

Long-Tail Websites Boost Ad Efficiency

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Placements on smaller, niche sites increase response to ads

Many advertisers stick to the top sites on the web when planning an online campaign, but overlooking less-trafficked sites could be a mistake.

A study by contextual targeting firm CONTEXTWEB of more than 1,000 ad campaigns across 18,000 publisher sites during the second half of 2010 found that ads placed on long-tail sites—those with an overall reach smaller than 1.5% of the internet population—had a significant lift in clickthrough rate compared with ads on larger web properties. Overall, long-tail sites lifted click rates by 24%.

All advertiser verticals studied showed lift when ads were placed on sites in the long tail. Alcohol ads enjoyed the highest lift, at 50%, while automotive advertisers experienced a lift of only 12%.

The site categories that provided the biggest lift in the long tail were education, technology and computing, and hobbies and games. Some site categories, including pets, home and garden, arts and entertainment, parenting and family, and automotive had a negative lift.

However, accounting for the decreased cost of placing ads on long-tail sites, even a negative lift often translates into a more efficient ad.

Not only can the long tail provide greater efficiency in clicks for advertisers' dollar, according to the report, it is critical in providing a truly mass reach for ad campaigns. The large crop of long-tail sites frequently provides access to a large audience unduplicated by top sites in the same category, and often with similar demographics as visitors to those top sites. And according to comScore, the vast majority of time spent on the web is spent with long-tail sites, while the lion's share of ad dollars is spent on the short tail.

Advertising on top websites is, of course, still critical, especially for major campaigns or for branding. But advertisers can use the long tail as a low-cost, efficient way to augment the reach and scale of their campaigns.

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