

COLUMNS

Screen-agnostic hogwash

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Jason Shulman is senior vice president at Vdopia

By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

By **Jason Shulman**

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I likely date myself when I say that I miss the old New York Times articles regarding etymology, written by the illustrious William Safire. I would sit on a Sunday, reading the On Language column and marvel at the history and usage of common phrases and sayings. I have recently longed for the return of the late Safire when it comes to the word "hogwash." Why?

Because that word comes to mind every time I hear an upfront buyer say they are "screen agnostic" and would be buying their video across all screens, on the same frequency cap, with the same creative, against the same goals on all screens.

Word's worth

In full disclosure, I work for a programmatic mobile video ad platform, so clearly I am a tad biased toward mobile. However, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence from established, neutral third parties that suggest a screen-agnostic strategy is pure hogwash. I urge you to listen to them, not me.

To begin, it does not require a William Safire to understand the mid-15th century combination of two words in the English language: hog and wash. It simply means foolish or meaningless talk.

But Safire would have a field day on the synonyms: balderdash, baloney, blarney, blather, blatherskite, blither, bosh, bull [slang], bunk, bunkum (or buncombe), claptrap, codswallop [British], crapola [slang], crock, drivel, drool, fiddle, fiddle-faddle, fiddlesticks, flapdoodle, folly, foolishness, fudge, garbage, guff, nonsense, hokeypokey, hokum, hoodoo, hooey, horsefeathers [slang], humbug, humbuggery, jazz, malarkey, moonshine, muck, nerts [slang], nuts, piffle, poppycock, punk, rot, rubbish, senselessness, silliness, slush, stupidity, taradiddle, tommyrot, tosh, trash, trumpery and twaddle.

Clearly, 15th-century English subjects heard a lot of malarkey in their day. Similarly, we here in 2015 constantly hear about treating all screens the same, which is hogwash. Why?

There is no device in anyone's life like the smartphone.

People are truly religious about their phones, even when they do not realize or want to acknowledge that truth.

There is no other device in human history that spends so much time in your hand every day as your phone. It is with you when you wake up, when you go to bed and, sadly, at pretty much every time in between.

The phone is also used differently than a television set or a magazine or a watch or a car or a desktop computer, or most notably a tablet.

You do not see someone whipping out their TV on the way to the mall to check out the latest deals from local stores, or to check the weather, or to see how long it will take to get there, or whipping out their tablet to text a friend or to post to Instagram.

While the screen is markedly smaller than, say, a TV, the smartphone offers the marketer many full-screen opportunities, with less ad clutter than other mediums. This means frequency is more important as mobile phone viewers really do see what is on their screen, whether an ad or content.

Care must be taken not only with frequency, but with other attributes such as sound on/sound off and skip/no skip.

In the desktop world, it may be acceptable to buy non-skip, sound on pre-rolls and have a frequency cap of five.

In mobile, acceptability would be largely skippable, sound off and a frequency cap of no more than three.

Right brew

Location is another truly different trait of mobile, but one that few marketers are taking advantage of, perhaps because of the hogwash from the screen agnostic folks.

I see far too many buyers say location is important. But then their campaigns have no personalized creative or tracking at an in-store sales level that would truly underscore the sales and revenue lift that mobile can uniquely bring.

Part of this may be the mobile industry's own fault for focusing so much on foot traffic and store visits.

Do not get me wrong foot traffic can be a good proxy for some retailers on actual revenue earned. But for many buyers, they need to see complete ROI in order to feel comfortable spending more on mobile.

The point is, mobile is different, yet it is incorrectly treated the same.

Do not take my word for it. There is plenty of unbiased research attesting to mobile's power in the marketing mix.

Consider some findings from Rex Briggs. While I consider Safire as the Lord of Etymology, many myself included consider Mr. Briggs to be the King of Media Mix Modeling.

You may be familiar with his previous landmark XMOS study, and his most recently released SMOX study, examining mobile's role in the overall mix.

For Coca-Cola, the study found that mobile drove 25 percent of top-of-mind awareness, 9 percent of "home brewed taste" image conversions and 6 percent of sales with only 5 percent of budget.

Similarly, Walmart's Wanda Young, vice president of media and digital marketing, after finding that mobile impacted more consumers per dollar spent than both broadcast and cable TV and drove 14 percent of change in overall shopping intent, despite accounting for only 7 percent of spend, remarked that "it's clear that mobile is becoming an increasingly critical part of the marketing mix, It's not only driving brand and campaign awareness, but also in-store foot traffic."

Other top-tier marketers such as AT&T and MasterCard had similar results.

SO THE NEXT time someone tries to sell you on the idea of "screen agnostic" and that mobile is the same as other screens, look up the synonyms for the word "hogwash" and you will have plenty of responses to chose from.

Jason Shulman is Fremont, CA-based senior vice president at [Vdopia](#), a global programmatic buying and selling platform for mobile video advertising. Reach him at jasons@vdopia.com.