

Inside Google Marketing: Our Programmatic Plans for 2016

Joshua Spanier, marketing director for global media, offers a glimpse into how Google went “all-in” on programmatic advertising and reveals his programmatic resolutions for 2016.

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For more than a decade Joshua Spanier has been planning media for global advertising agencies, including ZenithOptimedia and Goodby Silverstein & Partners. Now, as head of Google Media Lab, he's on our front lines of ad campaign planning and ad placement. As such, he's leading our brand's "all-in" push toward programmatic advertising.

How does Google use programmatic advertising in its marketing strategy?

Over the last two years, Google marketing has gone all-in, pushing close to 100% of our brand display advertising through programmatic in 2015.

"Programmatic—along with search—is the key to winning these moments that matter without sacrificing scale."

It's the most efficient and effective way for us to reach people with our ads and our message. It's especially helped us reach people in their moments—when they're looking for answers, discovering new things, and making decisions. Programmatic—along with search—is the key to winning these moments that matter without sacrificing scale.

We've found great success adopting programmatic for our product campaigns. To support the Google Search App campaign, for instance, we built mobile ads with dynamic content that changed based on the user's location, time of day, and 23 other live data points.

¹ Ad Age, June 2015

In fact, our programmatic push connected with people so effectively it led to some of our strongest mobile results to date. We saw a 12.5% increase in brand lift, as well as 5X the expansion rates (the ratio of ad expansions to ad impressions) versus industry benchmarks.²

Looking back at this "all-in" move to programmatic buying, what was the biggest challenge?

The hardest thing is respecting the relationship between the medium and the message. It's easy to get lost in the technical aspects of programmatic. But then you lose sight of our core mission as marketers—to add value to consumers. The most advanced programmatic advertising in the world won't break through if the creative doesn't tell a compelling story.

It's also been important for me to recognise that the technology is fluid. It's improving all the time. That means I have invested my own time in staying close to industry news to keep up with what other brands are achieving using programmatic technologies overall. This is not a "learn it once and done" space. It needs constant attention.

² Think With Google, Mobile Micro-Moments: Creating Valuable Programmatic Advertising with Search Insights, December 2015

How is programmatic different today for you versus two years ago?

For a long time, programmatic was the domain of direct-response marketers who were fixated on finding the cheapest possible conversion, leading to fears within the industry that real-time bidding, or RTB, stood for "race to the bottom." But now all marketers, including brand marketers, are using programmatic at a strategic level and getting real results while working with the world's premier publishers. For example, we have a great relationship with The New York Times and recently bought the first homepage masthead programmatically from them. A few years ago, no one would have thought that was possible because publishers thought programmatic hurt their digital business model. But now programmatic is seen as a mutually beneficial way of buying and serving advertising.

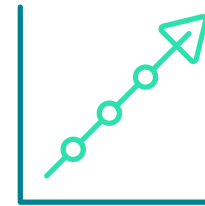
Brands like L'Oréal are getting up to 2,000+% return on programmatic ad campaigns.

Plus, buying and serving ads programmatically offers metrics like viewability (i.e., Did someone actually see the ad?), so brands can optimise against something that will lead to positive results.

What role do you think programmatic will play in the evolution of the marketing industry?

According to the IAB, 70% - 80% of the UK digital display will be traded programmatically by 2018. It's only getting bigger every year because it allows brands to deliver ads that are relevant to real human beings. And that connection with people is what pays off with measurable results. L'Oréal, for example, has seen exceptional results, in one case bringing in a 2,000+% return on ad spend with its programmatic campaign.³

In our case, with the Google Search App campaign, we reached 30% more people three times more frequently, with an approximately 30% lower effective cost-per-thousand impressions (eCPM) compared to the previous year.⁴



³ Think With Google, L'Oréal Canada Finds Beauty in Programmatic Buying, July 2015

⁴ Think With Google, Inside Google Marketing: How We Went All In With Programmatic Buying, July 2015

What are you most excited to work on in 2016?

I have a few resolutions in 2016. I'd like us to try to use programmatic scale to drive even more sophisticated advertising tactics—the things that we'd normally have to do on a smaller scale.

First, I'd like to experiment with new capabilities to refine relevance. I want to focus on things like geolocation, demographics, and dayparting—which are enabled by programmatic—to be there in **consumers' moments**.

Second, I'm aiming to make creative that people will find even more useful and engaging.

Finally, I want to push the boundaries of programmatic tech beyond the web. I want to experiment further with making real-time ads in the out-of-home industry, for example. We have done tests in London and Japan, and I see a huge opportunity to make more relevant ads within physical spaces out in the world.

Looking to make your own resolutions for programmatic in 2016? We created a [quiz](#) to help you develop an action plan for the year ahead.