



Audience Knowledge: The Publisher's Greatest Marketing Asset

How do you differentiate your site or publication? How do you turn that difference into highly profitable revenue? We often see that it all flows from the publisher's connection with the audience. One VP from a major advertiser put it this way: "Publishers sometimes seem to forget that their audience expertise is their greatest asset."

An audience becomes a golden asset through vivid storytelling. A Fortune 500 senior marketing executive told me recently that most publishers today do little to differentiate themselves in their sales and marketing communications. "I'm tired of sitting through cookie cutter, bar graph presentations showing audience information. Show me the psychographics of the audience—what makes them tick, what their day is like, what they care about—and show me in a way that brings the audience to life."

Comments like these show that with the right audience knowledge publishers can shape the way that marketers perceive the brand and their readiness to embrace sales proposals. This expertise also opens the way to new areas of revenue growth and the most profitable business opportunities. A media supervisor at a blue chip ad agency offered this rationale on why they sought to limit their publishing partners only to be perceived category leaders: "We believe that leaders are the authorities because they know their audience the best, and we expect that they will be able to tell us the best ways we can connect with that audience." This illustrates how audience knowledge enables publishers to make the short list. It also demonstrates that once a publisher has established this kind of credibility, advertisers are more receptive to the most effective—and high margin—advertising ideas.

This kind of differentiation requires that publishers establish dynamic, evolving, relationships with their audience. Quantitative and qualitative research are complementary and equally critical, as senior advertising executives want to know the big picture and the fine details of how their prospects and customers think, why they behave the way they do, and what will influence them to embrace their marketing propositions.

Harnessing audience wisdom and power involves three essential steps:

- Utilizing quantitative research to provide the big picture and establishing relationships with representative audience members in order to demonstrate the breadth and depth of audience influence relative to advertiser marketing goals.
- Offering thoughtful analysis of research, nuanced perspectives, and memorable anecdotes that illustrate the specific opportunities and threats facing advertisers.
- Providing compelling recommendations for advertisers to capitalize on the publisher's unique knowledge of how to win the hearts and minds of the audience.

In addition to creating value for customers, a strong audience connection gives publishers a strong source of insight for product differentiation. Advisory boards, professional communities, research, usability sessions, and relationships with audience members allow the publisher to know what content and advertising products will work well for individual clients. Publishers that leverage these tactics have come to realize that an extraordinary site user experience is closely connected to a richly rewarding advertiser relationship.