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The Road to Digital Success

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writes

The rise of Digital has changed the way that advertising is consumed in market, and therefore the way that advertisers think about their media spend. The digital space allows people to engage and interact with brand communication in new ways, which are evolving quickly and continuously.

Gone are the days of the consumer being the passive absorber of whatever brand strategy an advertiser cares to throw at them. Instead, active participation is sought from, or even demanded by, the consumer. The digital space allows consumers to take control of their relationship with brands, and direct it on their own terms. How can marketers make sense of this, and turn it to the advantage of their brands?

Despite – or perhaps because of - its growth in importance, "digital" is a complex and confusing medium for marketers. For a start, it is multi-faceted - because the catch-all term "digital" incorporates a range of very different types of communication, from the banner ads that appear on websites, through social media to search, and so on.

In addition, of course, the boundaries are becoming blurred between "Digital" and more traditional media. For example, TV is being watched increasingly via the internet, so online video advertising – for example, the "pre-roll" that we see ahead of the content we have chosen to view on an on-demand TV site - is redefining what we define as "TV" and "Digital". Perhaps we need to start thinking about ads in terms of their format – i.e. static, video, interactive – as opposed to the box via which they get delivered.

Then, there is the volume of information, but lack of insight, that is readily available about how well a campaign is working. Digital is the "most measured media" – but the measurements that marketers get do not necessarily give the insight that marketers need – namely, what difference does it make for the brand. For example, click-through rates indicate what proportion of ad impressions - occasions on which a banner ad appears – result in a viewer clicking on that ad and linking through to the advertiser's website. Typically, click-through rates are around 0.1%. What effect do the other 99.9% of impressions have?

Finally, there is process of change - both fast and continuous. There is a risk that by the time a marketer learns something relevant about digital, it has become obsolete. However, even in the Digital world, not all learnings become obsolete at once, and there is even more risk in ignoring the learning that is available.

With that in mind, what do we know today about what characterises the most effective digital advertising? On the basis of testing and evaluation of over a thousand digital campaigns, Ipsos has compiled a set of learnings about how an advertiser can maximise their chances of success, for digital in isolation and in conjunction with other media. Here, we have structured some of these learnings around the questions that we are most frequently asked by our clients.

Question 1: How can I get people to notice and interact with my digital ads or content?

The first step is to engage the consumer. By engagement, we don't mean the mechanical metric of engagement, defined as length of time spent with a piece of content visible on the page. We mean creating the conditions that maximise the chances of exposure to that content resulting in the desired change in attitude or behaviour.

Just as with traditional media, the first challenge is to cut through the clutter of surrounding content and be noticed. With the surrounding content online often having been specifically sought out by the consumer – e.g. choosing to visit a website, or to source a piece of on-demand video content - digital communications need to work particularly hard to achieve this stand-out. Advertisers need to work hard to be worthy of the viewer's attention - be bold, be eyecatching, and above all, be relevant.

Digital is a visual media – in many cases processed at a glance. Consumers' eyes move quickly over a page, so logos and other clear and easily noted elements of branding, are particularly important. The example of eye tracking shown here demonstrates how the eye passes quickly over the ad on the right hand side before settling on the video which viewers had linked to the site to see. The opportunity for advertisers to make an impact is short – showing something visually arresting, which can readily be linked to the brand, maximises its potential.

Source: "From a Heartbeat to a Mouse Click" presented at the 2009 MRS Conference by OTX & Google

Question 2 - How can I ensure my digital campaign creates the appropriate response – and makes a difference for the brand?

The first lesson here is that Digital is a dynamic medium, and advertisers can exploit that dynamism, by taking advantage of the storytelling power of rich media – formats which incorporate video or interactive elements - when possible. We know that brand impact is greater with rich media than with more traditional online banner advertising, and for rich media with video in particular. In addition, the ads don't disappear when the video has ended – so advertisers should leave a compelling image at the end.

Format driving brand impact
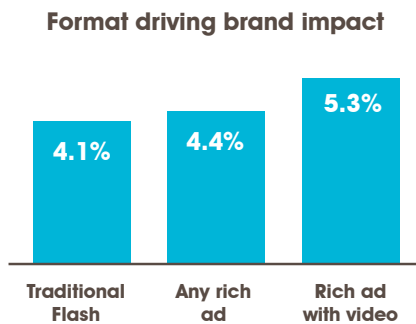
Source: CPG Digital Creative Best Practices, 2010. Ipsos Open Thinking Exchange in conjunction with Yahoo!

Secondly - a learning which isn't so different from what we might say about "traditional media" – how you say something is as important as what you say. If people have to work hard to figure out what an advertiser is trying to get across, the chances are that they won't. Advertisers should keep it simple, and use visuals that support what they are trying to convey about their brand.

Thirdly, if an advertiser wants people to interact with their digital creative, they should let them know. By "interact", we don't mean click through - these days people generally know that they can click through via banner ads, so saying it within an ad is unnecessary.

What's more appropriate is to indicate when there is a possibility to roll over an ad to expand it or access extra content – when there is a "wider experience" within the banner which should enhance the desired brand impact – but only if people actively choose to experience it. So advertisers should make it clear that there's something to be gained from rolling over the ad – and use the visual imagery to suggest why there's something to be gained. It is necessary to keep it simple, because the chances are that there will only be a few seconds at most before consumers have moved away from an ad.

Question 3 - How does my digital activity work alongside the other media in my campaign, and how do they build together?
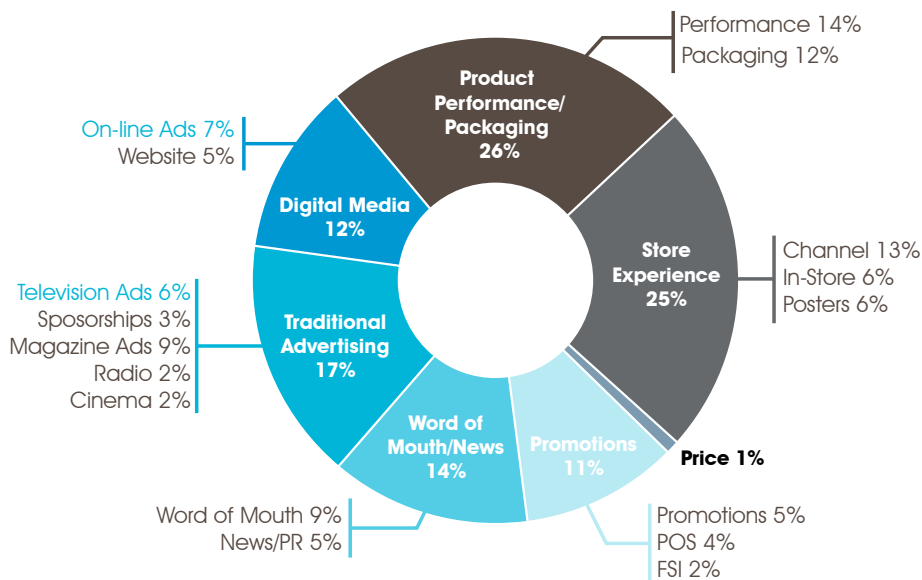
Digital very rarely exists in isolation – most of the time, it is being employed in conjunction with traditional media. Exposure to the campaign on TV, in print or on posters as well as online is likely to increase the effectiveness of the campaign overall, if the ads are visibly similar to each other, using consistent imagery and style. If they are not, then the advertiser is not making the money they spend on one media enhance the effectiveness of another, and therefore the effectiveness of the campaign overall. In short, synergy is real - if digital is "synergistic" with TV, it's likely to enhance the effect of both the digital and the TV. If it is not, then the advertiser is missing a trick – the variation in pre-testing results below is primarily caused by greater or lesser degrees of visual synergy between media.
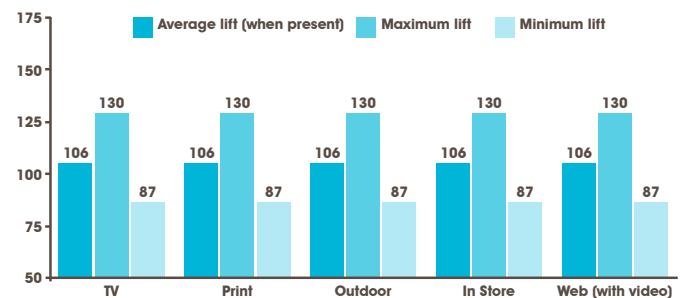
Source: Ipsos multimedia pre-testing – meta-analysis

Question 4 - How can I understand the impact of my Digital campaign when its reach is low?

Relative to TV, Digital does have limited ability to create brand impact, because it tends to have lower reach. Put simply, not as many people will see a specific piece of Digital communication as will see a similar piece on TV. However, to focus on low reach may be missing the point – low reach doesn't necessarily mean low effect. Digital is likely to have low reach, relatively speaking. However, it has the potential to give a better quality of reach – through targeting, and through the possibility for interaction. Digital can therefore make up in brand

Performance 14%
Packaging 12%

Product Performance/Packaging 26%

On-line Ads 7%
Website 5%

Digital Media 12%

Store Experience 25%

Channel 13%
In-Store 6%
Posters 6%

Television Ads 6%
Sposorships 3%
Magazine Ads 9%
Radio 2%
Cinema 2%

Traditional Advertising 17%

Word of Mouth/News 14%

Promotions 11%

Price 1%

Word of Mouth 9%
News/PR 5%

Promotions 5%
POS 4%
FSI 2%

Source: Ipsos in-market studies – meta-analysis – share of brand impact

response what it may lack in reach. We know from in-market studies that once engagement is gained, digital advertising will tend to account for at least as much brand impact as TV – and possibly more.

The key here for advertisers is to know what they expect their digital activity to be able to achieve, be realistic about it, and judge its success accordingly. Advertisers have known for some time that ads in newspapers will not reach as many people as TV, and yet they know that running print alongside TV will have value, either to ensure that more people see the campaign overall, or to enhance the brand impact when seen as well as TV. It's the same with Digital, (and indeed with any media running in support of a TV campaign).

• Understand what the media is designed to achieve – get more people to see the campaign, get people to see it more often, or address a specific objective such as raising curiosity and intrigue

• Design the sampling plan, and survey questionnaire, accordingly.

Advances in monitoring and sampling technology mean that we can usually help advertisers find enough respondents who have been exposed to digital campaigns even when the reach is relatively low, and do so cost-efficiently. This allows advertisers to understand the true impact of their Digital activity.

There is no doubt that opportunities for advertisers in the Digital world will continue to evolve rapidly in both scale and complexity – offering challenges and opportunities in equal measure. The "rulebook" for both determining and measuring success will need to evolve at a similar pace – utilizing the best of existing thinking aligned with fresh ideas and new methodologies. In the meantime, the principles outlined here not only provide a sound base for making current activity as successful as possible, but can also act as a foundation on which to build the next generation of ideas.

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