

Target God Metrics not Target Markets – Op-Ed

I love my yoga class. I practice yoga every day and now that COVID-19 has resigned me to working out from home, YouTube has become my gym. Yoga is my favorite time of the day but there is one thing about it that I hate: the ads. Every time I sign-in to YouTube to do my class I get the same ad, from the same sports bra company, begging me to buy the same bra, every single time. I hate it. I hate the bra. I hate the ad. I hate it so much that it has become a reflex to skip that ad as fast as possible. A game that I have gotten so good at, I barely even have to watch the screen anymore to win.

Are marketers targeting too much? In the age of media proliferation and platform expansion, some marketers worry that they are spreading their time and energy too thin when targeting consumers. There is talk that too much targeting will destroy the brands that we market and even the ad business. I don't think that targeting is a bad thing or that marketers are targeting too much. Ads should continue to be addressable on the individual level, but I do think that if companies don't change the way that they measure audience interaction, eventually individual targeting will drive consumers into the silos of the digital streaming, hybrid and/or 100% ad-free, world. Marketers must do away with their singular "God Metrics" that push them to inundate consumers with ads by finding new ways to measure websites value besides time. If they cannot, the best solution would be to abandon behavioral target marketing in exchange for contextual target marketing because maybe then consumers won't be forced to watch the same ads over and over just for measurements sake.

We need to make sure customers time and attention is well spent or we will alienate them.

Scott Neslund, Digital Media Expert and Vice President of Client Services at The Trade Desk, describes an early media landscape where companies bombarded consumers with messages to bring awareness to their company and products. Then as companies like Google, YouTube, and Facebook were introduced to the market they brought with them targeted search ads that met consumers where they were with the product information that best fit their internet activity.

This was an excellent strategy because, with the constant increase of media channels and platforms, targeting consumers helped businesses to figure out where their customers were and learn as much about them as they could so, that they could serve them better. The problems began when companies lost sight of their original mission, to serve their customers, in the rush to collect user data and pinpoint consumer behaviors to sell more products.

That's when companies started measuring the time that consumers spent with their ads. They figured that consumers time/attention was the best measurement for how well their ad catered to customers...and to an extent they were right. Franks and Viswanathan (2020) suggested that using "the degree to which current advertising expenditures are in or out of alignment with time spent is important to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of [a company's] marketing effort" because, by putting more money into the websites where consumers are, companies will bring in more sales. Advertisers were flocking to media platforms that boasted long pageview times because that meant that consumer attention was on their ads the longest. They considered the time spent to be valuable and key to getting consumers to interact with or at least think about their product.

But that was just it, advertisers were looking for consumers impressions on them and their product; not *just* the time spent looking at it. "Advertisers don't really want your time – they want to

make an impression on your mind, consciously or subconsciously (and, ultimately, your money,)” says Ev Williams, CEO of Medium. So, when you consider the YouTube bra ad, marketers have to realize that it is not just the time that is spent with the ad but the impression that the ad makes on the consumers. They need to make sure customer’s time and attention is well spent or they will end up alienating them with their content.

Williams goes on to discuss the rise of the “God metric” in marketing and the way that companies measure their consumer interactions. He too, saw that without diversifying the way that companies approached ads in the future we won’t be able to truly know if consumers even care about our ads or our products.

Though contextual target marketing is a still a type of targeting, it is a strategy that allows businesses to pull back on extensive individual data collection.

The 2021 Winter Quarter Media Foundations 450 class recently conducted a study that indicated that consumers are most apt to interact with ads if they are displayed to them by an influencer they trust or if they are on during the Super Bowl. The differences between these ads and the ones that consumers have to sit through while streaming on Hulu or YouTube, the classes least favorite places to interact with ads, is that the influencer and Super Bowl ads are always in context. Marketers need to lean into targeting using contextual ads – ads that are matched with relevant content on the website or page where the ad is displayed using keywords, categories, and topics.

Though contextual target marketing is a still a type of targeting, it is a strategy that allows businesses to pull back on extensive individual data collection and lets consumers feel less like they are being stalked across the internet landscape by an aggressive sports bra ad and more like they are being presented with an ad that is just where they needed it, right in the nick of time.

A lot of the time, it seems like “the marketing buying audience overlooks media efficiency at the expense of quality and because of that, in many markets, less than half of ads [today] are delivered in-target”, per Gantz and Meyer’s *Ad Targeting in the Age of Privacy* presentation.

They implore marketers to “drive contextual relevance among key demographics, by layering in compositional indices to reach the right demographics, and protect against sensitive content without sacrificing reach” (Gantz and Meyer, 2020). This allows marketers and companies to know for sure that if consumers see their ad they are doing so because they have an interest in their product. Then, when they have successfully converted a consumer to a customer, who has the intent to purchase, the information they gathered will be perfect for classifying the ad data they will have gleaned from that original ad interaction.

In the end, it would be great for marketers to adopt a new way of measuring the value of websites and consumer time. Or if they decide that contextual targeting is best that would help reshape the ad market for the better, as consumers and marketers face the ever-expanding digital streaming marketplace ahead. However, in the perfect world it would be best for marketers to adopt both options. Ads might be less addressable on the individual level but they will be more engaging and entertaining for advertisers and consumers alike because “one key ingredient remains the same, as in all display advertising – the more impactful and engaging the ad creative, the more likely it will drive engagement! In fact, having the best creative, in front of the most relevant audience is always a winner” (Bannerflow,

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2021). Plus, it would feel awesome to not have to listen to that bra ad before my YouTube yoga class, but not as awesome as yoga class. I love my yoga class.

OP- ED REFERENCES

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