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COLUMNS

Why I think 2011 won't be the Year of Mobile

November 2, 2010

By Elizabeth Joy Zalman

Catchy title, eh? Now that I have your attention, let me tell explain why 2011 is not looking so bright. And then let me explain how the industry can prove me wrong.

I was at a Mobile Monday event in New York a few weeks ago, and struck up a conversation with the founder of an applications analytics firm.

While talking about the importance of measuring display advertising's effect on consumer behavior, he looked at me and said sharply, "Well, I'm ex-Doubleclick and Yahoo!, and believe me when I say you are wasting your time if you think you can change that mobile media is bought or sold on anything other than clicks. Good luck to you."

Fast forward to Future M week in Boston, which found me in attendance at a panel discussion late one evening.

The question posited in front of two media planners from two very large agencies was why they thought their clients viewed mobile display as a nice-to-have versus a must-have in media planning. Their answer?

They had not heard of a way to measure mobile display beyond clicks, and so really had no way of justifying increased spend.

These two conversations saddened me.

Measured response

In the first, the supply side essentially said that even at the highest levels of the industry, any forward movement with respect to measurement had been rejected and, as a result, my job was a supreme waste of time – to the point where the gentleman ended the conversation and walked away.

Meanwhile, the demand side was strongly suggesting that because they had heard of no way to measure – an inaccurate statement – there was no way to substantiate additional investment in the space.

Pardon me, but if I understand correctly, it seems as if both sides blame the lack of growth on lack of insight, but neither is doing anything about it.

The single greatest piece of professional advice I ever received was regarding ownership.

If I were working on a project that met with resistance and I truly believed in it, the only sure way to get it done would be to change the facts on the ground.

Once I had proven the concept, nobody would be able to ignore it, particularly if it affected revenue.

If everyone is whining and nobody is doing anything about it, how can the industry move forward?

Both sides, supply and demand, have an obligation towards growing the mobile space. And the only way to do that is by focusing on measurement.

As Peter Drucker, the father of modern management once said, “You can’t manage what you can’t measure.”

Step up

The steps to bring the industry to the point of explosive growth are simple and clear:

• Advertisers and agencies – You are the buyers. You bring the money. If measurement is inhibiting the spending of that money, then demand enhanced measurement.

Interview provider after provider until you find an analytics firm which supplies the metrics on which you base decisions.

• Publishers and networks – You are the suppliers. If you want to sell more, your inventory must be worthwhile.

So why not take more of an advertiser approach and take steps to prove that your display advertising provides return? If you help media buyers demonstrate success, everyone wins.

Change the facts on the ground and mobile advertising will grow, unfettered and more quickly than anyone can imagine.

And as someone who willfully left the online space for mobile, I would love nothing more than for 2011 to find us with fill rates of 100 percent, desperately searching for new sources of inventory to buy. We should all have such problems.

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