New Media

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From e-mail to banners, online ads evolve

These days, the science of online advertising ranges from the metamorphosis of plain-vanilla banner ads into zippy new formats to the more targeted use of that most prosaic of Internet tools: e-mail.

Second of two columns on online advertising

Last month, I began this two-part series with an update on trends in online marketing, including local advertising, direct marketing, sponsorships and "advertorials," business-to-business advertising, and better integration with overall marketing strategies. This month, Iâll look at the technologies that savvy advertisers are using to grab eyeballs in this increasingly competitive medium.

The first of these trendy technologies is not exactly cutting-edge, but "e-mail is hot, hot, hot!" said Robbin Zeff, president of the Zeff Group (http://www.zeff.com/) of Arlington, Va., "The Internet works when you deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. Thatâs what it does best," said Zeff, co-author of Advertising on the Internet (Wiley Computer Publishing, 1997). Seems pretty low-tech, but letâs face it, we know that like 112 percent of Internet users use it primarily for e-mail.

But there are downsides to using e-mail for your direct-marketing message. For one, you donât want to send spam. (If youâve been under a large, non-wired rock for the past few years, spam is that unsolicited junk e-mail that fills up your AOL mailbox.) Not only is spam uncool, itâs increasingly illegal. Another problem is how can a local advertiser select his recipients, since most e-mail addresses are not geographic.

Opt-in e-mail lists, pioneered by NetCreations of New York City, can address both problems. NetCreations (http://www.netcreations.com/) can give you qualified leads, based on demographic data, that allow you to carefully target your message. Of course, you can do your own opt-in lists, by asking visitors to your Web site to fill out a form if they want information about new products, price reductions, etc.

Okay, but what about the cool stuff? Another hot topic in the online-advertising industry is the rich-media ad, which is more interactive than the more common animated banners. Rich media uses multimedia, such as 2-D or 3-D animations, video or sound, to produce ads with higher performance, meaning more click-throughs and ultimately orders. "Interactivity in banners is the future," said Brad Aronson, president of i-frontier, a Philadelphia online-advertising agency whose URL is http://www.i-frontier.com./

Rich media includes HTML banners, audio and video banners, Java and JavaScript banners, and other more proprietary formats. Examples are available at www.i-frontier.com/ric/ric.html, and hereâs more about each type:

- **HTML banners**, basically a small Web page, can use forms to collect information, as well as incorporate other features of HTML. One banner done by Aronson's company asks users how much they spend to get a visitor to their Web site, with a pop-up box for choices ranging from 10 cents to $50 or more. When users make their choice, they are transported to a site with real-time results of the poll and, of course, an ad for a Web-marketing seminar. "HTML banners pull 100 percent better than simple animated banners," said Aronson, co-author with Zeff of Advertising on the Internet.

- **Audio and video banners** are likely to increase dramatically as bandwidth increases and technologies such as the RealNetworks' G2 and Microsoft's NetShow gain acceptance. To view these video formats, free players are available for RealPlayer G2 at http://www.real.com/ and for Windows Media Player at www.microsoft.com/windows/mediaplayer. "Video is generally better for a branding message," Aronson said.

- **Java and JavaScript banners** "allow consumers to complete a transaction within a banner: ordering a product, requesting a free sample, etc. Java banners aren't yet widely used," Aronson said. "What excites me is their potential to capture the impulse buy; consumers can see an offer and purchase within the banner without having to leave the site they are visiting." His company recently created an ad that allowed a user to subscribe to a magazine within the banner.

- Proprietary banner formats include InterVU V-Banners (http://www.intervu.com/), Enliven (http://www.enliven.com/), Macromedia Flash and Shockwave (http://www.macromedia.com/) and Thinking Media's ActiveAds (http://www.activeads.com/). These tend to be the least accepted of rich-media formats.

On the plus side, rich-media ads receive an average response rate of 4.32 percent, compared with 1 percent for animated GIF banners, according to a study of more than 2,400 viewers by research firm Millward Brown Interactive of San Francisco.

But these new formats often require more bandwidth and browser plug-ins, which can limit the number of users who can see the ads. Another problem with rich media is that many Web sites will not accept them. That seems to be changing rapidly, though. Advertising networks and sites such as AdForce, Excite, @Home, RealMedia and Datacom Network have recently announced that they are beginning to accept many forms of rich media. For a list of sites accepting rich-media ads, check out Channel Seven's TurboAds.com (http://www.turboads.com/) for "The List."

Finally, be conscious of your audience and what they like and dislike. Formats like interstitials ÷ ads that pop up in a new window ÷ can work in certain cases but receive mostly negative reviews from users. But thanks to the interactivity of the Internet, you will get feedback, so prepare to adjust accordingly. "People will complain if they don't like your ads," Aronson said.

New Media Notes

E-Commerce Commission gets under way · Members of Mayor Rendell's E-Commerce Commission (http://www.phillyecommerce.org/) signed up for four task forces on metrics, human capital, infrastructure and public relations at their first meeting recently. The commission is led by Philadelphia Commerce Director **Stephen Mullin** and Eastern Technology Council CEO **Rob McCord**. It consists of **Thomas Bonney** of Polaris Consulting, **Brian Boruff** of Microsoft's Greater Pennsylvania District, **Norman Cohn** of the Cohn Family Trust, **Michael Emmi** of Systems & Computer Technology Corp., **Jill Felix** of the University City Science Center, **Walter Garrison** of CDI Corp., **Andrew Goldberg** of SiteLine L.P., **Michael Green** of triSpan Inc., **Johanna Hambrose** of Electronic Ink, **Robert Hollebeek** of HUBS Inc., **Wayne Kimmel** of KimmelCorp.com, **Pamela Lewis** of Drexel University's College of Business and Administration, **Timothy Reese** of the Standingstone Group, **Alan Rihm** of Aspre Inc., **RoseAnn Rosenthal** of the Ben Franklin Technology Center of Southeastern Pennsylvania and **William Zebrowski** of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. In addition, there is a 37-member Advisory Board.

PhillySports.com covers area sports scene · Fans of Philadelphia sports teams can follow their favorites at PhillySports.com (http://www.phillysports.com/). The site, presented by *The Fan* magazine (http://www.fanmagazine.com/) and AOL's digitalcity Philadelphia (http://home.digitalcity.com/philadelphia/), features live news and scores, as well as feature stories for the area's professional, college and high school teams. Total Online Design & Development (http://www.totalonline.com/) in Flourtown produced the site.

PANMA launches new job board with VirtualEdge · The Philadelphia Area New Media Association (http://www.panma.org/), a division of the Eastern Technology Council, inaugurated a new job board for the regionâs new-media job-seekers and employee-seekers alike. The site was developed by VirtualEdge LLC of Forksville, Pa., developer of the E*FAIR Events and PlanetTech IT-jobs database. The new-media database will include resume and job postings, along with resources from PlanetTechâs site: www.planet-tech.net.

Media Bureau.com brings Mayorâs race to the Înet · Media Bureau.com of Philadelphia, in conjunction with Peco Energy, broadcast a Philadelphia mayoral-race debate over the Internet. Democratic candidates Dwight Evans, Happy Fernandez and John White Jr. and sole Republican Sam Katz attended the debate, while Democrats John F. Street and Marty Weinberg sent representatives. Peco arranged the April 9 debate for a group of real estate trade organizations. About 350 watched the debate at http://www.mediabureau.com/.

Phillynews.com becomes regional portal Philly.com · After four years, **Philadelphia Online**, one of the regionâs most visited news sites, is changing its name and its philosophy. The new name and address will be simply **Philly.com** (http://www.philly.com/). The site will function more as a general regional portal, with links to a variety of news and information sources, including *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Philadelphia Daily News* and *PhillyTech*. Philadelphia Newspapers Inc. owns all three publications, as well as Philly.com. Among the new features of the site is an improved search-and-directory function that follows visitors throughout the site.

Richard Kolenda is the chief operating officer of Precision Media Inc., a Philadelphia company specializing in streaming video via the Internet, and the founding president of the Philadelphia Area New Media Association, a division of the Eastern Technology Council. He can be reached at nm_news@kolenda.com.

Articels   Home