

Advertising is not a numbers game, it's a people's game

An advertising sales rep trying to convince you to purchase premium space always leads with their traffic. Of course they should, but their traffic shouldn't be presented as a figure. Advertising in 2015 is not a numbers game

 By [Veruschka Khan](#) 9 Apr 2015

Many companies are happy to pay to assemble an audience - the bigger, the better - and then to broadcast a message at them. In theory, you have a better chance of being spotted using this approach, but you're choosing visibility over connectivity. You might be getting clicks, but are you making sales?

Plugged into our phones

Mobile technology has changed our world. Communication has moved into our personal sphere, and we've invited it to do so. Unlike conventional television that is still largely aimed at mass audiences, our mobile phones know what we like, what we're interested in, what we should be reading, who our friends are and how we spend our time. Our mobile phones wake us up in the morning, travel with us to work, and are often the last thing we look at before we go to sleep. According to Arbitron and Edison Research, 52% of mobile phone owners always keep their device within arm's reach and another 30% do so most of the time. We are either directly or ambiently plugged into our phones all day long and the relationship is personal. Brand messages that don't directly address who we are, aren't going to interest us.

Mobile advertisers also fall into the trap of presenting their impressive figures, but mobile can't be used like mass media. Readers make visual decisions in less than three seconds. They may log into their phones for at least three hours a day, but they spend less than two minutes at a time doing so. Unless they are already interested in what you are selling, grabbing their attention is going to be difficult.

My philosophy is simple. Technology rules the moment. You aren't meeting someone in a place any more, but in a mindspace. Someone who is visiting a news site to do a quick two-minute scan of the daily headlines is going to spot your family health insurance advert but he is less likely to engage with you.

However, someone who is spending five minutes scrolling through pages of adverts hoping to buy a stroller or a cot for a new baby might be prompted to click on a banner that says "Have you added your new arrival to your medical plan yet?" Someone picking out a new car will be exponentially more interested in finding out if you can beat their car insurance quote or offer more competitive financing than someone visiting a weather site to figure out if they need to take a jacket along for the day.

Buyer intent

This is why impersonal and uninteresting advertising is not going to cut it, and why I don't present numbers to prospective clients - I present buyer intent. I tell you why customers are where they are. Brand experiences are only dead ends if we design them that way. If we leave a compelling enough trail of digital breadcrumbs, you can pull someone deeper and deeper into engaging with you. But you have to seize upon that moment of interest, that three-second window of their attention, to keep your costs low and your hits high.

It's easy to be dismissive of sites like classifieds, because someone is "looking for a bargain". It's not necessarily true - as many high-end cars, houses and pieces of furniture are sold on classifieds as they are anywhere else - but let's assume that it is true for a specific customer. She is spending her time looking for bargain Louis Vuitton handbags and jewellery. She's forking over less than the retail price, to be sure, but what do her searches tell you? She has enough disposable income to put down a few thousand rand on glamour items, and is certainly an aspirational shopper. Isn't she the perfect candidate to sign up for a store card at a fashion or jewellery outlet? She is interested in the items, she has disposable income, she is likely to shop for years to come and she would love an opening offer that includes an incentive, like fashion vouchers.

Of course, every prospective advertiser will tell me that they want to speak to our 6 million browsers. But you have to narrow it down. New parents, bargain hunters, car shoppers, casual browsers, adrenaline junkies? There is nothing more personal than a classifieds page, where the content is provided by individuals, rather than a corporate. Every person that clicks through to a platform and spends time there has a compelling reason to do so. Either to save money, re-decorate, upgrade their car, buy their first home, look for a job... how do you fit into that moment?

Advertising shouldn't talk at consumers, but with them. Online behaviour is little more than a realisation of our thought processes - either to evaluate alternatives, seek information, purchase or plan. Offer information, alternatives, be an active participant.

When planning your next campaign, get tactical, get mobile, and target specifics. Your consumer's interests are being carried around in their pocket. If you can address them, you'll get them in the bag.

ABOUT VERUSCHKA KHAN

Veruschka Khan is the Head of Sales for Guntree South Africa. She currently oversees several teams in charge of mobile and desktop ad sales and has many years of rich media experience.

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