

How to Make Advertisers Love Your Site

10 Steps to Take Now

insight

Margie Chiu | October 2007



Marketers are going to spend \$43 billion on internet advertising in 2007 and 2008 – but unless you have a strategy for making advertisers love your website, you won't see a penny of it.¹

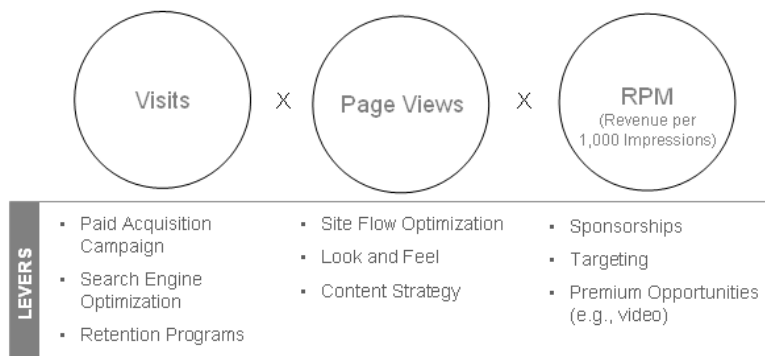
Media planners are looking for sites that stand apart and resonate with their audience. Do you want advertisers to choose your site? Then here are 10 steps you should take now:

1. Take a Critical Look at Your Site

Evaluate everything from the look and feel, content quality, user experience, and profile of visitors, and then ask yourself, "If I were a large prestigious advertiser, why would I want to appear on this site?" If you hesitated in answering even for one moment, focus first on improving your site before you begin thinking about an ad strategy.

2. Know the Revenue Levers

The revenue potential of a site comes down to a simple formula of number of visits x page views per visit x revenue per thousand impressions. In each of these three areas, various levers (see below) can improve results—think about ways to drive new and repeat traffic to the site, increase on-site engagement and content consumption, and maximize revenue potential of every page impression.



Problem:

With the explosion of online advertising options available, a Web site needs to clearly stand out to media planners.

Solution:

The ten concepts presented in this paper offer the fundamentals of creating a site that stands out to advertisers.

Benefit:

Media planners want sites that understand their clients' needs and provide them with innovative solutions.

¹ IAB Internet Advertising Revenue Report, October 2007; JupiterResearch, June 2007

3. Know Your Site

Larger sites can rely on services such as comScore and Nielsen/NetRatings to do some of the heavy lifting when it comes to audience measurement. But if you have a smaller site, you'll need to bring in a reputable third party to help survey and benchmark the site's audience composition against that of competitors.

The more you know about your customers and audience, the better you'll be at selling solutions to a media planner. Think about these questions: Why are people going to your site versus someone else's? What are the reasons that keep people coming to the site? How much time do they spend on it?

Knowing your site also means knowing who your competitors are. The best way to identify them is to use a syndicated service such as Ad Relevance to see where else your advertisers are spending their media dollars. Or, better yet, talk to your advertisers and understand how they perceive you.

Finally, research and compare how different ad units and placements on your site are performing. When Avenue A | Razorfish redesigned Brides.com, we reviewed historical ad-serving data to identify its top performing placement and sizes, and integrated those findings, as well as new advertising solutions, into the final site design.

4. Understand Advertisers' Needs

This concept is closely related to the previous point. Media buyers want to know that your site's audience is also their target. They also want to know how you differ from the competition.

"The best sites are those that really good about having their salespeople understand who they are and which advertisers are best suited to them. Unfortunately sometimes publishers come in and try to be everything to everybody."

– Media Planner, Retail

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You also need to understand the different business goals of brand and direct response advertisers. Direct response (DR) advertisers are completely focused on the bottom line, and efficiency is the name of the game, which doesn't always mean the lowest CPM (although that doesn't hurt); it comes down to how a site performs against key metrics. On the other hand, brand advertisers want to showcase their product or service in the best possible light, and that means flexibility as well as innovative placement ideas.

5. Make Every Impression Count

Start by maximizing the revenue potential of highest traffic pages, such as the home page or category level pages. These placements are ideal for a variety of advertisers—for brand advertisers because it's a premium placement and for DR advertisers because of the high volume of impressions. For example, on NYTimes.com and CNN.com home pages, larger premium units are available near the top of the page for brand advertisers while DR advertisers can choose smaller, more cost efficient units farther down on the page.

Also consider different ways to include ads in non-traditional elements, such as video players, slideshows, and Flash modules or tools. In an advertising audit of client sites, these features often provide hidden opportunities for incremental advertising impressions.

6. Standardize and Simplify Sizes

Just because the Interactive Advertising Board (IAB) lists 18 ad sizes doesn't mean you should incorporate all of them. Design your site around a small number of standard ad units to minimize complexity for your advertisers.

The different preferences of brand and DR advertisers again come into play. Brand advertisers often mention the half-page format originally introduced by NYTimes.com and now an IAB standard as one of their favorites. In contrast, DR advertisers often mentioned the small logo format (IAB Button 1 or 2) as efficient acquisition vehicles.

Many planners say they don't want a cookie cutter solution. They can tell when a large publisher searches and replaces on a 'custom' proposal they just presented to a planner's competitor.

In general, the recommended array of ad sizes is:

- Medium Rectangle (300 x 250) or Large Rectangle (336 x 280)
- Leaderboard (728 x 90)
- Wide Skyscraper (160 x 600) or Half Page (300 x 600)
- Button 1 (120x90) or Button 2 (120 x 60)

7. Create Customized Solutions

Sites that offer flexibility to accommodate an advertiser's needs and present unique solutions stand out in the minds of planners. It starts from understanding a client's goals and developing creative solutions to speak directly to those goals.

Smaller sites often excel in this area. In our research with planners, smaller sites are consistently mentioned as being among the most innovative in offering custom advertising opportunities.

Some planners admit that certain large publishers don't do enough for their advertisers in terms of customized solutions. These planners favor smaller publishers because they constantly offer new ideas and opportunities—the underdog tries harder.

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8. Offer Targeting Options

Targeting options such as demographics, geography and day-parting (showing ads during a select time of day) are now table stakes. If these options aren't already in place on your site, definitely consider adding them.

Portals like Yahoo! and MSN are also offering advanced options such as behavioral segments based on content browsing and search behavior. MSN currently offers 18 audience segments built through a combination of online search habits and Web pages visited—segments include mobile users, Internet power users, gamers, movie watchers, new or expecting moms, travel searchers, and auto buyers.

“The portals have really pulled ahead of the pack when it comes to advanced targeting. They've raised the bar. The opportunity to target can help a site differentiate itself from competitors.”

– Media Director

9. Bigger Is (Usually) Better

Some planners favor larger sites because they can efficiently achieve reach.

“The sheer volume of eyeballs at a portal, combined with the targeting options available, means that you can often achieve multiple solutions, through one partner, with tremendous scale.”

– Media Supervisor

For smaller sites, there are a couple ways to stand out. First is by targeting a niche, hard-to-reach audience—typically in a business-to-business context.

“For the right client, if there's a site with a unique, high-quality audience, then size is not a barrier.”

– Media Planner, Health/Pharmaceuticals

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– Media Planner

Another way to stand out is to offer innovative, custom opportunities not available elsewhere. An excellent example is another Avenue A | Razorfish client, Flip.com; a site that has garnered a tremendous amount of positive attention in the media with its innovative approach of letting users choose the advertising that will appear on their profile page. Sponsors can provide assets related to their brands, such as graphics, logos and photographs that can be integrated into users' Flipbooks.

10. Service Matters

Great service is defined as responsiveness, accountability, and creativity. When Avenue A | Razorfish worked with CNN.com to evaluate its advertising sales strategy, we interviewed and surveyed hundreds of media professionals to understand how it stacked up against its competitors. The differentiator most frequently mentioned was service. In short, they stood out because the sales team made the media planner's job easier.

“I appreciate a timely response and even though my budget may be small with them, they still treat me like I spend millions a month with them. I love that!”

– Media Planner, discussing CNN.com

One planner captured perfectly what great service means: *“My CNN rep is extremely responsive, and when I need to make any adjustments or optimizations, he suggests what to do before I even have a second to think about it. I appreciate a timely response and even though my budget may be small with them, they still treat me like I spend millions a month with them. I love that!”*

Conclusion

So what's the bottom line secret to getting advertisers to love your site? Treat your advertisers like your best customers. Be relevant to their needs. Offer compelling content. In short, don't assume you have their business. Give them a reason to do business with you, and you'll earn your share of the \$43 billion that's coming to you.

About the Author



Margie Chiu is the Vice President of Strategy and Insights at Avenue A | Razorfish and has over 15 years of experience in online and traditional direct response marketing. Her areas of expertise include the design of advertising strategies for publishers, acquisition and retention campaigns, qualitative and quantitative customer research, as well as campaign analytics and optimization programs.

She holds a BA in Statistics and Social Sciences from Columbia College, a MS in Decision Information Systems and a MBA from the University of Maryland.

Please share your thoughts or insights to margie.chiu@avenuea-razorfish.com.

About Avenue A | Razorfish

Avenue A | Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology services agencies in the world. The company helps industry leaders such as Starwood Hotels, Kraft, Ford Motor Company and Carnival Cruise Lines use digital channels to acquire and service customers. Avenue A | Razorfish's full suite of digital offerings includes online advertising, Web site design and development, e-mail and search engine marketing, emerging media strategies, and enterprise portal development. Its award-winning client teams have a great understanding of customer needs and provide solutions through distinct business disciplines, which include analytics, strategy, technology, media, creative design and user experience. Avenue A | Razorfish has offices in markets across the United States, and global operations in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom.

Avenue A | Razorfish
821 2nd Avenue, Suite 1800
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206.816.8800
Fax: 206.816.8808

For more information please visit: avenuea-razorfish.com.