



Making your online marketing campaign a success



Liane Dietrich, UK managing director of the affiliate network LinkShare, discusses early use of ads on social networks, successful trends in online marketing and what brands can do to encourage consumer interaction

There has been much hype on the promise of social networks in giving brands a route to a defined and targeted market segment, allowing them to promote their products or services more effectively. However, what has been the reality and how have consumers reacted to being marketed to in this delicate and personal online space? LinkShare's recent research*, looking at the effectiveness of different types of online marketing showed that adverts placed on the more mainstream social networking sites are unlikely to be effective as direct marketing tools.

Are social networks worth the effort?

The research found just 5% of respondents considered adverts on professional social networks, such as LinkedIn helpful in assisting their purchasing decisions on the web. This was only a little higher for personal social networks, such as Facebook at 9%. While, only 4% of those surveyed had previously clicked through on a banner advert displayed on a social networking site. This low interaction suggests adverts being used in this space are not currently having the desired effect in terms of audience participation. Despite this, there is some encouragement for advertisers targeting social sites, as less than a fifth of respondents considered adverts an interference to their online activity, suggesting there is still an opportunity for brands to improve the success of their internet marketing campaigns.

Activity from social networking sites is also encouraging. Facebook announced a partnership with Nielsen Online to help marketers measure the impact of advertising on the social network. While, a report by Interpret LLC suggests that Twitter users would be more open to ads. They are twice as likely to review or rate products, visit company profiles and click on advertisements or sponsors than Facebook or MySpace users are. Advertisers need to remember that users logging on to social networks are there to network and not necessarily to shop. In respect of this consumers need to be targeted in a way that is specific and tailored to their individual needs, meaning brands need to work harder to make sure they convey information which both captures their audience's attention and also enhances the consumer's overall [online shopping](#) experience.

How to implement a successful online marketing campaign

The economic crisis led to a downturn for high street sales, while online has been boosted as cost conscious shoppers log on to find the best bargains and online offers. The latest e-Retail Sales Index from Capgemini showed that while spending with e-retailers fell in September 2009, the online sector has seen an increase in sales compared to the same time last year. Brands that are currently offline need to begin developing their online offering, or risk missing out as shopping trends change. Equally, brands that are already trading online need to make sure they implement a well planned marketing strategy to develop their internet profile and to continue driving traffic to their websites.

Affiliate marketing has received a new wave of attention as brands try to reach a different segment of customers. To be successful in this field, brands need to team up with an affiliate partner that will not only provide the technology needed, but also select the right affiliates to generate the most return in terms of traffic. As part of any campaign, high-end technology needs to be combined with proactive, tactical [customer service](#). An effective strategy enables both advertisers and publishers to create tracking links through new channels with exciting new rich media options to drive traffic to a brand's website. This way adverts can be developed to be more visually appealing and this is beneficial in attracting attention to the brand, as well as improving the look and feel of affiliate sites.

How to capture attention online and encourage user interaction

There is a lot of noise online and brands are continually looking at new ways in which to break through that noise, in the hope of encouraging the right type of consumer to interact with their site and online offering.

Voucher codes have become a popular form of affiliate marketing, for companies looking to raise their online profile and tap into new demographics. LinkShare works with a number of retail brands on voucher-led affiliate marketing campaigns to help stimulate sales and attract new customers through web-only discounts. LinkShare coordinates activity with publishers in line with the brand's core marketing campaigns to help publishers understand the brand in more detail and encourage more interaction and exposure with voucher sites. This tie in also creates a consistent message across all marketing initiatives which strengthens the brand image. Vouchers can be used as part of a wider digital marketing strategy and have the added benefit of creating both tangible and intangible ROI.

An additional tool to attract consumer attention is the use of interactive links containing video, Flash and Javascript to encourage a higher level of interaction with the consumer and ultimately a higher conversion to sale rate. This can be developed further to create product information widgets, essentially a clip of the internet, designed to include information about the website or product. LinkShare has worked with some of their [travel](#) clients to produce a search box which allows consumers to see the up to the minute fares and availability for flights and holidays without navigating away from the page.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to affiliate marketing, what might work for one company, will not for another. The success and pitfalls of using ads within social networks is not yet clear and although signs are positive, more research and measurement will need to be put in place. Vouchers continue to see success but companies need to work harder to gain consumer attention in a saturated market. Brands need to invest the time to develop and maintain a targeted and strategic affiliate marketing campaign which closely matches their target audience. By doing this, they can offer their customers added value and increase their conversion to sale rate.

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