

Buy Audiences, Not Impressions

Boost ROI with Audience Screening

By Toby Gabriner [x+1]

Media planning is a science -- and some say, an art -- that has seen growth and increased discipline over the last few years through the introduction of new technology that has enabled audience segmentation and audience profiling. This means simply that we are moving away from serving ad impressions to serving ads to people who have an interest in seeing them.

Behavioral targeting gets a good deal of credit for enabling publishers to identify and segment groups of users based on past traffic patterns. Once an advertiser identifies the audience they are looking to reach, publishers can sell this inventory accurately. But the problem with this model is it is not as fluid and flexible as the web appears to be. The experiences and the profiles of the audience change quickly and are reactive to the environment around them, so the past behavior of an audience, though relatively accurate, has its limitations.

On the other hand, if you combine the best attributes of behavioral targeting with a number of different technologies including progressive optimization and the more advanced audience profiling engines you can accomplish what I will call audience screening. Audience screening allows the advertiser to identify the audience represented from an impression on a network or a portal and determine if that audience member is more or less likely to act in response to an advertisement than the general audience. If the audience member is regarded as highly desirable, then the ads are exposed. If the audience member is not deemed highly desirable, then they are not exposed to the ad and the next sequential audience member is evaluated for desirability and match to the potential customer base for the advertiser.

The audience screen model actually identifies this information in real time and can be updated faster and with more detailed accuracy. Audience Screening can take into account audience profile data, preferably in conjunction with industry reliable sources such as Claritas or Simmons, and merge this with data referring to the page where the ad is shown, the category of the site and more recent events (i.e., News, et cetera). In this way the audience member being potentially show the advertisements is evaluated based on more recent, timely data and positioned as either more or less desirable to an advertiser or more or less likely to become a customer. In addition, the "traditional" targeting metrics such as frequency caps and successive messaging can be overlaid to determine the most effective model for reaching and converting customers while limiting budget exposure.

This process happens in fractions of a second and can be used to better qualify the audience, allowing advertisers to reach only those folks most likely to convert as well as the publisher to generate a higher cost basis for their inventory. It's a higher-reward, lower-risk model that is becoming more effective as time moves forward.



The technology for audience screening is beneficial to the publishers because it allows them to further segment their audience without the weight of customer surveys and deeper analytics packages being overload in their existing inventory. The technology works simply with a pixel tag being placed on the publisher's site and a simple database feed being established whereby the technology owner can amass a wealth of information concerning past habits and click streams as well as the syndicated data sources being used to categorize the audience members, or potential customers.

The payoff for audience screening is that publishers can help media planners be more efficient. If you can eliminate audiences members who will in all likelihood not respond to the advertiser's message, why not? If you can adjust the client's messaging on the fly to assure a higher response rate, why not? It will improve the client's ROI and your standing in their eyes.

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