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Informative Advertising: A Better Way

By Paul Siegel

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Advertisers have tried many approaches on the Web. When one approach bombed, advertisers tried a new one. The latest is "contextual advertising." Sounds sophisticated. But it will die like all the others. Why? Because none of these fanciful techniques take into account the new online reality: The visitor is boss.

A new approach, Informative Advertising, does.

The Advertising Cemetery

Since inception of the commercial Web, advertisers have been busy trying innumerable techniques. I look briefly at the major ones:

1 – PUSH – Early in the game they decided to send news together with advertising directly to the Net user. Did not get off the ground

2 – BANNERS – At first banners seemed to work. But after awhile they faded away. The cemetery is full of them.

3 – ANIMATION – You still see animation, though not as much as was prevalent at first. It will die soon

4 – FLASH – This seems to be the time for Flash. But it is so irritating it will die soon too

5 – POP-UPS – You try to visit a site and up pops a window with an ad. Annoying. I don't give it much time to live

6 – POP–UNDERS – Instead of the window popping up in front of the window you want you see the popped window afterwards. This too will die

The Latest Approach: Contextual Advertising

Now advertisers have gotten the brilliant idea of grabbing the visitor's attention while he or she is in a related situation. They say that if a person is at a search engine entering a keyword, this is a good place to advertise a product or service that fits under this keyword. This particular approach, it seems to me,

is an excellent form of advertising. It has been done successfully by Google and other search engines. Some call this "contextual advertising." But I have a better name for it, as I will show below.

Here is an example of "contextual advertising." An outfit called EZula sells keywords. But instead of supplying a search engine EZula distributes a program called TOPtext. When a user of TOPtext visits a site, he sees highlighted words, which enable him to jump to sites that have purchased ads for these keywords.

These words are not highlighted by the website owner. They are highlighted by TOPtext. The jumps take the visitor, not to a site chosen by the website owner, but to a competitor site. Do you think competitors will put up with this? More important, do you think the visitor, when he finds out about this "contextual stealing," will trust the advertiser for anything? This is the most outrageous form of advertising invented so far.

Wells Fargo Bank, I hear, is one such "contextual advertiser." Does this increase your trust in Wells Fargo?

The Big Blunder

Why do advertisers, who were so effective offline, not know what to do online? Because the tricks they developed over the years to ensnare the consumer do not work online. They do not work because the environment has changed drastically. Before the vendor was in control; today, online, the consumer is in control. Before the vendor could play on the emotions of the more or less "captive" consumer; today the consumer has an infinite number of choices. Before ads were effective by themselves; today you must get the consumer to do something – click.

In other words, the consumer is boss. Advertising, like everything else on the Net must be helpful to the consumer. Using wile to catch the consumer will not work. Annoying the consumer with spam messages, or even with opt-out messages, will not work. Stealing "context" from competitor sites decreases consumer trust, and will not work.

Informative Advertising

Let us get back to advertising that works. What Google and other search engines do is sell ads related to keywords. When your chosen keyword is picked by a user, your website message appears on the right side of the results page under Sponsored Links. Other search engines list them under Preferred Sites or similar headings.

These successful ads are characterized as follows:

- > They do not try to ensnare you
- > They do not try to interrupt you
- > They do not try to hurt others
- > They are obviously ads
- > They are related to your current interest
- > They are INFORMATIVE

The last item is key:

- > **THEY ARE INFORMATIVE!**

Good online advertising is **INFORMATIVE ADVERTISING**. It does not try to manipulate the visitor in any way. It earnestly tries to be helpful. It earnestly tries to build trust. It earnestly tries to steer the consumer to a site, but only if the advertiser feels the site may be helpful to the consumer.

Of course context is important. Context is one way the advertiser knows he may be helpful to the visitor. But context is not enough. The important consideration is how you use context: to exploit or to help.

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Everyone agrees that newsletter advertising works. Why? Not merely because the context is right, although this is important. Newsletter advertising works because, for the most part, it is Informative Advertising.

Summary

The old-fashioned advertising, which culminates today with "contextual advertising," or as I call it "contextual stealing," is dying.

The best type of advertising – today on the Net, but tomorrow off the Net, as well – is informative Advertising. Informative Advertising is part of an integrated marketing strategy called Helpfulness Marketing.

Paul –the soarING– Siegel is a provocative Internet speaker and author of HELPFULNESS MARKETNG, a book stressing learning, cooperation and community. Learn about it at <http://www.learningfountain.com/helpfulnessmarketing.htm> Subscribe to newsletter, LearningFOUNT; send blank email to: <mailto:LearningFOUNT-subscribe@topica.com>.

Informative Speech Topic Ideas

By Brian B. Carter, MS, LAc

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Need an Informative Speech Topic?

I've never had trouble choosing an informative speech topic– I started speaking after I was already learning alternative health, and there's plenty that people don't know about that.

What makes a good or bad informative speech topic?

I was already part of the way there– my speech topic was interesting. So when you choose your informative speech topic, don't pick something your audience is going to groan about as soon as they hear it! Gun control has been done. Drunk driving is old. Abortion is too polarized. Legalizing marijuana... all of these are a death sentence, and so is capital punishment. You can't talk about them without bias, and even if you could your audience won't put aside theirs. Save them for a challenging persuasive speech topic.

What kind of informative speech does your audience want to hear?

Choose an informative speech topic either your audience knows nothing about, or that hasn't given much thought to – for the second one, I mean things that are commonplace, but when you think about it, you realize you don't know how it works or what it is – e.g., what is escrow? Why does inflation happen? What happens to your trash after the garbage truck takes it? Who determines TV and radio

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ratings? And so on. Look around your life and see if something like this sticks out.

Your informative speech topic should be entertaining, or useful. What happens to your trash is trivial unless you make it funny, or there's an ethical implication. But don't get into persuading – just inform!

What does Toastmasters say about informative speech topics?

According to Toastmasters International, the best known public speaking organization, people learn when the information is relevant, relates to what they already know, involves them, is clearly organized, is presented in an interesting way, is repeated, and involves visual aids.

So, in some ways, your informative speech topic is not as important as the spin you put on it, how you package it, and how you present it.

First it must be interesting to you. Second, the information must reach your audience by being interesting to them... there are all kinds of presentation tricks you can do to involve them, but that's another topic!

But here's an example– I wanted to inform people about something specific with acupuncture. People are afraid it will hurt. Yet, most of my patients think it's basically painless, and were pleasantly

surprised the first time how good it made them feel. I wanted to contrast the negative expectation with the positive reality. So my informative speech topic was "How Acupuncture Feels" but I used surprise as a tactic to deliver the message. I also used analogy, because the "Acu Buzz" was so elusive– I compared it to a number of good and complicated experiences (swimming and the taste of oysters) that were hard to describe but fairly commonplace. I answered their questions, kept it interesting, delivered something unexpected, and related it to something they already knew about.

Brian has been a public speaker for five years, a guest on national radio shows, is president of his local speaking club, teaches medicine, and is the author of *Powerful Body, Peaceful Mind: How to Heal Yourself with Foods, Herbs, and Acupressure* (<http://www.pulsemed.org/>).



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