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Video Insider

## **Goodbye Banners, Hello Webisodes!**

BY CHRIS YOUNG

Recently I was lunching with a friend who is high up on the ladder at a Fortune 100. We started talking about the changing business of advertising. In the middle of telling him about how we're producing and distributing branded original content across a network of sites online, he asked me a very simple question: "Why video content?"

Admittedly, he's not in the marketing side of things, but he went on to say that he knows who he is (and who his company is), "I'm the producer and seller of Product X, which does A, B and C," he said, "not the producer of great video content."

So I said that that was great -- and then explained that unfortunately, no one outside of his company knows who he is. I gave him a textbook speech on "brand" and how no one knows if he's high-end or low-end, all about quality or all about convenience. Then I explained that the worst part is that when he does tell people who he is (mostly via banner advertising), fewer and fewer people tend to trust him. In fact, Don Tapscott's book "Grown Up Digital" points to a whole generation that is amazingly adept at detecting, filtering, skipping and blocking ad messages all together.

The old screenwriter adage "don't tell me, show me," is extremely relevant, and branded entertainment is something advertisers have been doing successfully for years. Just as they embraced running TV spots online, advertisers find it a natural progression to embrace other proven "offline" tactics like product integration and show sponsorship, and bring them online.

Unlike ads, branded content engages people with good story-telling, while at the same time showing your product in action. Rather than telling people the features of Product X, you get to illustrate authentically, without heavy sales spin, how Product X fits into a particular lifestyle.

I pointed out that Honda, which recently produced a "Dream the Impossible" documentary series, states in one of its videos: "Honda is an engine company." But even as an engine company, Honda strategists saw the potential of tapping into the power of story-telling and communicating personal narratives that correlate with their brand.

Where banner ads simply flash a message, and rich-media ads only invite interaction, good content and Webisodic series hold the customers' attention for minutes at a time, lure them back for repeat exposure, and communicate much more than the often forgettable "buy me" messaging of a traditional 30-second spot.

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In today's digital environment, where empowered consumers dictate their media schedule and only flock to brands they can relate to and connect with, offering your client base quality and entertaining content is a better way to connect and stick out from the clutter. What's more, the best of traditional Web advertising still applies. In terms of distribution, content can be super-targeted to the right eyeballs, significantly reducing waste. Could you imagine if television networks, rather than shooting a number of shows out to a diverse audience and crossing their fingers for big pockets of success, could target each of their shows to the people who wanted to watch and enjoy them?

As an example, I pointed out that Honda could easily distribute full episodes of their documentary series around the Web and target them using contextual and behavior methods to get in front of their core target; 25-to-49-year-olds with a youthful spirit and who are comfortable with technology.

Finally, I pointed out that unlike banner ads, whose success is often judged by how many clicks a unit got (a metric that has yet to correlate to brand lift), content can be tracked on a whole new set of much more in-depth metrics.

"You can see how long people are engaged with content, where they rewind or fast-forward, how many times they watch and re-watch content, as well as where and when they pass the content to friends or re-post the content to their own social media sites," I noted.

I would have continued -- but my friend stopped me at that point by yelling over me, "I get it! Goodbye banners, hello Webisodes."

"Exactly," I said. "Exactly."

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