

How eharmony created the perfect audience-messaging match

Author

Grant Langston

Published

February 2018

Topics

Emerging Technology,
Consumer Services,
Experience & Design

If you're like most companies, you're already testing various messages to see how they resonate with different audiences. You've also probably already set up audience targeting. But for many marketers, one big question keeps cropping up: How can we raise the bar and deliver more laser-focused messages that grab consumer attention and drive results?

At eharmony, we were in the same boat. To find the answer, our marketing team partnered with our search technology provider, Marin Software. If I had to render a recipe for our "audience targeting love potion," it would include these elements:

Know your users' needs

We ran our marketing programs the same way for quite some time—delivering ads to a broad audience and hitting as many demographics as possible. This worked to an extent, but after a series of tests, we found that our potential customers have different wants and needs than we thought.

We knew we had to make a change. What transpired was a mindset shift, which resulted in adjusting our approach to search advertising campaigns and reworking our entire audience targeting program for better performance and results.

think with 

Thanks to machine learning, we've got a new level of mass personalization. That said, consumer survey results reveal that over "71% of consumers prefer ads targeted to their interests and shopping habits." It's important that we as marketers aim to meet this expectation. Google audience has helped eharmony tap into this area with strong results.

We found that the ability to match those wants with the language in our messages dramatically increased the effectiveness of our ad spend. In tests, we saw an ROI increase of 20-30% just by understanding and addressing consumers' concerns in our creative copy.

We also retarget customers using Google audiences based on attribution insights. Attribution lets us see exactly where the customer journey starts and ends. Then we're able to adjust our offers and messages depending on the audience. For instance, if we know a certain type of user starts their eharmony journey through a search for our brand, we retarget them on the most likely channels they'll hit next.

Attribution lets us see exactly where the customer journey starts and ends. Then we're able to adjust our offers and messages depending on the audience.

Meet those needs through targeting and retargeting

Testing our creative audience strategy has uncovered a few "aha" moments. What surprised us most were men in their 40s and 50s. They responded to our targeted messaging at a startlingly high rate. Prior to testing, we fell into a trap that affects a lot of marketers, either generalizing male consumer behavior or broadly targeting them as all being the same. However, as we've learned, middle-aged men have targeted needs too.

Without this more precise audience targeting and feedback loop, none of this would've been possible. It enabled us to move from the generic to the specific, which better serves our customers and dramatically improved the effectiveness of our advertising program.

One of our goals is to get people to our site, and another is having them engage in the sign-up process. We realize that signing up for a dating service takes guts. You have to put yourself out there in the hopes of meeting someone special. But oftentimes, making it through our sign-up steps takes more than one try.

We put a lot of thought into nudging users to complete their sign-up without being pushy or annoying. Nailing this was mission-critical because we know that someone who began a form has a much higher chance of completion if they're reminded and come back within seven days. This was another tactic in our strategy: remarketing them in a way that made it easy—and enticing—to finish sign-up.

With the right audience targeting, we reach consumers anywhere they are, with smartly aimed messaging that appeals to specific users and their current phase in the eharmony journey. It has worked wonders.

Keep the team timely and trained on the latest marketing innovations

This isn't rocket science, but it is data science. It's being clear about how to fulfill not only the customer's needs but the team's needs, too. Targeting according to how we're best personalizing the customer experience requires a specific skill set.

It's a process of learning how to identify what we don't know so that we can fill the gaps. What technical and data expertise does our team need to run these types of campaigns? How can we master the art of persuasive messaging to court a wide range of personality types? These are questions we're asking and acting on.

With targeting, we know dollars aren't being wasted. Bottom line: We're sharper and more focused.

The linchpin to our personalized advertising success—averaging 220% ROI—rests on highly reliable forecasts according to audience segment. With targeting, we know what to expect, and now we're more efficient at a large scale. We know dollars aren't being wasted on people who are potentially married or who just aren't within the dating mindset. Bottom line: we're sharper and more focused.

It takes time, the right tools, and collective strategic thinking, but this approach has proven to be a boon for our business. As advertisers, we have to constantly remind ourselves that we're serving people—in all of their complexity—and as a result we need to create custom-made campaigns that guarantee a love connection.

Grant Langston
CEO at eharmony



Sources

1 Adlucent/Google, "The Value of Targeted Advertising to Consumers", United States, n=1000 consumers, May 2016.