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Challenges of sports audience targeting

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Sports advertisers care about reaching the right audience, but many of the current approaches they take to find relevant audiences are ineffective. Digital advertising was meant to address this, but too often, the audience tools used to target consumers are just as broken as the spray-and-pray model of television advertising.

However, there are new approaches being used by large sporting media companies and brands that can provide better audience targeting and, in turn, help drive increased advertising sales.

Challenge of using third-party data

Digital brand advertising has used third-party data to create ad targeting. This is where multiple attributes about a consumer are pulled together by a data exchange from all engagements across the Web. The data may have been bought, scrapped or, most likely, inferred to build a targeting profile.

Acxiom, one of the largest sources of third-party targeting data and which claims profiles

on 700 million consumers worldwide with 1,500 data points per person, recently made publicly available its consumer profiles (see <http://www.aboutthedata.com>). Anyone can check what Big Data has on them.

I decided to check out myself, and to my surprise found out that I was profiled as a 65-plus female, of which I am neither. This illustrates just how wrong these targeters have got it relying on third-party data.

Another concern with third-party data is how much of the information behind the user traffic is built on bogus traffic.

A real concern among marketers is bot traffic, where bad actors are using machines to simulate usage.

According to Solve Media Inc., an Internet security company, up to 29 percent of online traffic worldwide is driven by bots. Third-party data sourced from these types of sites skews the validity of the profile data.

Sports fan data and polling

One approach to solve for this is to build audience profiles based on either first- or second-party data.

First-party data is information obtained directly from a consumer, and tends to have higher levels of accuracy for ad targeting.

Second-party data is qualified information obtained directly from a relationship with a publisher site. Sports marketers can start to build more effective consumer profiles by:

1) **Tapping into fans.** The significant advantage of sports media companies over many other industries are the passionate fans.

Tapping into engaged fans and getting them to market a brand to their friends is probably the most effective means of ad targeting.

According to a sports media fan study by research firm CatalystIMG, “seven out of 10 sports fans who Like or follow a brand online say they're open to sharing brand content, buying goods or engaging with social posts.”

For example, Celtic Football Club in the United Kingdom created a live streaming app for pre/post game coverage.

Celtic's passionate fan base quickly responded to this and within six weeks that application had been downloaded more than 22,000 times. Data gleaned from the social profile of fans using the app has helped Celtic create unique audience insights for advertisers.

2) **Audience polling.** This requires asking a broad user base questions about their interests, brand perceptions and purchase intent. This approach relies more on getting users to take brand research questions, and a number of companies have successfully done this in the sports industry.

For example, acutelQ, an ad technology company that works with publishers and brands, poses research questions on the Web, and then uses look alike modeling to get audience scale.

"We were able to get an 80 percent view-through on an eight-minute wakeboarding video sponsored by MasterCraft by using acutelQ's audience polling approach," said Bill McCaffray, publisher of Alliance Wakeboard Magazine.

Sports media companies are also adding user polling into the content experience to provide the double benefit of greater user engagement and a chance to learn more about their audience needs.

Andy Viall, head of marketing at Extreme Sports Channel, said, "We are thrilled to be one of the first to broadcast sports content live with interactive audience polling via the Xbox."

BRAND MARKETERS are focused on audience reach, frequency and receptivity.

While third-party data has helped the industry achieve massive reach, there are new alternatives that can deliver higher frequency or brand receptivity.

Therefore, sports media companies need to start thinking how they can start including some of the latest audience targeting techniques to get more value from their inventory.

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