

NEW WAYS OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Francisco Costa Pereira, Escola Superior de Comunicação Social-IPL, Portugal
Jorge Veríssimo, Escola Superior de Comunicação Social-IPL, Portugal
Maria do Rosário Correia, Escola Superior de Comunicação Social-IPL, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The present study had as main purpose to identify the different typologies of Marketing and Communication strategies over the Internet and to research how digital forms of “standard” Advertising (as Banners and Buttons), Advergaming and Streaming Advertising are directed to Portuguese children.

We ran 124 websites 87 of which were marked as having more hits by Marktest’ Ranking Netscope in January 2009 and the other 37 are of food products.

All websites were accessed and recorded between January and June 2009. The analysis was made by two highly skilled in qualitative analysis independent analysts.

INTRODUCTION

Initially online advertising came almost exclusively as dynamic banners and buttons, usually intrusive, as pop-ups filling the user’s monitor.

Progressively product placement was being used extensively as well as Brand Entertainment as an entertainment-based communication way. Within this concept came also advergaming - brand-connected video games – working as a true marketing tool focused on promoting a brand image. This way, games act as communication and branding promoting interactivity, personalization, sharing, extending the site’s visit and the chance of a revisit (Moore, 2006).

Recently Streaming Advertising came as a way of reproducing online contents - video or audio related to a specific brand – and which doesn’t need to be downloaded to be seen. Under a technological perspective besides entailing innovation and creativity this format proves as being more dynamic in exposing advertising messages.

This study falls on these new formats and its contents and its main purpose is to identify the Marketing and Communication Strategies companies are using today in this field.

New ways of online communication/advertising

The study *Kids’Power* (Chaves, Dutschke, Liz & Gervásio, 2007) shown that the regular internet use by Portuguese children starts relatively early (54% of children from 4 to 12 use this mean), increasing its use in groups from 7 to 10 years old (55%) and from 11 to 12 (81%). In the later group the context of internet using – home and school– entails more expressivity for this tool is compulsory for school research and papers.

However, internet access has yet another main purpose: to play (58%). Other activities taking children time are, as said, research for school papers (42%), as well as communication activities as Messenger (32%) and email (14%).

Internet also shows singularities that make it different from other means (Dionísio, et al. 2009). These singularities are Interactivity (presuming an action and a consequence causing a feedback and immediate effect), Timeliness or Instantaneity (presuming the update of contents and immediate reaction) and Plasticity and Adaptability (i.e. the message must be shaped in order to be copied, changed and spread by its consumers and simultaneously reach the largest number of sectors).

Obviously, these digital communication singularities were explored by advertising (specially the one directed to children) which adapted it to formats – advergames, electronic games (video games) associated to a brand – consisting in a true marketing and communication tool focused on promoting the image of a specific brand. This way games act as a mean of the brand's communication and presence, promoting interactivity, personalisation, sharing and as a mean of extending the site's visit and chance of revisit (Moore, 2006). On the other hand Streaming Advertising is a way of online reproduction of video and audio linked to a specific brand which doesn't need to be downloaded to the computer to be seen that also may contribute for that extension. From a technological point of view this format besides bringing innovation and creativity shows as dynamic in exposing advertising messages although Schafer (2008) points out some inconveniences such as the intrusive nature that can trigger some reactions in websites visitors.

Both are part of a strategy called Brand Entertainment, a way of communication that makes its way through entertainment and a playing nature whose main element is a specific brand. According to Schafer (2008), if this ways of communication attract there might be a craving to adopt the brand which is shown.

Besides the entertainment provided to the user, Brand Entertainment gives the advertiser a number of advantages such as low production costs and a tracking of ratings which enables him or her to account for the number of hits, the time of each visit to the site, the number of revisits among other markers.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to identify strategies that brands use to develop Brand Entertainment in order to keep visitor's loyalty establishing an emotional liaison.

METHOD

This research had as object the websites with more hits in Portugal together with the food products websites. In all, 124 websites were analysed 28.2% of which are food products websites and 33.8% of online media (traditional media as television, press and radio). We classified websites according to product category and from this classification we had a site profiling. Among the online media, 24.2% refer to press, 8.1% to radio and 1.6% refer to television. Online channels represent 21.8% of the sample and homepages (main site page containing an options menu and links to other resources within the site, as Carrera proposes, 2009) represent 14.5% of the analysed websites. Although we may consider that the food products websites are also a homepage, we chose to segment as a food category. (Table 1). This analysis gave us a sample of 148 Advergimes and 58 Streaming Advertising.

In selecting the websites we took in Markttest's ranking – Netscope January 2009 which shows websites with more hits in Portugal. All the websites were visited and recorded between January and June 2009.

After recording we analysed them under an analysis grid made according to the dimensions of the study: a) strategies of the site's marketing (brand contact, revisiting and visit extension strategies), b) characterisation of advergimes, c) characterisation of streaming advertising.

The analysis was run by two independent analysts both highly skilled in advertising qualitative analysis to whom we explained the analysis grid and who were given training in analyzing websites, advergimes and streaming advertising. Their work proved a convergence level between 85% and 100%.

RESULTS

Ensuing from goals set for the research, results are organised according to the analysis dimensions of the study.

Marketing strategy as an analysis dimension of websites contains variables concerning Brand and Products (logo, package, product and the brand's significant characters) and variables related to customer-loyalty and active participation in the site strategies such as Specific Areas within the site directed for registering and connecting to the brand, to communities and access to special offers.

As communication forms within the analysed websites digital advertising formats were defined, such as, advergames as an online game integrating the brand, and streaming advertising as a form of online reproduction which doesn't need to be totally downloaded to the computer to be seen including videos or audio linked to brands. Although their online advertising wasn't analysed, we included the group of websites with an advertising format normally known as banners or display advertising.

From this communication forms we set the specific analysis basis of a) 148 advergames in 29 of the websites (23.4%); b) 59 streaming ads in 22 of the websites (17.7%) (Table 2).

Marketing Strategies

Marketing and customer-loyalty strategies of brands in website using have as main purpose extending visits and ensure revisits from users. One of the ways of provoking and initiating the user's involvement is to customise the website visit thus rendering easy not only the contact of the user with the brand but also an involvement and liaison.

The possibility offered by the websites to make part of a group to which a number of benefits are provided, as promotions, hobbies or even a personalisation of the page, favours the consumer participation thus extending the contact length with the brand.

We defined customer-loyalty ways as "site areas" involving register (access to information) and sharing promotions. Promotions as a way to call on visiting and sharing were integrated in the customer-loyalty category.

We verified that the majority (95.2%) of the run down websites uses at least one operational way of implementing and promoting customer-loyalty.

Of the 118 websites presenting an area enabling register and contact with the site and brand we could verify that login register is on 58.5% of the websites. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) stimulating the distribution of contents over the internet seems to be a way of extending the visit and is on 51,7% of the run down websites. Reception of newsletters is a way of transforming the visitor in an information receiver – in a private space as the email. The concept of "follow me" (through social networking as *twitter* or *facebook*, is in 11.9% of the websites (Table 3).

A cross-examine between the contact areas of the websites shows that in the food websites participation in hobbies dominates (45.7%) and access to clubs or communities (34.2%). In homepages-sites register dominates (77.7%) and RSS (55.5%). In online media, register to access information dominates (70% press and radio) and RSS (93.3% press and 50% radio), as well as the call on forum participation. Access to clubs or communities is in all website categories except for online television web portals while access to Blogs is present in all website categories except for food products websites.

Promotions as a communication technique aiming to certain consumer behaviour (as user) still are a way of creating dynamism and interactivity between the user and the website/brand visited. This resource was present in 56.5% of websites. Hobbies (81.4%), rewards (78.6%) and special offers (67.1%) seem to be the predominant way of calling on the consumer. Almost half (45.7%) of the websites induce shopping and in 37% free downloads are offered (Table 4).

Communication Supports

In food products websites advergames dominate and in online media websites streaming ad is more used. As for online advertising as banners and buttons they are still very much used in almost all sort of websites (see Table 5).

The fact that online media websites are supported by technological platforms related to audiovisual contents may help to explain why there are so many streaming ads on one hand and almost an absence of advergames on the other.

Target groups for these different categories of product, food and media, are also different because of their age. The target group of food products websites is younger thus more prone to games and also more exposed to the brand.

Main qualities of Communication Supports

Advergames

Advergames answer the need of brands to keep in touch with consumers and simultaneously entertain thus sparking an encouraging inclination to the brand and also offering elements in order to strengthen the brand's notoriety (Brand awareness). Merged in a playing dimension the brand infiltrates in the game and, thanks to several interest and game extending strategies, also extends the contact with the player, generally a child.

In 124 websites run down we accounted for 148 different advergames concentrated in only 29 websites and this presence clearly dominates in food product websites (133 games in 21 websites). A significant part of these games (48) can be found only in 1 website.

The advergames analysis was pointed for the following dimensions: product category, characterisation of games as to location and internet format and characterisation of advergames as communication elements. This characterization tries mainly to understand the level of advergames and not to develop some deep understanding on the typology of games (Table 6).

It's still on treats and desserts that we find the major investment of advergames (41.9%). These results follow the commercial strategy of this product category directed to children. The other product categories start to emerge on this commercial strategy.

The game access format is mainly through a normal button (56.1%), which makes it easy. As to the positioning of the game (Table 7) we verified that the centre of the page was the most used, whether on the centre (75.7%), or on top (6.8%).

Games implicating agility are the majority (25.0%) followed by maze games (13.5%) and sport games (12.8%). These games are the most attractive to children both because they stir up prowess and children and teenagers learn and develop their psychomotor skills.

Commercial strategies lead the target group to the game thus putting the user in a playing situation in order to visualise the identifying elements of the product, that is to say, of the brand. Results show that games have a very clear communication strategy as multiple advertising insertions are made in order to maintain the relation between the public and the brand. Thus in 89.9% of the games there are brand identifying elements and in 70.3% the character linked to the brand is present. Stimulation for the game is normally through a call on fulfilling a mission as if it was a game of strategy (30.4%).

The identified instructions only refer to what is available before the game starts. 23% don't show the instructions before the game starts. In the visible instructions we verify that most of them, 43.31% call on the player so that he/she relates to the character representing the brand. (Table 8)

A significant percentage calls on the skill of the player. All these situations may shape an attraction of the child or teenager to the game especially when it calls on an affective dimension to connect to the character or mascot through which he/she will connect to the brand.

Streaming Advertising

Streaming advertising as a way of advertising communication appeared 81 times in only 22 websites of the 124 run down being that according to the registered repetitions only 59 different streaming ads were analysed. We point out that the predominance of streaming ads insertion is on websites related to online media: radio (48 campaigns on streaming in 10 websites), press (11

streaming ads in 5 websites in a total of 30) and online channels (15 streaming ads in 3 of the 27 websites). The highest streaming concentration (10) is in on online channel website.

As to product categories advertised under the way of stream we saw a trend for “serious” products (credit and funding) and to playing products (entertainment). (Table 9)

These results show that telecommunications (23.7%) and banks (16.9%) who invest more in this type of formats. In product subcategories, credit and funding invest more (15.3%), while entertainment spreads over cellular phones (13.6%) and music festivals (8.5%). Apparently, advertising communication in streaming is more directed to a young target group although it starts spreading to a great public diversity.

As to formats we considered different details as location on the website, the sort of media used (video or audio), sort and origin of contents.

As to location we could detect a major trend to use as “insertion point” the upper part of the website (84.7% - centre with 57.6%, left with 20.3% and right 6.8%). (Table 10).

The most used sort of media in these messages is audio (79.7%) whereas video represents only 20.3%.

The origin of the contents is 94.9% from the website itself.

As expected contents of stream messages are consonant to the type of media used, i.e. they essentially drive the user to music (79.7%). The rest 20.3 % show a great scattering from building *webseries*, to sport and news.

This analysis leads us to conclude that this kind of messages is spreading now for an adult target group.

We now show the working of these formats and how they are presented to website visitors.

These contact ways (how they link to contents in media player) change from linear to **non-linear** formats, that is, if they are presented as advertising blocs casted on television or simultaneously presented along the contents of the website. **Linear video** is known for presenting advertising before, in the middle or after the video is seen by the consumer i.e. the consumer sees advertising according to the sequence of the video content. In **non-linear video** advertising is found within the video where the consumer sees it along and simultaneously with the video content as a footnote or, for instance, as product placement, (IAB, 2008).

Results show that only 20.3% of stream ads run are linear i.e. they do not interrupt the video reproduction. The majority of stream videos analysed are non-linear (79.7%), i.e. they elapse during the streaming reproduction without interrupting the content. This way campaigns are visualized simultaneously with the content in stream. Still they can overlap player/reproduction or simply be near it attracting the consumer’s attention. (Table 11)

Ads inserted in a linear way (see Table 12) along with the player content, “run” mostly inside that content – overlap – with a tendency to enter an alignment previous to the reproduction of the website content (pre-roll).

As for ads inserted in a non-linear format (Table 13) most of them does not overlap the player (97.9%) and is almost always on the right hand side of the player (91.5%). (Table 13).

As to building an advertising message (Table 14) results show that these supports are presented mostly through animation (67.8%) and only 3.4% show a link.

We also verified that the majority match companies messages (61.0%), where some material already made up for other purposes is used.

CONCLUSIONS

Internet usage as a new way of communicating and transmitting commercial messages as a result from technological progress is showing rapid evolution particularly in innovative advergaming and streaming advertising.

The use of these advertising forms seems to be linked to two different vectors: audience and the website's technological platform.

Advergaming is still chosen by brands working for younger target groups and dominate food products. They are mainly interactive supports calling on to dexterity and a sense of adventure while exposing the visitor to the brand even if he/she does not enter the game. Playing components related to a young audience having fun with the game and who beside being exposed to the brand and the product normally revisits and extends their visit to this sort of websites (Buckner, F., Qiao, S., 2002; Moore, 2006)

Using streaming advertising seems to be the dominant resource of online media websites whose nature of contents demands more sophisticated technological platforms on a audiovisual perspective. It is also an audience interested in information contents but also playful and entertainment as music. This audience has also more demanding expectations, different and dynamical which might be a very interesting terrain for inserting advertising messages in flow, i.e., streaming. If the youngest segment sticks with the experience of watching absorbing advertising videos maybe won't leave the website (Schafer, 2008) and this communication field is a major challenge both for marketeers and designers and editors (owners) of websites hosting commercial communication of different brands.

Streaming advertising as a technology advertising and entertainment fusion contacts the consumer (visitor) in an almost autonomous way, that is, visitor does not have to enter (like in advergaming) to be exposed to the advertised brand.

As to the location within the commercial communication website we confirmed that the preferable area to put advertising communication supports is the central area of the screen.

As to marketing strategies in this cybernetic context they imply revisit and extending the contact time of users with the websites and we confirmed that most of the websites show loyalty mechanisms. Most used mechanisms are User Registry (through login), RSS and reception of newsletters as a way of keeping the user in contact.

The drift to use these forms differs from website categories. Whereas websites related to homepages, online channels and online media (press) mostly use RSS and user registry, food products websites call on the user to take part in events and hobbies.

Special offers as a way of generating interest and dynamics between brand and user are used by most websites where taking part in access to rewards and hobbies dominate. In a general way this tool seems to be used in all website categories we run.

We conclude saying that new communication logic is rising linked to new means where interactivity is a crucial element to create communication strategies placing the consumer as an active element.

Table 1

Website category

	Frequency	Percentage
Food	35	28.2
Online Media – Press	30	24.2
Online Channel	27	21.8
Homepage-site	18	14.5
Online Media - Radio	10	8.1
Portal	2	1.6
Online Media – Television	2	1.6
Total	124	100.0

Table 2

Advertising forms

	N° of sites	Percentage	N° of Supports
Presence of Advergames	29	23.4	148 Advergames
Presence of Streaming Ads	22	17.7	59 Streaming Ads
Presence of Advertising	85	68.6	172 Banners
Total	124 Sites	100%	

Table 3

Contact Forms

	Frequency	Percentage
User registry (login)	69	58.5
RSS - Really Simple Syndication	61	51.7
Newslwttter/Info via e-mail	51	43.2
Information access registry	46	39.0
Clubs or Communities access registry	43	36.4
Blogs access	32	27.1
Forum participation registry	31	26.3
Events / Hobbies (not including games) and/or Special offers	31	26.3
Twitter or Facebook page	14	11.9
Total sites (118)		

Table 4

Promotion ways

	Frequency	Percentage
Downloads (Free)	26	37.1
Rewards	55	78.6
Rewards / Non guaranteed Offers (Drawings)	47	67.1
Hobbies	57	81.4
Buying drift	32	45.7
Contests	6	8.6
Rewards /Guaranteed Offers	10	14.3
Coupons/Vouchers to print	1	1.4

Table 5

Communication Supports by Website category

	Base Sites	Advergemes		Streaming Ads		Advertising	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Food	35	21	60.0			5	14.3
Homepage	18	5	27.8	3	16.7	13	72.2
Portal	2					2	100
Online Channel	27	1	3.7	3	11.1	25	92.6
Online Media – Press	30	1	3.3	7	23.3	29	96.6
Online Media – Television	2	1	50.0	1	50.0	1	50
Online Media – Radio	10			8	80.0	8	80
Total Sites	124						

Table 6

Product categories in Advergemes

Product categories	Frequency	Percentage
Treats and Desserts	62	41.9
Dairy products	24	16.2
Flour / Flakes / Fortifiers	18	12.2
Dairy products/ Other food products	3	2
Soft drinks	18	12.2
Preserves and frost food	3	2.0
Other food products	5	3.4
Sports	6	4.1
Online Media	4	2.7
Press	1	0.7
Various	4	2.7
Total	148	100

Table 7

Game access webpage area

Access Area	Frequency	Percentage
Centre	112	75.7
Top left	17	11.5
Top centre	10	6.8
Background	5	3.4
Centre left	2	1.4
Bottom right	2	1.4
Total	148	100

Table 8

Game instructions

Instructions	Frequency	Percentage
No instructions	34	23
Player must help character	25	16.9
Helping character to more speed + transposing obstacles	22	14.9
Helping character and being fast	18	12.2
Player must be fast	16	10.8
Helping character with obstacles	9	6.1
Helping character+speed+Adversaries	8	5.4
fast+Obstacles	7	4.7
Adversaries present	4	2.7
Fast+Adversaries	4	2.7
Game with obstacles	1	0.7
Total	148	100

Table 9

Product categories in Streamig Advertising

	Frequency	Percentage
Telecommunications	14	23.7
Banks	10	16.9
Food	5	8.5
Online Services	5	8.5
Shows	4	6.8
Online Media	3	5.1
Cars	3	5.1
Personal hygiene	2	3.4
Hobby	2	3.4
Press	2	3.4
Education	2	3.4
Sports	1	1.7
Travel	1	1.7
Decoration	1	1.7
Collections/Fascicle	1	1.7
Online Games	1	1.7
Cosmetics	1	1.7
Online Entertainment	1	1.7
Total	59	100

Table 10

Stream location in the website

	Frequency	Percentage
Top centre	34	57.6
Top left	12	20.3
Centre	9	15.3
Top right	4	6.8
Total	59	100

Table 11

Type of Stream Ad

	Frequency	Percentage
Non Linear	47	79.7
Linear	12	20.3
Total	59	100

Table 12

Linear Ad: Insertion and Position

Linear Ad Insertion	Linear ad position towards the player		Total
	Overlaps the player	Audio ad	
Before reproduction	6	1	7 (58.3%)
After reproduction	5		5 (41.7%)
Total	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100%)

Table 13

Non linear ad: Insertion and Position

Non linear ad insertion	Non linear ad position towards the player			Total
	Footnote	Headnote	Right Side	
Partially overlapping player			1	1 (2.1%)
Not overlapping player	1	3	42	46 (97.9%)
Total	1 (2.1%)	3 (6.4%)	43 (91.5%)	47 (100%)

Table 14

Advertising message Format

	Frequency	Percentage
Animation	40	67.8
Motionless	10	16.9
Video	6	10.2
Phrase/Link	2	3.4
Audio	1	1.7
Total	59	100.0

REFERENCES

- Arnold, C. (2004). 'Just Press Play', Marketing News, 38 (9),1,15.
- Buckner, K; Fang, H; Qiao, S. (2002) Advergaming: A New Genre in Internet Advertising, em http://www.dcs.napier.ac.uk/%7Emm/socbytes/feb2002_i/9.html (access in 12/08/08).
- Carrera, F. (2009). Marketing Digital na Versão 2.0 – O que não pode ignorar, Edições Sílabo, Lisboa.
- Chaves M., Dutschke G., Liz C. e Gervásio E, (2007). Kids'Power, A Geração Net em Portugal, Plátano Editora, Lisboa.
- Deal, D, (2005). The Ability of Branded Online Games to Build Brand Equity: An Exploratory Study, Proceedings of DiGRA Conference: Changing Views – Worlds in Play
- Dionísio, P., Rodrigues, V., Faria, H., Canhoto, R., Nunes, C.R., (2009). b-Mercator – Blended Marketing, Publicações D. Quixote.
- IAB (2008) Digital Video In-Stream Ad Format Guidelines and Best Practices Retirado de <http://www.iab.net/media/file/IAB-Video-Ad-Format-Standards.pdf> (acesso em
- Markest, 2009 Ranking Netscope (em http://www.netscope.marktest.pt/ranking/Jan09/Rank_Jan_2009_Visitas.htm).
- Moore, E. (2006). It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children, The Henry Kaiser Family Foundation.
- Schafer, I (2008), In-Stream Advertising: Killing or Saving Online Video? Retirado de <http://clickz.com/3628214>.
- Shrum, L.J. (2004). (ed). The Psychology of Entertainment Media. Blurring the Lines Between Entertainment and Persuasion. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Winkler, T.; Buckner, K., (2006). Receptiveness of Gamers to Embedded Brand Messages in Advergaming: Attitudes towards Product Placement, Journal of Interactive Advertising, 7(1):37-46 (Fall 2006), Published at <http://www.jiad.org/vol7/no1/winkler> (access in 19/12/2008).