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Finding answers in digital media research

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FINDING ANSWERS IN DIGITAL MEDIA RESEARCH

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It is a different ball game altogether when measuring the effectiveness of an online advertisement than that of print and broadcast

Data is being collected everywhere and 24/7 – from your mobile phone, personal computer to mobile devices such as a tablet and global positioning system gadget in your car, television and radio sets. As you travel to work, the close circuit television or CCTV systems installed in high human traffic areas will be capturing your image, data will be recorded as you use a stored value card for transportation, buying your favourite cup of coffee with a credit card from a café and entering your office building with an access card.

As you start working on your computer in your office, the machine will keep records of the programs and email systems that you have been using to submit that urgent report. Your phone will store the contact numbers of those you have spoken to as you set up meetings and the day's lunch appointment.

While companies can capture these data using various systems available today, can they actually make use of these numbers to create targeted media campaigns and measure the effectiveness of their advertisements published online and on the newspaper, as well as broadcast on radio and TV?

“Online analytics systems such as Google Analytics will give you a limited amount of data around things that happen online. Market reports can go further than that and they are also being used for so many things because it is not just about online but multiple channels now,” says **Arno Hummerston**, Managing Director, Digital Market Intelligence, GfK.

“Even market reports only provide you with the hard numbers. They don't necessary provide you with the reasons on why things happen.”

WORKING WITH AGENCIES

In order to have meaningful market research report that help evaluate the effectiveness of a media campaign or advertisement, what should a marketer do?

“The one question I love to hear from someone is: ‘I want to know what people do online’. I would normally respond by saying, ‘Let's be more specific. Why do you need to know that? What do you want to do with the information?’” says Hummerston.

“I think it’s difficult for clients to come up with a piece of research that they want to commission unless they know how to frame those business questions. And to do that they may need help at times.

“When we get involved at an early stage we get an early sight of what their issues are and then together we can come up with what the questions should be before they put out a tender for agencies to bid for.

“There is also a good reason for clients to come to agencies for this kind of help...my personal view is that digital market research and marketing are changing so massively and quickly that you can do more and better with external expertise, rather than trying to keep in-house knowledge up to date.

“There is always room for getting expertise in because research covers so many things. Unless you’ve got a massive market research team in-house, you can’t cover it all well enough. So there is an added value in getting other people to do it for you.”

Getting help from media research agencies will enable marketing executives to lay the foundation of a marketing campaign and shorten the learning curve. In addition, marketers will be emboldened to try new things.

“I would say a marketing manager should talk to media research agencies early, but then you would expect me to say that. Don’t wait until it’s a big issue for you. If you talk to us early, we can help identify the business issue rather than answer the panic questions,” says Hummerston.

“I would say that, in general, the biggest mistake by marketing people is just continuing with the norm and what they did yesterday. Is this done because it is still working and they are afraid of change? If you want to change and do it properly in this new digital age, you should be talking to experts who know what they are doing and what is possible instead of just going with the safe thing.”

CHALLENGES IN MEASURING DIGITAL MEDIA

Although one can churn out more data online than traditional media such as broadcast and print, Hummerston says there are limitations to what one can make use of.

“With digital, you feel like you can measure and analyse everything with these data points. However, when you want to measure the effectiveness of an online ad, you could not ask someone if they recall seeing that banner advertisement like you do for the ad on TV.”

Another limitation Hummerston shared is measuring the effectiveness of a digital advertisement through multiple devices and using one device for multiple uses. If one were to access a company’s website and a mobile phone application using the same handset for example, it would be taken that two persons have seen the advertisement. If the site is accessed by a smart phone but viewed by several people in a social setting, it would be measured as one person has seen the advertisement.

BE OPEN TO CHANGE

With the online media here to stay, marketing executives who are skilled in creating advertisements for broadcast and print media will need to think out of the box in order to relate to digital media consumers.

“I think they need to be open to new stuff. They need to think more creatively than they have done before. There used to be very creative people just focused on creating a TV advertisement.

But now they have to come up with advertisements for video, crafting the social media campaign, the online banners to support all of that and potentially any other new ideas for online.

“That takes a lot of effort and there are only a few special people who can do that. And I think that’s a real talent. You can only do that when you are open to new stuff. If you just want to use a cookie cutter approach every time, I don’t think it’s going to last.”

Arno Hummerston was the speaker at Singapore Management University Centre for Marketing Excellence Speaker Series, A Perfect Paradox – More to Measure Equals Less Confidence in Digital Ad Effectiveness held on August 8, 2014.