

Native advertising vs Native content?

 By [Athar Naser](#)

14 Nov 2013

By now we all know there has been a shift in the way companies are doing business. The social era has been long upon us and it's a case of "adapt or die".

But there is more to using social media than just shouting through a social megaphone at whoever will listen. People have become a lot more discerning and selective as to what to consume from around them. Therefore, we need to speak to the right people and communicate with the content that they want, when they want it. Much easier said than done.

It can however be done through content marketing, a form of marketing aimed at using content to build and engage an audience with a specific marketing call to action. For more on the 101 of content marketing, see my [previous article on the subject](#).

For now, let's focus on one of the many tactics that fall into the content marketing field: Native advertising - a term that you might well be familiar with by now, but is often taken at face value.

What is native advertising?

Advertisorials, sponsored ads, advertising sections, infomercials, and branded (seeded) adverts are all examples of native advertising.

It is said to have its foundations within Google Adwords whereby you search a term and are presented with results served perfectly into the host (or native) environment (Google results). In this way, the results (or advertising) are native to the environment you are in.

A divisive subject

As with any new formats, technologies or ideas that find their roots in existing entities, there is a certain amount of criticism, scepticism and support levelled at native advertising. Ian Schafer, CEO of Deep Focus Digital Agency cynically views it as "re-packaged versions of advertorials".

Whereas Jon Steinberg, President of Buzzfeed, believes it is a "unique and organic experience that is better for the user". Not surprising to note that Buzzfeed - a US based site with over 90 million monthly unique browsers - derives 100% of their revenues from native advertising.

Native in numbers

However people may feel towards native advertising, there are a few statistics to consider. Though 85% of people have not heard of the term "native content", after viewing a native ad 52% of consumers intend to purchase the product. 32% of native advertising created a sense of brand affinity among consumers and 32% of consumers have said they would share a native advert with friends or family on social platforms.

Dwell time on native content is only 20% less than editorial content, which dispels the fear that a brand association deters people from viewing the content. 23% of executives stated that native video would become top priority in their content strategies to reach consumers. However, 86% of users feel misled by video ads appearing as content.

The queen and king of the native realm



Buzzfeed native advertising - highlighted in a pink box and clearly marked with a 'presented by' tag

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An interesting analogy to make is that of the queen and king of the native realm, or, contextually speaking, the analogy of native advertising - and that of native content.

Although they are (unfortunately) interchanged frequently and used to refer to the same things, we can split these concepts up in a very distinct and significant manner.

The queen - native advertising - is a context led initiative, relating to where and how the content is published to look 'at home' in the host environment (appearing 'in-stream' to the consumer). In this instance, the content is written by the brand and is ultimately a marketing effort posted into specific areas of a published site.

The king - native content - is an editorially-led initiative that works with a brand to make sure the message being communicated to the consumer is relative and valuable, and in the host editorial style. Essentially it is an 'outside in' perspective, starting with the needs of that specific publisher's consumers and writing content around those needs. Content is written by the publishers' own editorial team, in conjunction with the brand. In this way, real value is added to the consumers.

Put another way, native advertising is brand content dressed in publisher clothes, whilst native content is publisher content dressed in brand clothes...

A key consideration is that native advertising can be scaled up (one article on several sites), but will be met with cynicism by consumers (who see it as advertising first). On the other hand, native content cannot be scaled up (it is written specifically for a publisher's audience), but will be met more openly by those consumers (who see it as content first).

Be warned!

It is very important to note that native, in any of its guises, is not designed to attain 'clicks'! Those who hunger for these statistics will be disappointed.

The strength of native is that it develops trust first. So think brand affinity, purchase intent, thought leadership. These are metrics that are (sadly) often overlooked in favour of simple clicks (to the advertisers' detriment), are the real gold to be found in the native realm.

Key players

Whatever the pros and cons, native advertising is being utilised by some big global names. Publishers such as The Washington Post, Huffington Post, Forbes, WSJ, ESPN and Buzzfeed are all testing this revenue stream, and social media players such as Gawker, Tumblr, Google, Facebook, Twitter and Foursquare all have their own versions of 'native advertising'.

Keep a look out for my next article where I will be showcasing a case study of just how a specific publisher has used native content, and what their results look like!

ABOUT ATHAR NASER

I specialise in content marketing and native advertising - two areas that I have been involved in strategically and on a ground level for many years. My media career has spanned a variety of senior roles that have lead me to start my own content agency with my personal vision - one of high quality service, products and innovation. My clients now benefit from and are part of this vision.

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