



The technology that will grow online video

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Online branded video entertainment is swiftly gaining traction among both brands and agencies. As iMedia's recent branded entertainment survey showed, nearly three quarters of agencies have used or plan to use branded entertainment as part of a campaign in the next six months. Still, concerns about developing quality content, accurately compiling useful and detailed performance metrics, and -- most of all -- achieving scalable, targeted distribution are impediments to unlocking truly significant branded video budgets.

Of these hurdles, scale is the single biggest challenge preventing more brands and agencies from either using branded video or allocating more of their budget for it. Demand for high quality video, particularly video that is expressly produced for the web, is far greater than the current supply, which is astonishing in the current economic climate. According to eMarketer, 80 percent of U.S. internet users watched online video in 2008, and that figure is predicted to rise to 88 percent, or 190 million people, in 2012. Accordingly, aligning quality video with a partner that can meaningfully scale distribution to satisfy this growing demand and simultaneously deliver marketers' desired results is crucial to the continued growth and adoption of branded entertainment.

Push to scale

"Scalability" is a buzzword that's often thrown around, but how do we get there? It's not through portals like YouTube, branded channels, or microsites, though those are all parts of the solution. We can achieve significant scale by pushing content to users on every part of the web. I call this the "push model" of distribution.

By delivering branded video to users wherever they are on the web -- in their email, on a social network, or reading about last night's game -- that content becomes more discoverable. As it stands, portals and destination sites require users to search out this content on their own -- if they have time and remember to do so. Pushing content to users enables them to consume quality video content -- which they want -- in many more places than they previously could.

Think of the push model of distribution as the new online television network.



Combining scale with accuracy

Of course, simply reaching massive numbers of people isn't adequate -- as we know, it's reaching the right audience in a meaningful way that brands and agencies are looking for. The push model lends itself to targeting based on traditional ad network metadata, including demographics, geography, channels, and behavioral targeting, all of which enable the precise delivery of relevant video where it is most likely to be consumed and enjoyed. This method also emphasizes the highly sought after metric of considerable user engagement.

Indeed, branded video delivered using ad network content-serving infrastructure backed by metadata tags is very effective in this regard. Google and ON Networks have made advancements in this vein with their respective series "Cavalcade of Cartoon Comedy" and "Smart Girls at the Party." RedLever, a wholly owned subsidiary of Adconion, also uses this structure to distribute Vuguru's web series "Back on Topps." High levels of engagement with carefully targeted users who are active all over the web -- not just on video destination sites or portals -- is the most important yardstick by which brands and agencies want to measure their branded video campaigns, and the push model of syndication will deliver the best results against this scale. Reaching the users who are not frequenting the portals and destination sites also exposes coveted new consumers to brands.

Particularly in the case of episodic programming, careful user targeting ensures that videos are displayed in the proper order, meaning that the first video in a series is always served to users who have not seen it before, while users who have previously viewed the content are served subsequent episodes. Brands will undoubtedly find this accuracy attractive, as it allows the brand the ability to sequentially target its embedded ads, providing a superior brand experience and ROI, in addition to increasingly the viewership of a series.

Nuts and bolts

Today, the push model is based on delivering a branded video experience using rich media ad units that dynamically appear on a page (versus being fixed on the page) and are fully targetable. The benefit of a targetable video player versus a fixed one is that the marketer is guaranteed that only its target audience is watching its branded video content or pre-roll ad, delivering superior performance. The majority of interaction and consumption comes through these targetable ad units, though content is also added to static players like those found on YouTube and Hulu. The network of an aggregated audience is the real power here. A great example is Seth MacFarlane's "Cavalcade of Cartoon Comedy," which was hosted on the YouTube homepage and distributed over the Google Content Network. From what we can tell, 86 percent of the 14 million streams delivered during its first three weeks came from the network and not YouTube, the destination. Similarly, "Back on Topps" racked up 2 million views in just 48 hours when distributed across the Adconion.TV targeted



network. Both of these networks demonstrate the power of the push model. Portals, on the other hand, do not offer much in the way of targeting, though they do provide scale. The key is to unite volume/scale and targeting.

Conclusion

As brands and agencies continue to sharpen their focus on performance and ROI, scalability combined with precise targeting will demonstrate the special value of branded video done right. Moreover, campaigns using distributed branded video will be backed up by a wealth of metadata and detailed measurability showing how long a video was played and whether it was paused, muted, and so on. This superior performance will in turn pave the way for larger campaigns and bigger budgets, which feeds into the ongoing creation of more quality content ready to be consumed by the growing audience of users who are hungry for video -- branded and otherwise.

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