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5 tips to maximize online ROI



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ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Article-based advertising was the strategy most preferred by consumers, according to an ORC study
- It's helpful to mix brand storytelling into your tactical approach
- Remarket to consumers who show an interest in an article or ad about your company or products

There are times we all feel like field generals, deciding where to deploy our limited resources along the many fronts of the marketing wars. But the best leaders are one step ahead with strategy -- looking for results by reading the signs that others don't see.

Yet, the signs are right there in front of us: Clicks aren't translating into purchases; consumers aren't returning; online advertising spending is wasted on tactics with little or no ROI. We're seeing story after story in the marketing trades about the reshuffling of ad dollars, with more and more budget being plowed into online ad spending and social media. Despite the economy, online marketers aren't shy about investing in clicks, paid search, back-links, and tweets. But are their online efforts resulting in action? Marketers need to put the brakes on less-than-strategic online spending and instead determine which tactics deliver the most actionable outcomes.

The good news: We are also seeing signs that point us in the direction of engaging with customers through action-causing tactics, while discounting the siren's song of sheer click numbers.

But how do we pinpoint these high-ROI tactics? There are countless analytics available, but I decided to go beyond click data and ask consumers how they're making decisions about their online advertising choices. My company recently commissioned a study by public opinion measurement leader Opinion Research Corporation to help us understand what's happening inside the minds of consumers as they're making choices about what online advertising they're engaging with -- and what actions they take over time after seeing the advertising.

The results represent a big, full-color, blinking sign for marketing leaders.

ORC asked 1,000 consumers the type of online advertising they're most likely to read and act upon, among banner ads, pop-up ads, email offers, articles that include brand information, or sponsored links. Article-based advertising was the most preferred -- 51 percent of respondents said they are "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to read and act upon the material.

Coveted demographic groups are even more likely to express a preference for articles. According to the survey, 67 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 24 and 56 percent of those making at least \$75,000 per year say they are "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to read and act upon article-based advertising. Pop-up ads were least likely to be read or acted upon.

And here's another critical sign from the study about how consumers take action based on what they see online: When asked how frequently they conduct internet searches for products or services they read about in online articles, half the respondents said "very frequently" or "somewhat frequently."

Those are some pretty strong signs directly from consumers. It tells me that they are willing to interact with a product or brand in an in-depth manner if the information is presented to them in ways where they can read the information, evaluate it, and then decide to click through for more details.

As marketers, we owe it to ourselves and our clients to use consumer feedback to earmark online marketing dollars for tactics that deliver the highest ROI, deliver the most action, and bring value to the brand.

Here are five tips for maximizing ROI and measuring the impact of online advertising:

- **Mix brand storytelling into your tactical approach.** If you can build a program that breeds consumer feedback and fosters measurement, consumers will be willing to engage with content-rich information, and take the next step in contacting the advertiser.
- **Set benchmarks for every step in the conversion funnel and measure against them.** Not everything is measurable, but it's important to capture data on every step possible.
- **Take on the tougher measurement tasks.** Determine how online advertising and social media activities are impacting consumer attitudes toward your brand. You can try unconventional methods such as using social media to get qualitative feedback from your other marketing methods.
- **Integrate by measuring the flow of consumer interaction among social media, websites, blogs, and product landing sites.** As marketing disciplines have converged (PR, advertising, and digital are using sometimes indistinguishable tactical approaches), it challenges us to update our measurement tactics as well. Count the clicks, but measure brand impact, too.
- **Remarket to consumers who show an interest in an article or ad about your product or company.** Study the downstream value of the first interaction. If a consumer has expressed interest in your category, it's an indicator for further dialogue (and ads).

The signs are clear. Consumers are telling us to give them information in context, and if it's good enough, they'll take action on it. Then, it's up to us to measure it.

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