Think of social and programmatic platforms as big tech, not mass media

By Grant Lapping   24 Dec 2019

More than 30 years after the invention of the World Wide Web, many marketers still describe marketing on digital platforms using the language of the mass media era. Hence, brands often continue to think about digital advertising in terms of purchasing 'inventory' or 'ad space' on platforms like Facebook and Google -space they will use to reach their target audience.

Image source: Gallo/Getty Images.

But the truth is that the big tech platforms are not publishers or content companies in the traditional sense of the word. Sure, they aggregate and distribute content from various sources, but generating and owning content is not their core business. And yes, they sell advertisements, but they do not sell ad space in the same way as a broadcaster sells a 30-second spot or a publisher a page in a magazine.

So, if these platforms are not media companies, what are they? The hint is in the name, 'big tech'. They provide brands with a sophisticated stack of technology and tools that can be used to target dynamic and highly personalised messages to consumers based on who they are and what they are doing. Just like the programmatic platforms or email marketing companies, they are not content companies but IT and data companies.

Paying for results, not space

In practice, rather than paying for space, the advertiser is paying for the tools it needs to target a select audience with its message, with the aim of achieving an outcome or an action such as an impression, video view, engagement, click, lead, app install, or conversion. The cost is generally not set by a rate card, but by a bid from the advertiser for one of these actions depending on the objective.

Thinking of Facebook or Google as technology platforms will lead marketers to use them differently to the ways in which many brands do today. Rather than purchasing an ad, they will understand that they are paying for an opportunity to engage with the right customer at the right moment. Think of it as direct marketing to qualified leads, but made even more targeted and efficient through the power of customer data.

When one starts to think of the social and search platforms as tech stacks, the importance of integrating digital advertising engagements with the company's customer relationship management (CRM) and analytics tools also becomes obvious. Together, these tools enable a brand to understand the customer journey from initial contact with a customer to conversion and the post-conversion relationship.

The four phases of digital maturity developed by Boston Consulting Group offer a useful model for understanding how marketing and advertising are evolving in the age of big tech:

- **Phase 1:** Nascent. Marketers use traditional media principals, direct media buys and external data to run their digital campaigns. Campaign outcomes are not directly linked to metrics like sales.
- **Phase 2:** Emerging. Brands in this stage of maturity fuel decision-making with internal data and automate media buying with single channel optimisation and testing.
- **Phase 3:** Connected. Data is integrated and activated across channels with a demonstrable link to ROI.
- **Phase 4:** Multi-moment. Marketing executions are dynamically optimised for one-to-one customer interaction across channels.

As a digital marketing consulting firm, we don't think of ourselves as media buying and campaign optimisation agency, but as experts in technology. Our goal is to lead clients to a point where they have a complete view of the target customer at every stage of the sales funnel and where they can leverage technology to personalise each engagement to an individual's exact wants and needs at an exact moment in time.

For example, when someone searches for a hotel in Cape Town, a brand should not serve a generic ad, but one tailored to the areas and price range they are looking at, based on a complete view of the customer.

Another instance: if a prospect starts an online application for vehicle finance and then abandons it at the last step, the bank could target them with ads encouraging them to complete the process. While some CRM systems might send such reminders via email or SMS, this functionality can be powerful when integrated with the media buying strategy.

To wrap up, here are five steps to success as brands evolve into multi-moment marketing organisations:

- Think about how to use data to engage with new prospects, compared to those that have already embarked on a customer journey with the brand. Use third-party data from programmatic and social platforms to find new, relevant prospects. Leverage first-party data to engage with those that have already interacted with the company—for example, using tailored messaging convert one-time purchasers into regular customers.
- Capture audience data at every touchpoint in the sales journey, from the customer's first exposure to the brand via video view, banner click or social media engagement through to a purchase and post-sales engagement.
- Develop a clear messaging strategy for each touchpoint. Use artificial intelligence and other automated tools to dynamically customise ads to each person's specific interest at that moment in time.
- Go beyond Google Analytics for attribution. Understand the role of each channel engagement, from when the customer first sees an ad to the conversion, rather than crediting the sale to the last click. Analytics360 or Adobe are

examples of tools that provide this functionality.

- Integrate point of sale, CRM and programmatic audience data to trigger tailored ad messages. SalesForce or IBM Watson sync well with platforms like Google and Facebook, for example.

ABOUT GRANT LAPPING

Grant Lapping is Managing Director at DataCore Media, which helps organisations to drive better results from their digital marketing investments by unlocking the full potential of campaign performance data. DataCore Media services include digital media strategy, buying and planning across all digital, social media and mobile platforms as well as the implementation and management of the technology organisations need to effectively track and optimise their campaigns.
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