

ADVERTISING

In-app advertising: The best and worst examples of 2011

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By CHANTAL TODE



As the significant growth of mobile applications grows, so does

the interest of in-app advertising. While in-app ads are still a small portion of overall mobile ad spending, brands and marketers are expected to increase their spend over the next few years.

However, it is important to keep in mind that not all in-app ads are created equal. While the functionality of in-app ads is growing, some marketers continue to underwhelm and even annoy consumers with ads that lack relevancy, are disruptive and do not deliver on their promises.

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“In the past, our clients have been a little more reluctant to invest in in-app advertising,”

said Pat Morgan, Cincinnati, OH-based creative director of [Possible Worldwide](#).

“Now, it has become less of an afterthought and more of a base line need,” Mr. Morgan said. “It has definitely matured to the point of being mandatory in any holistic campaign.”

Superior experiences

In-app advertising has grown and matured over the past year, with stronger executions and bigger commitments from brands.

As the variety of ad unit mechanics has increased during the course of the year with expandable ads, video ads and full-screen take-overs, this has enabled marketers to deliver superior mobile advertising experiences.

“In general, the in-app advertising experience is of a higher quality than mobile Web,” said Brennan Hayden, vice president of Wireless Developer Agency, East Lansing, MI. “The UI benefits of a native app extend into the ads that run in them.

“In general, the ability in-app to rotate the ad unit without requiring a screen refresh – as is required with the mobile Web – is a great value,” he said. “This capability will develop in time with the mobile Web of course.”

One of the reasons for the growth in in-app advertising is the continued migration of Web experiences from the desktop to mobile.

Additionally, mobile is increasingly being seen as an important third screen opportunity for interacting with consumers while they are watching TV.

“People are seeing the power of being able to give access to and way to interact with a brand wherever someone is since desktop is becoming less and less of a focal point for experiencing the Web,” Mr. Morgan said.

“Particularly with the rise of tablets, being that third screen for people whether they are out and about shopping or at home on the couch, and having that outlet people to amplify whatever media they are experiencing” Mr. Morgan said. “People are beginning to see the power of that third screen opportunity.”

Good job

One example of a well-executed in-app advertising campaign is what Miller Lite did in Yahoo’s Fantasy Football app, per Mr. Morgan. The ad pulls in both team names and allows users to send messages to their opponents from the ad.

“I really thought Miller Lite did a nice job from with the functionality that they allowed users to access from the mobile app and letting talk trash to other players in their league,” Mr. Morgan said. “They added a lot of interesting tools to the existing fantasy sports experience on Yahoo.”

The worst in-app ads were not relevant to users or disrupted whatever they were experiencing.

“There are a lot of underwhelming experiences that, when you click on them, either take you out of your preferred mobile experience and are more interruptive rather than an enhancement of what you trying to do at that moment,” Mr. Morgan said.

“There is a lot out there that feels like a bait-and-switch,” he said.

“Something like a game in the right context can add or enhance the experience. Educational content at the right moment can really enhance the user’s experience.”

An example of an underwhelming in-app ad comes from Go Daddy, which teased exclusive online content in its TV ads but did not deliver content that made it worth the user’s time and effort to view it.

“Go Daddy set up these scenarios on TV where it promises that you’ll see some provocative content on the site,” Mr. Morgan said. “But, when I clicked on the ad, it was just the same TV ad with an additional three seconds of content

“If you set it up that there is going to be exceptional additional content and you don’t deliver on that, it is an underwhelming experience.”

Deceptive ads

Also in the “worst” category for in-app advertising are deceptive ads.

While such ads are not exclusive to in-app advertising they can seem particularly annoying in this context.

“The fake ‘you have a message’ ads, and the look-alike app store landing pages, are particularly annoying,” Mr. Hayden said.

“I don’t think they help the industry to allow these types of ad units,” he said. They aren’t necessary - you can be enticing without being deceptive.

“These practices aren’t limited to in-app of course, but they seem more annoying because there is a user expectation I believe that the in-app experience will be more curated than the mobile Web.”

Final Take

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