

Why Television Is Still King

Source: MediaPost Blogs, Online Spin, 10/12/2010

The Economist has a great overview of the ad industry landscape titled "The return of advertising: The box rocks." The story paints a very hopeful picture, not only that ad dollars are coming back, but that those ad dollars might just be an indicator of the overall economy bouncing back. Aside from the wishful thinking around the economy bounce back, the most interesting part of the column is the direct call-out to the Internet's utter lack of a system of advertising to rival television: "Search engines and online banners are not nearly so good at making people aware of new products. Nor do they offer emotional experiences. Television's ability to build brands by surrounding adverts with gripping content is unsurpassed."

And in the end, this is digital media's greatest challenge. The Internet has simply not created a system for engaging consumers in advertising at scale in a way that achieves the goals of major brand marketers, especially around discovery and story-telling. Television enables marketers to achieve these goals by transferring consumer attention at scale to a rich-media experience that can be designed to meet their specific goals. Banners and search simply don't work this way, leaving marketers struggling to leverage the Internet to achieve brand objectives, despite a massive consumer audience. This has led brands to search for alternative methods to "buying media" and a never-ending string of attempts at creating content that consumers will seek out AND still deliver a brand message, which still simply will not scale.

While, as The Economist piece points out, people do spend an awe-inspiring amount of time consuming content through television, time spent is not the differentiator between television and the Internet. From an advertiser's perspective, the differentiator is that television has created a system for delivering advertising in a way that fits with the medium and engages consumers, giving advertisements the ability to create discovery and tell stories. The Internet has the potential to offer marketers the same ability, but simply needs a better system than banners and search.