

COLUMNS

Former advertiser offers up 5 improvements to make on the buy side

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By **Michael Hayes**

Here is something that every person on the buy-side of the advertising industry would likely agree with: the digital and mobile advertising technology industry is overloaded with too many companies, jargon and, in many cases, hyperbole.

While there are many credible and unique companies, a proverbial sea of sameness tends to sink all boats.

Discerning the advantage of one solution over another could be a full time job in and of itself, and it does not help that proliferating industry jargon makes it nearly impossible to distinguish the product from within the packaging.

But that level of distinguishing is not the job of the buyer, and the sooner the ad tech industry puts itself in the seat of the buyer, speaks their language and focuses on solutions versus complex selling, the better it is for the whole ecosystem.

I have spent nearly two decades on the agency and brand side of the advertising ecosystem, and although I recently joined ad tech myself, I still think like a buyer and I am frustrated.

A recent article in a national business publication quoted JetBlue's senior vice president of marketing saying that the airline has worked with nearly 40 different ad tech companies over the past year to execute its mobile and digital campaigns.

This is an almost unbelievable scale of inefficiency, yet I do not fault JetBlue at all. The blame lies with the ad tech ecosystem, where it can be extremely hard to differentiate between the various solutions and companies.

Now that I have had a few months in the ad tech world, here are five specific things I have learned and will work to improve for the buy side:

1. The word "audience" is extraordinarily overused and misunderstood. "Audiences" have been one of the most overused terms in digital for years. A purely relevant targeted audience is extremely difficult to deliver.

Take the do-it-yourself audience handy people who love going to home improvement stores.

When someone says they can deliver this audience through location visitation, you may be getting the desired consumers mixed with home improvement store employees, professional contractors or consumers who frequent a coffee shop in close proximity to a home improvement store.

The ability to target actual audiences can be accomplished by very few and over-promising here contributes to confusion and misleading results.

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2. Television is not dead it is just evolving. Digital companies will occasionally talk about the death of television advertising, with the thinly disguised intention of convincing brands to shift that spend to other channels. This is misleading. In fact, it is completely untrue.

We may not watch TV the same way that we did five to 10 years ago, but TV still works remarkably well for top-of-the-funnel activities, and if brand awareness is the main goal of a campaign, TV is often a great approach.

Mobile and digital should not necessarily be seen as a replacement for TV dollars, but as a medium that complements and amplifies those campaigns, and can take a television campaign from creating awareness to building engagement and consideration.

3. The role of mobile in the marketing mix is grossly misunderstood. Many publishers will sell brands/agencies on campaigns that target the first step of the conversion funnel (awareness) or the last step (purchase).

In actuality, mobile is often best positioned in the center of the funnel as the force that connects awareness to purchase.

Targeting can be implemented to reach users who are already past the awareness stage, and the creative can be built with the specific goal of pushing consumers into the consideration set and driving purchase intent.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, brands and agencies should be thinking about how they can use the medium in this unique spot of the funnel.

4. Beware of data "mystery meat." Most ad tech vendors get their data from a variety of third-party sources that can prove to be unreliable, and lump them together to form data "mystery meat" that can be sold to brands and agencies.

This data often has no transparency, and as a buyer, you have no idea where it came from or what exactly it contains.

As someone who has been sold data "mystery meat" during my agency days, I can confidently say that it tastes terrible and has no nutritional value whatsoever. It is essential to understand the data sets being used in campaigns, and whenever possible, rely on first-party data.

5. The Sea of Sameness. If you spend some time on SlideShare looking at mobile advertising decks, you will quickly realize that everyone is pitching the exact same thing.

Sure, some companies may have one or two products that they think are unique, but in the end, true differentiators are becoming exceedingly rare.

People buy from people, and trust is at the root of it all, so it is important for ad tech companies to speak honestly and openly about what they can deliver, and focus more on solutions than the latest tech jargon.

AD TECH is not a lost cause.

Digital and online media is evolving in interesting and impressive ways, and the consumer shift to mobile is real.

Do not believe everything you hear though, and always think about the advertiser. This is a philosophy that has served me well my entire career.

Consider ad-tech providers as you would a fine meal from a talented chef. You do not necessarily care about the tools used to cook that meal ("innovative new oven!", "premium cheese grater!"). You just care about how it tastes.

Do not get caught up in the hype and jargon.

If you hear words such as "programmatic," "audience," "real-time" and "cross screen," and you do not immediately understand how it will move the needle for your business, take your marbles and run the other way.

Find a company that truly wants to partner with you and deliver results. It is that simple.

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