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Re-examine the Metrics of Online Video

By Jaffer Ali

Oscar Wilde described a cynic as "...one who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." A century and a half later, this sage observation could easily describe the legions of media professionals who insist on performance metrics designed to measure quantity rather than quality.

They say that to learn a language, one must first learn to think in that language. Perhaps *that's* the problem. We seem increasingly intent on defining new media opportunities in terms of old, outdated language. What we *really* need is a custom vernacular as purposeful as the opportunity it describes.

The sudden explosion of online video—and the tens of billions of branding opportunities it evokes—compels us to re-examine how we measure and assess consumer behavior online. Virtually all current media metrics (including and especially digital) are agency-driven artifacts of convenience, and thus speak almost exclusively to quantity (numbers are far easier to measure and manipulate than words).

Born and bred as agency agents of expedience, today's cabal of media metrics (again, including and especially digital) are designed and invoked specifically to expedite the planning, buying and delivery of hundreds of billions of daily ad impressions, a process that—to no one's surprise—benefits the media agencies far more than it benefits their clients.

Rather than starting with the advertiser's message (as was far more typical just a mere decade ago), advertising today begins and ends in the bizarre and thoroughly antiseptic world of media metrics—at the sole behest of the agency, irrespective of the advertiser's message.

For my money and hopefully yours, results are better measured by the true end user—the advertiser—in terms of quality, not quantity. Who cares how many millions of impressions are generated if the message falls on deaf ears?

Years ago (around the time many of today's digital media buyers were born), Ted Turner revolutionized the direct response business by offering his new Superstation TBS as a proving grounds for the likes of Ginsu Knives and the Pocket Fisherman. TBS didn't have any ratings per se, so Captain Outrageous encouraged and challenged advertisers to determine value for themselves on a strict performance basis. His media colleagues branded him as a turncoat and a pariah, but the naked emperor had already been exposed.

The explosive emergence of online video offers us a fresh opportunity to take up the gauntlet thrown down years ago by Turner and put the quality horse before the quantity cart once again.

I propose a simple new term to describe the online marketing experience, one that is increasingly video-driven: Value Per Engagement (VPE), which is not a metric per se. VPE describes whatever litany of metrics such as duration, customer satisfaction and conversion an advertiser might deploy in any given campaign to determine the quality of the engagement.


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