

ADVERTISING

Can Forbes really track how print ads affect online behavior?

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By PETER FINOCCHIARO

Forbes magazine is launching a new research program to measure the impact of print advertising on consumers' online behavior, a line of inquiry that could shed new light on the importance of traditional media to luxury brands.

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Forbes has enlisted the help of research firms comScore and Starcom MediaVest to devise a method for tracking how print advertising affects online behavior. Such research methods could have a significant impact on luxury brand media strategies and potentially merit a rethinking of print advertising.

“The most progressive brands are realizing that the convergence of Web and other media is another opportunity to reach the best customers,” said Greg Furman, founder and chairman of the [Luxury Marketing Council](#), New York. “But, what that means is luxury brands have to understand how they can integrate them.”

Mr. Furman is not affiliated with [Forbes](#), [comScore](#) or [Starcom](#) and commented as a third-party expert.

Methodology

The research method devised by Forbes and comScore compares the online activities of

an experimental group who was shown designated print advertisements from Forbes versus those of a control group who were not shown any ads.

Participants for the study's first run were enlisted from Forbes' subscriber base via email messages asking if they wanted to participate.

Then, the researchers asked those who opted in if they had read an issue of Forbes in which the ad being tested ran.

Those who responded in the affirmative were placed in the experimental group, while those who said they had not read the issue were placed in the control group.

The magazine hopes to get 2,000 participants total.

Members of the experimental group will be assigned a cookie to track their online movements.

Researchers will pay particular attention to whether or not participants visit the advertiser's site, while tracking the length and quality of their visit, according to BtoBOnline.com.

Additionally, the study will track search activity, before filtering all the data through an analysis to determine the print ads impact.

Forbes said it conceived the project following its recent editorial restructuring that resulted in larger issues and a growing base of print advertisers.

Making advertising better

One of the most well-known maxims in marketing is that only half of advertising works. The trouble is figuring out which half is effective and which is wasted.

Companies such as Nielsen and comScore are able to glean insight into advertising efficacy across media such as television, the Internet and mobile devices based on data concerning the number of eyeballs and clicks they attract.

However, the issue has become increasingly complicated as the media landscape expanded a diverse ecosystem through which consumers move fluidly.

Online advertisers have responded by creating tools such as behavioral targeting technology to track and increase the effectiveness of their ads.

However, the equation becomes significantly more complex when trying to understand how online behavior is affected by advertising in the real world, where the only cookies are of the baked variety.

The issue is particularly important for luxury brands that spend a significant chunk of their advertising budget on print media buys.

Prestige brands are expanding their online repertoire, but often have little idea how it impacts consumer behavior in greater detail than aggregate-level analysis of return on investment.

What is missing is a more nuanced and detailed level of analysis concerning how print

ads affect consumer behavior, particularly online where an increasing amount of time is spent.

"We are launching print ad effectiveness research to provide our marketing partners with new accountability tools to measure online behavioral changes as a direct result of their investment in Forbes magazine," said Meredith Kopit Levien, senior vice president and group publisher at Forbes, New York, in a statement to the press.

Final Take

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