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Mobile Micro-Moments: Creating Valuable Programmatic Advertising with Search Insights

Year after year we've heard pundits announce that *this* is "The Year of Mobile," but we don't quite seem to get there. Still, the facts don't lie: eMarketer estimates that mobile will account for 72% of U.S. digital ad spend by 2019 and Google's tech-forward audience spends more than 74% of its time on mobile.[1] It's fair to say that marketers are finally responding to consumer behavior. And given mobile's deep penetration, it's important that marketers dedicate attention not only to their mobile budgets, but also to their mobile efforts and strategies, tailoring creative to the unique capabilities of mobile.

Google Marketing's biggest campaign of the summer featured its most progressive use of mobile advertising yet. The focus: the evolved Google app. Search has advanced tremendously over the years, and the team wanted to shine the spotlight on its mobile-first functionality. To do so, they designed creative that highlighted the Google app's capabilities and demonstrated its value directly in the ad unit.

Because mobile devices are consumers' always-on, constant companions, the idea was to deliver personalized, contextual creative programmatically via ads. By helping people in their micro-moments, the hope was that the app would stand out among the many options consumers have for finding information.

The team knew, however, that mastering the pipes and platforms of programmatic is only one part of great marketing. Ultimately, marketers should find ways to connect with human beings by adding value to their lives. By leveraging technology and developing creative that is interesting and relevant to consumers, the multi-million dollar campaign efficiently illustrated the utility of Google's products at the right moment, producing some of its strongest digital results to date.

Goals
- Stand out among the many other apps used for finding information
- Create individually tailored messaging at scale

Approach
- Understand: Derived insight from search data about what questions people ask
- Target and tailor: Targeted moments that were likely to induce curiosity and tailored messages to be useful in those moments
- Learn: Iterated and improved based on measurement
- Scale: Used programmatic buying and dynamic technology to build compelling ads for many variations of locations and messages

Results
- Reach: Served 165M impressions and reached 46M unique users
- Engagement: Interaction rate and expansion rates were 2X and 5X that of industry benchmarks
- Usage: Users exposed to ads were more likely to use the Google app than those who weren't exposed

The Google Marketing team followed four key steps as it developed the creative for the Google app:

1. Use data to understand what people want
People travel during the summer, and search data revealed the most popular cities, landmarks, and events. What's more, it showed what people are curious about in each of these locales. The goal was to use this data to design ads that could answer questions before they were asked, further fueling people's curiosity.

The team identified the most common queries related to these locations by using search data trends available to any brand marketer through their Google sales team. For instance, one of the most frequently asked questions about the Golden Gate Bridge is: "How long is the Golden Gate Bridge?" Google compiled these questions and answers and built a dynamic mobile ad template in DoubleClick that would showcase the queries. When the ad was expanded, the Google app's knowledge panel popped up displaying the answer.
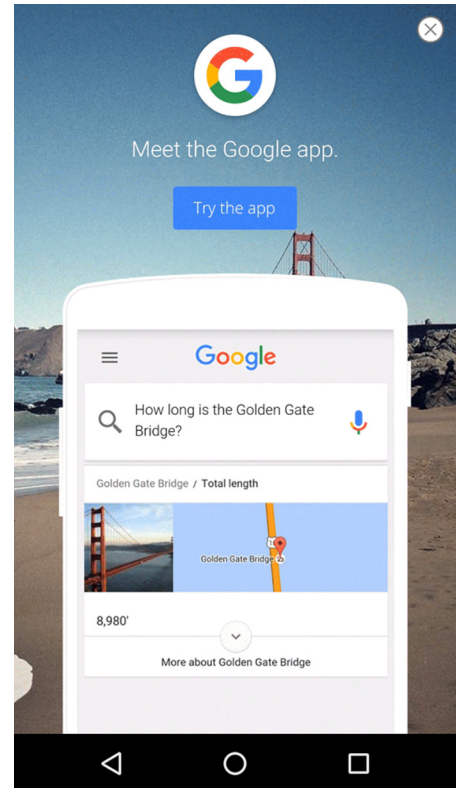
2. Target micro-moments when products are most useful or interesting
Because each ad iteration was tied to a specific event, landmark, or neighborhood, Google used standard geo-targeting available within the ad buying platform to maximize relevancy. For example, when a person was close to Golden Gate Park, Google served a creative that simulated a search within the Google app, asking, "Who designed Golden Gate Park?"

In addition to reaching people who were out and about, the Google team also wanted to reach them in their homes. Given that 84% of smartphone and tablet owners use their devices as a second screen while they watch TV, the team designed an ad that reached consumers in these I-want-to-know moments. During a recent women's international soccer match, Google leveraged search data insights to serve common queries like: "How many panels are on a soccer ball?" (answer: 32). Engagement with these ads spiked during U.S. soccer moments when people were most likely to be tuned in.

3. Learn, tailor, and make the creative better
To serve more interesting, relevant ads, Google Marketing went back to the data to continually optimize. When the company saw what people responded to and what types of destinations or landmarks they were interested in, it could update and refine its location targeting and messaging.

This mobile strategy led to the second highest awareness lift (12.5%) Google Marketing has ever seen for mobile ads. Most importantly, it resulted in an incremental lift in app usage across exposed users.

4. Rely on technology and programmatic to scale
To bring the contextual relevance and magic of the Google app to life in a scalable way, Google built a fully dynamic ad unit using APIs that feed elements of the app into an ad to create endless permutations, all personalized to a user's surroundings. The ad, which had 120 concept variations, contained 23 pieces of dynamic content and pulled from five different APIs. Walking home from work in Seattle? You might see the local time, weather forecast, and nearby restaurants and attractions.

The team didn't want to build a compelling ad for just one city. Combining this dynamic creative with programmatic buying allowed Google to tailor messaging to each unique individual in a scalable way, launching more than 50 iterations to cover a large national footprint.

Programmatic buying and dynamic creative can help brands reach consumers in a more meaningful way

With these strategies, the Google team reached its target audience at the right moments and in multiple contexts. Executing programmatically helped it do so at scale, serving 165M impressions and reaching 46M unique users. Interaction rate and expansion rates were 2X and 5X that of industry benchmarks, respectively.

Based on strong results and a winning formula, Google is planning hundreds of new concepts for upcoming campaigns. The solid infrastructure of programmatic buying plus dynamic creative can now be used for other Google products beyond the Google app. Because the team invested up front to create a dynamic platform with multiple inputs, it can now iterate easily and use this infrastructure as a foundation for reaching consumers at scale and in a more meaningful way.

Source

[1] ComScore MobileMetrix, September 2015.