



Privacy comes to the internet.

Targeting will never be the same.

Google Chrome's incognito mode, Microsoft Internet Explorer's InPrivate Browsing and Firefox's privacy settings can block cookies, delete private data after each online session and be set up not to store internet history.

Great for privacy. Not so great for targeting. Because these stealth searching/surfing tools can make it impossible to track internet activity.

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That means ad networks will not be able to serve up banners, videos, buttons or skyscrapers to audiences targeted on the basis of the sites surfers have visited or the key words they've searched in the past.

When these technologies are adopted widely (the folks at BrainPosse are already using Chrome) all demographic targeting will be dead. That's because the algorithms which generate probable demographic profiles are based on tracking web activity.

A whole lot of contextual targeting will be dead, too. 'Cause the ad networks won't be able to determine what websites a surfer visited recently.

Is this a problem?

We don't think so. We're convinced that network-served web ads don't reach or persuade the target audience.

But what about the data that show that online video ads are twice as effective at television commercials? It pays to read the fine print in those studies.

Online ads get recall *when they capture attention*. And they usually don't. An online ad is on screen simultaneously with the content for which the user has come to the website in the first place. Guess which gets that user's attention?

According to the Yankelovich study, "When Advertising Works," traditional media are more effective than digital media at generating sales." The study pinpoints the reason for this disparity: "The biggest differences between media platforms are the situational contexts within which people are exposed to ads." In other words, a commercial is the only thing on a TV screen. It's peripheral on a computer.

So online marketing communications messages are not as effective as those in traditional media. But that's not all. The effectiveness credited to network-served online ads is almost always measured in clicks, not sales. If all you want is clicks, get a pair of castañets.

Does this mean internet advertising was a flash in the pan and we can all go back to :30 TVs, skywriting and sandwich boards?

Not hardly.

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Although TV is still the 500-pound marketing communications, gorilla, online is gaining weight fast. A lot of pundits believe that the scales will tip to online somewhere around 2012.

So what will work?

SEO: Ten years ago we were telling clients that they needed good websites just to be in the game. Today it's search engine optimization. An effectively optimized website is no longer an advantage, it's a basic necessity. Because all of the effective competitors in any given field have SEO. Search engine optimization is also one of the most cost-effective weapons in the marketing communications arsenal. The cost of optimizing a site (and keeping it optimized) is a small fraction of the outlay involved in buying clicks through sponsored search.

Sponsored search: Search engine optimization is the most powerful online marketing communications tool, but it isn't applicable in all situations. For example our healthcare sibling agency recently worked on a search program for a regional cancer care organization. People searching cancer seldom include a geographic term in their search terms. So all the major search engine algorithms bring up national websites like the National Cancer Institute or the American Cancer Association on the first page. Geotargeted sponsored search brings this client's site up first on all searches of "cancer" originating within the organization's service area.

Contextual targeting: Didn't we just say contextual targeting will not be possible with the new browsers? It certainly won't be possible to track users web history. But a targeted website buy still works. Although a run-of-network buy for a display or video ad is likely to be a waste of money, a buy on targeted sites still makes sense. A BMW ad on cars.com or a Sony ad on consumersearch.com/electronics would reach an in-the-market audience.

The actual ads we saw on our most recent visit to the sites were a bit mis-targeted, however: an American Express banner on cars.com (It seems unlikely that anyone would charge a car on her or his American express card) and an Ing button on consumersearch.com/electronics (Although buying a 60" plasma TV might make a call to a financial services company advisable.)

Geotargeting: Being able to pinpoint the searcher's location makes geotargeting the single most important sponsored search tool for single-market or regional advertisers. The ability to specify the target area within a specific radius of a street address makes it ideal for retail, food service, car care, and a whole range of other local businesses. The ability to buy the keywords "pizza," "Pizza Hut," "Domino's," "Papa John's," "Mr. Gatti's" and maybe "restaurants" on any search within a mile of Mamma Mia's Pizza Palace gives Mamma a very strong competitive tool. (Naturally it would be pointless for Mamma to buy her own name, since that will come up at or near the top of the organic search listings.)

Microsites: Your website may be impeding your search/targeting results. If a prospect looking for widgets clicks on a link to your site and gets the corporate history, she or he may just click right back off and go to the next listing the search engine turned up.

That's bad for two reasons.

First, of course, you've lost that prospect. And if paid search brought that prospect to your site, you paid a couple bucks for the privilege of boring that prospect away from your site to a competitor's more user friendly web presence.

Almost as important, a bloated one-site-fits-all site will gradually sink down in the search engine rankings, since it will get less traffic, fewer page views and fewer links. If you do recruiting online, have a microsite for job seekers. Plus separate microsites for each product, or service line. Optimization and search for each microsite should be tailored to each sub-segment of visitors.

When you track traffic and navigation you'll see that no one reads the fluff that clutters up a typical "Look how important we are." home page. Yes, one of the beauties of the web is the ability to convey an enormous amount of information in drill-down form. But the three-click rule is pretty ironclad. Attention spans are short and getting shorter. Your site needs to be tailored to individual interests and get people to the information they want quickly.

Pre-roll and in-program video: The online non-targeted (or only somewhat targeted) display advertising format that works. Watch an episode of "30 Rock" on Hulu and you'll also watch a minute or a minute and a half of commercials. A pre-roll and a few in-program :15 spots.

They work because they're not on screen simultaneously with the program content. They're seen sequentially, so the viewer doesn't ignore them to pay attention to the content she or he has come to the site to see.

They work because they are only short interruptions to the program content, not minutes-long commercial clusters that send audiences to the bathroom or channel surfing.

And they work because they're tailored to the medium, not re-purposed :30 TV spots. First, they're fifteen seconds long, the optimum length for online commercials. And most advertisers do special, wittier, more concept-driven spots that are appropriate for online.

Of course the only possible targeting for pre-roll or in-program video is "People who like '30 Rock' and watch it online," but that's actually slightly more precisely defined than the audience of the broadcast version of the show.

Social media: No one has figured out how to make advertising effective on social media. The results have been abysmal. But that doesn't mean social media are not effective marketing communications tools. Just that they're not effective advertising media.

Your employees and management should have pages on Facebook and on specialized social media sites, and they should post regularly.

Social media can also be tremendously valuable research tool. See what people are saying about your product category, your brands and your individual products. Enter into the conversations, too. But never try to pretend you're a disinterested consumer. Be up front about who you are. Better to fess up than to be outed. And if you try to hide who you really are you will inevitably be outed and lose your credibility.

UGC: Why on earth would anyone spend thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars on a television commercial and not post it on You Tube or other user-generated content sites? Odds are the spot won't get a lot of views. But that's OK, because posting it is *free*. And if the spot does happen to get some buzz you'll get tremendous viewership without spending a cent of your marketing communications budget. It's a "no loss/big gain" situation. What marketing director wouldn't take that deal?

There's been a lot of industry moaning and hand-wringing about losing the ability to pry into every site we visit, every keyword we search and every tidbit of personal information we generate online. But – except for ad networks – the loss is hardly catastrophic. There are plenty of effective search and targeting options, and used judiciously they can deliver a better-targeted audience than cookies ever could.

To find out more about reaching your target audience online – or in traditional media – contact BrainPosse by [clicking here](#) or calling 865.330.0033.

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