

Content trickery alienates audiences rather than engaging their attention

 By [Andre Steenekamp](#)

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Brands, agencies and publishers need to take a consumer-friendly approach to digital native advertising that emphasises transparency and value to the reader, if they want it to strengthen rather than damage their brands.

Ads thinly disguised as editorial alienate and annoy customers rather than engaging them and persuading them to take the action the brand desires.

Break through advertising clutter

Many publishers like digital native advertising because it's one way to mark up the cost of their inventory with a premium. Some agencies like it because it allows them to count editorial hits as advertising hits.

Brands like it, too, because they think it's a perfect way to break through advertising clutter and grab the audience's attention. Yet the most important party in digital advertising - the consumer - is increasingly mistrustful of native ads. Marketers and advertisers need to rethink how they handle native advertising if they want to drive benefit from this potentially powerful tool.

Digital consumers have little patience with content trickery where brand messages try to pass themselves off as something they're not - independent, objective and unpaid-for.

Today's digital-savvy consumers do not want advertising pushed down their throats. They see it as cheap and dishonest when a brand cheats them into clicking on its content under false pretences. The result is high bounce rates as consumers steer away from the web page in disgust when they find a blatant hard sell rather than the content they were expecting.

A choice to engage

However, that does not mean that native advertising is without value. Consumers want brand messages to be packaged in a way that is relevant and transparent and that gives them the choice to engage. When these conditions are met, they are often happy to interact with the content.

For example, many business and entertainment news users are receptive to native advertising if they feel it is from a trustworthy brand and if they believe it to be relevant to the content they were looking for in the first place. The more relevant the content to the reader, the better its credibility.

And when native advertising is properly labelled in a manner that differentiates it from editorial, users are more likely to see it as trustworthy, especially if it is placed on a Web site with high credibility.

Value to the reader

International research from Edelman Berland, found a 33% lift in perceived credibility of native ads when they appeared on credibly perceived news sites.

And of course, one good way to ensure that native content is well received is to ensure that it has value for the reader. This means start with the reader's needs rather than taking a hard selling approach.

Marketers should use analytics tools to track user engagement with their content. They should be aiming for at least 90 seconds of engagement - anything less should be counted as a bounce. In addition, the right analytics tools will help them track what users do after exposure to the native ad, which gives insight into how well it is working.

Native advertising will have an important role in the digital media landscape in the future, but brands must learn how to use it wisely.

ABOUT ANDRE STEENEKAMP

As CEO of 25AM, Andre Steenekamp leads the company's expansion in South Africa's fast-growing digital marketing and advertising space. His 25-year career has seen him work in a range of sales, marketing and management positions for leading traditional and digital publishers and agencies. Steenekamp was appointed to his current role following the acquisition of a 50%-stake in Acceleration Media by Times Media Limited.

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