

The Digital Difference

What works for one medium doesn't necessarily translate to another

Who could forget Clara Peller asking “Where’s the beef?” Well, some might have if she had done it through a digital ad. Although television ads can be successful, believing you can automatically cut and paste one into a digital version isn’t just assumptive—it’s silly. Graham Harris, director, product of management, for Yahoo! says you really need to look at taking advantage of the medium, possibly incorporating ideas which have previously worked but with the willingness to expand on them. “You need to think about how digital ads can come alive,” he says. “They don’t simply have to stream or be read. They can move. Many of our most successful campaigns have had a page be ‘taken over,’ a character or the product itself suddenly running down the page at you.”

Julie Coulton, sr. vice president, digital media, for Mullen, Boston-based advertising agency, says online is often too specific for a one-size-fits-all message. “Advertisers try to put that 30-second spot up but it’s not a time for speaking to the masses,” she says. “Think about how sites can have such a small specific audience they serve...It’s not like a television show that has this broad demographic.”

Coulton also says digital needs to think outside just the fact they’re online and consider the gadget. “In the mobile space the majority of smart phone time is looking at email yet no one is leveraging marketing to fit that,” she says. “Or look at tablets. When people sit down with those it’s clearly for entertainment. They’re the kind of people who lean in, open to new environments. So why aren’t you giving them that?! It’s the opposite with your PC person. For them, you’d do short quizzes, drop down menus, things that are familiar to them.”

Harris also reminds to think of digital not as ads but art. “I don’t care if you’re having a sale on children’s toys,” he says. “Surprise them with a spectacle of some kind that forces them to notice. What can be done with graphics is incredible and you’re just a few inches from it. You have a chance to hit them visually in a way that television can’t always do.

Of course, if you still want to use that trusty TV 30-second spot, Coulton says okay—but with a twist. “If you want to show that spot then edit it down to the 15-second option. And give them the option of viewing other spots like it or other content like it. The key is to let them do something!” Many would say that’s what interactive is all about.

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