism has been spread recently about the opportunities for mobile publishers and developers to finally crawl their way out of the mobile advertising abyss.

Certainly this progress is encouraging, but it is far from a silver bullet. Mobile publishers and advertising technology developers are going to need a variety of increasingly potent solutions for marketers to achieve the kind of monetization that their exploding traffic implies.

Mobile audio features within applications represent an enormous and largely unrealized opportunity for both mobile developers and their brand partners. With more than a million apps in the app stores, only a fraction offer premium audio experiences and even fewer incorporate audio advertising.

Through ads and sponsorships, as well as premium content and audio features sold directly to consumers, app developers could unlock a completely new revenue stream that to date has been largely unexplored.

Premium audio content

Progressive developers are exploring new opportunities in paid audio content.

In-app purchase and subscription models provide an effective and seamless way for users to upgrade for premium audio queues and content.

In the health and fitness category, many developers are finding success with premium audio features such as mobile coaching, tips and real-time feedback based on intra-workout biometrics.

With more data affirming the benefits of listening to music while exercising, it is no wonder that consumers are increasingly engaged in audio entertainment during their exercise routines.

As smartphones become even more interactive with the integration of speech-to-text and voice command capabilities such as Siri, it is not hard to imagine a future where an increasing level of real-time voice-audio engagement becomes common in apps across many categories.

Sponsored audio

On the ad technology side, big bets on mobile audio advertising are beginning to pay off.

Pandora remains one of the most well-known platforms offering integrated audio and display ads on mobile, showing strong mobile revenue growth through innovation in product and sales efforts around mobile audio.

Even Apple may have taken notice, rumored to be launching an audio ad product via iAds as part of a move into streaming audio.

While audio monetization is an obvious fit for streaming music services, progressive mobile developers and brand partners from entirely different categories such as health and fitness are getting in the game.

A recent project by Walgreens paired integrated audio messaging with pace and distance alerts, delivered directly to the headsets of runners and walkers during their daily exercise routine.

Exercise and mobile audio have long been great bedfellows, since the smartphone has replaced the MP3 player. Eighty-three percent of consumers who own a smartphone use it while working out, and 82 percent report using it to listen to music during their workout (source: EB Sports Group Study 2013).

With research showing that more consumers are in a "positive, receptive mindset" during and after their workouts, it is no wonder brands jump at the opportunity to participate in moments such as these.

TargetSpot, a leader in Internet radio advertising across all connected devices including laptops, tablet, mobile and in-car, reports that audio is increasingly effective with consumers, with some 44 percent of polled listeners self-reporting responding to an ad.

Another recent study by TargetSpot showed that 32 percent of users listening to streaming radio via mobile devices did so while exercising, further validating the connection between exercise and mobile audio experiences.

AS DEVELOPERS, BRANDS and consumers continue exploring new ways to get more from their smartphone experience, audio will continue to gain attention as a medium for entertainment, premium content and brand engagement.

Savvy developers and companies who experiment with this emerging trend will be rewarded well beyond those who continue to view the smartphone as just another screen.

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