

WPA Column- The (Not-So) Perfect Storm

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In light of recent challenges posed to digital publishers such as increased ad blocking and viewability issues, I had a long conversation with the head of my digital team here at TEN: The Enthusiast Network, Greg Morrow, to discuss how we can combat the trends. Interestingly, his take was one in which digital publishers are facing what he called a “Perfect Storm” of three different waves that are coming fast and furious at the boat of digital media:

The First Wave:

The first wave is the transition of media consumption from search-initiated and desktop-viewed to social- initiated and smart phone viewed. This has led to a decrease in the time spent on site and page views per visits as users "snack' on an article and jump back out as oppose to visiting a site and staying for a full course. Fewer impressions and less time on site adds up to fewer ad dollars.

The Second Wave:

The second wave is the increasing demand of advertisers to pay based on ad viewability. The internet has the inherent ability to track and provide data so it has been consistently held to a higher standard of accountability versus other print (pass along), TV (DVRs) and Outdoor (if every driver is looking up at the billboard?). Advertisers—and their agencies—are getting more and more bold with conditions such as viewability in order to attempt to counteract fake 'bot' traffic and unseen ads at the bottom of the page. As a result, we've had to redesign home pages and create new ad units to accommodate for this demand.

The Third Wave:

The third wave is the rise of consumer ad blocking. Ad blocking is partially a response to excessive advertising practices of media (Pop-unders and interstitials). A recent October 2015 story in AdWeek noted that “the number of consumers using ad blockers in the U.S. increased 48 percent during the last year, according to a report commissioned by Adobe and conducted by PageFair, which estimates that ad blockers on desktop computers will cost publishers \$22 billion this year.”

Separately, that same AdWeek story reported that UBS Securities puts the damage at \$1 billion for mobile devices.

Any one of these waves is threatening to sink the boat of digital media. All three of these combined present a substantive challenge and require expert and nimble navigation to get through the storm.

Painful and challenging as all of this is, we as media publishers must continue to adapt and attempt to give our consumers (audience) and customers (advertisers) what they want so that they'll keep coming back. Some of the solutions to the aforementioned issues that media companies have undertaken include a heightened focus on sponsorable sections (not sold editorial; think more like an airline sponsoring a recurring editorial section such as “Traveler's

Favorites” on a B-to-B focusing on the travel market), in custom digital content using with advertising imbedded in it, and expanding into video for both pre-roll opportunities as well as straight sponsorship.

Share some of your solutions to these problems by emailing us at wpa@wpa-online.org. We'll include some of your ideas in our next newsletter.

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