

Could Custom Ad Formats Be the Future of Mobile Ad Tech?



AN INTERVIEW WITH:

Mike Isabella
Director, Customer Engagement, Timberland
April 04, 2017

(Not pictured)

Daniel Meehan
Founder and CEO
PadSquad

Two areas that had once been siloed, ad tech and creative are now coming together to make ads effective. Mike Isabella, director of customer engagement at outdoor apparel and footwear company Timberland, and Daniel Meehan, founder and CEO of mobile advertising technology provider PadSquad, spoke with eMarketer's Maria Minsker about the success Timberland has had with custom ad formats—and why ad tech players can no longer afford to ignore creative.

eMarketer: To promote Timberland's new flexible boots, you launched an interactive ad campaign. Tell me about how that campaign came to be.

Mike Isabella: Our 2017 campaign featured our SensorFlex products—they're boots that are meant to flex for comfort. To tell that story, we worked with PadSquad to build a custom ad unit that comes to life. We gave consumers control and let them engage with the product to understand how it works.

“Even highly targeted ad units that use all kinds of proprietary algorithms and audience targeting won't accomplish anything if the format, the message and the creative are not engaging.”

Virgil Gadson, a dancer from [the show] “So You Think You Can Dance” is featured in these

ads. As consumers scroll through our ad, Virgil is dancing. As they engage with the ad further, they can alter his movement and flex the shoe by tilting or shaking their phones. It's a virtual flex test.

eMarketer: How was this campaign developed from a technology standpoint?

Daniel Meehan: Our goal was to develop a custom ad unit that would reach men on mobile devices in a way that was unique yet native to the device. Because of the nature of the product, we were trying to get the brand message across through engagement with the actual device, not just the ad unit itself. That's why we built this custom ad, where tilting the phone or shaking it changes the dance in the animation.

eMarketer: How did the campaign turn out?

Isabella: The engagement rate has been high for us. In some instances, we're hitting three times the industry benchmarks for engagement, and that has a lot to do with the creative of the ad unit and the custom format in which it was presented.

eMarketer: Are ad tech players thinking enough about different ad formats?

Meehan: Lately, ad tech discussions are all about the innovation that happens below the surface—the plumbing of the ecosystem. We're all constantly talking about connecting demand-side platforms [DSPs] to exchanges and supply-side platforms [SSPs], but there isn't enough focus on the creative technology involved.

If you think about it, even highly targeted ad units that use all kinds of proprietary algorithms and audience targeting won't accomplish anything if the format, the message and the creative are not engaging.

“Mobile devices present unique spacial challenges. Brands are stuck with a small amount of space to present their ads, and breaking through that limitation requires interesting creative formats.”

eMarketer: Is this a concern for brands? Is enough attention being paid to innovative technology on the format side, vs. the ad delivery side?

Isabella: It's a concern when it comes to mobile because mobile devices present unique spacial challenges. Brands are stuck with a small amount of space to present their ads, and breaking through that limitation requires interesting creative formats. It's one of the larger challenges out there for mobile advertising technology.

eMarketer: Custom ad units sound promising, but isn't it a challenge to scale that approach?

Meehan: It is hard to execute these unique ad formats at scale. For example, companies can't buy ads like this programmatically because the DSPs, exchanges, SSPs and publishers are not connected enough yet to allow that to happen. As it stands now, there has to be a direct connection and a custom code to run these ads on a mobile website.

The industry will still head in this direction eventually, though, because more marketers like Timberland are going to demand these types of units. Once brands realize that they can create out-of-the-box ads, it's enlightening. As they plan other campaigns, the bar will be raised. It's a fluid situation in ad tech, and it's a challenge specific to mobile that ad tech providers have to consider.

Interview conducted Maria Minsker on April 4, 2017.

©2017 eMarketer Inc. All rights reserved. www.emarketer.com