

Eye on Advertising

Silver Linings: Pay No Attention to Those Ad Declines



Iris Dorbian

At this point, there's no need to restate the obvious and ramble on about what a tough year it's been for b2b media companies. Instead, let's look at some of the year's high points and pinpoint some areas of potential revenue growth.

Co-Branded Web Initiatives

Some b2b media companies, like UBM and IDG, partnered with client companies to launch highly immersive, digital co-branded initiatives that exemplified synergy at its finest. For UBM and Cisco, it was TechWeb's "Data Center for the Future," an online program or "macrosite" created to leverage TechWeb's IT audience to help Cisco grow market share; for IDG and AMD, it was Accelerateresults.com, which went beyond the parameters of a custom site to incorporate videos, white papers and webcasts as well as editorial content from AMD's quarterly *Accelerate* magazine.

TechWeb, a winner in *min's* 2009 **Integrated Marketing Awards**, and IDG's Accelerateresults.com, a winner in *min's* 2009 **Best of the Web Awards**, took advantage of their partners' strongest assets while serving the interests of all parties. And judging by the number of other co-branded initiatives that have gestated and launched in the wake of both programs, it seems to be more of a trend rather than an anomaly.

Quality Audiences

Seen one way, the recession has had a devastating effect on ad pages and continues to threaten the existence of many b2b brands. Seen another, the disappearance of some brands will enable marketers to be more confident about reaching

their intended audiences. Tighter bonds with b2b brands may be the result.

"More than ever, publishers were willing to offer more discounts, increase value-added opportunities and say yes to offers that they would have said no to in a normal economy," says JT Hroncich, managing director of Capital Media Solutions, an advertising and media agency. "Also, some of our smaller clients were able to afford media that before was too expensive. There has been a lot of consolidation among publishers, so the cream of the crop has risen, thus making the opportunities to reach quality target markets easier."

Custom Publishing

Custom publishing projects specifically targeting a b2b audience were another high point. King Fish Media, a custom media company based in Salem, Mass., scored gains by creating, in the wake of its successful (and award-winning) publication *Blueprint* for client BBVA Compass Bank, three internal communications vehicles for employees.

But this success was only a small slice of a strong year for King Fish Media, says Gordon Plutsky, the company's director of marketing and research. "We are finishing significantly ahead of 2008 and

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continuing to demonstrate that as marketers question the return on traditional advertising, they are gravitating to custom media firms to deliver measurable results for their CEOs."

Webinars

Webinars targeting a b2b magazine's audience also were draws. For Jim Langhenry, publisher of RBI's *Consulting-Specifying Engineer* magazine, the Critical

Power University four-part webcast series strengthened the CSE brand in the marketplace while further tying the brand to its audience.

Mobile

Although mobile has yet to take off as a platform for b2b media companies, it's inevitable that business audiences will demand mobile-ready content.

According to a new report by Morgan Stanley analyst Mary Meeker, mobile looks like the next big thing. King Fish Media's Gordon Plutsky certainly agrees with this assessment. "The iPhone, BlackBerry and other new mobile entrants will become the next battleground for content and eyeballs," he predicts.

Behavioral Targeting

An area of great potential—and a cause of concern—for b2b companies is behavioral targeting, which uses information about an individual's Web-browsing history to display specific ads to them. Although many marketers swear by the practice, feeling behavioral targeting has earned better and more targeted ROI, others bridle at how it breaches a user's privacy.

Still, according to a recent survey by Synovate, more consumers (42%) are willing to accept behavioral targeting in their Web browsing (and TV watching) if it improves their experience with

advertising.

"It is paramount that the industry be cognizant of the fact that the real owner of data is the consumer," says Pam Horan, president of the Online Publishers Association. "We need to be respectful of their privacy and balance that with appropriate ways to leverage the data to build great advertising experiences."

Sounds like a plan for a prosperous 2010. —Iris Dorbian

The next issue of *min's* b2b will be published on January 4, 2010. Have a safe and happy holiday season.