

The Gap Between What Advertisers Want and What Media Publishers Deliver

The needs of advertisers have changed in recent years. While getting the right ads in front of the right people was all that really mattered to publishers only a few years ago, advertisers are now seeking the delivery of connected, end-to-end experiences. And they want partners who both understand and can help them to achieve it. Unfortunately, publishers are falling short. There is a real disconnect between what's wanted and what's delivered, and there seems little evidence of effort being made to close that gap.

Why better targeting is no longer enough

Advertising today isn't just about finding the right audience. It's about relevance, context, and engagement: delivering the right message at the right moment. And that's why contextual advertising, particularly when paired with Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO), is becoming such a popular strategy. When advertising adapts to whatever is happening in the real world, be that the time of day or the weather, it performs significantly better than other approaches. Yet many publishers struggle to consistently put this into practise.

The myth of being customer-first

Most media organisations would say that they are customer-centric, but in real terms that often means that they've invested in analytics tools, dashboards, and audience measurement systems. And it's a good start, but data alone doesn't create meaningful experiences. True customer-centricity requires complete alignment across processes, teams, and decision-making. And designing operations that manage to unite both advertiser goals and audience expectations. Unfortunately, rather than achieving this, publishers frequently fall into a pattern of "performative progress." Internal systems become more efficient, but external experiences remain unchanged. This creates the illusion that progress is being made, but in reality, publishers and advertisers are continuing to work towards very different goals.

Several factors contribute to this disconnect. Firstly, there's the obsession with efficiency. Systems are designed for convenience rather than genuine results, so user experience becomes an afterthought. While impressions and reach are still used as the benchmarks of success, instead of focusing on the metrics that actually matter now, such as engagement quality and brand impact. Personalisation also tends to be at a surface level, instead of making a meaningful difference. And while tech investments are clearly happening, they tend to happen because of market trends, rather than as a response to customer needs. Together, these things reduce the effectiveness of every campaign, while eroding customer trust.

What advertisers are really asking for

Advertisers simply aren't interested in traditional media metrics. The priority now is the production of meaningful, connected, and contextual experiences that ensure that wherever a customer makes contact, the experience and messaging are recognisable and relevant. But what they're getting is fragmentation.

Advertisers are less interested in who the user is and more interested in where they are, personally, right now. That's why campaigns that adapt to context - whether that's heavy rain, nighttime travel, or the end of a live event - are far more compelling and effective.

Equally, transparency has become non-negotiable. Advertisers expect real-time visibility into performance and results. Vague reporting or delayed insights simply aren't acceptable.

Then there's the growing emphasis on value over visibility. Reach was only enough when it was the only possible measure of success. Now, tech has made it possible for more pertinent metrics to be measured, such as engagement, brand lift, and relevance, and that's what advertisers want.

Finally, there's the need for complete reliability. Even the most innovative campaign can fail if it's delivered inconsistently. Technical stability, accurate scheduling, and seamless execution are now an expected norm.

How tech can help to close the gap

The common answer to most problems these days seems to be to throw more tech at it. But it rarely works because what's actually needed is to use the right tools more intelligently and cohesively. And that means creating a **unified data ecosystem**. Bringing together all relevant data - audience, campaign, and sales - into a single, easily accessible CRM, like Salesforce or Microsoft Dynamics 365, creates a holistic view of everything advertisers need to know.

Then, when you add in **advanced analytics and AI**, you gain access to **better decision-making** based upon deeper insights, which allow publishers to anticipate advertiser needs. AI can also help through the **automation of workflows**, helping to build operational efficiency, making life easier for internal staff and improving both turnaround times and accuracy for advertisers.

Personalisation is another priority. Too long, the focus has been on swapping out the visuals, when meaningfully adapting messaging to real-world context is so much more effective. The aim should be to create campaigns that feel timely, relevant, and cohesive, across channels. Delivering value to customers.

The need for **transparency** is also unquestionable. Real-time reporting and accessible dashboards should be considered the bare minimum. Advertisers want to see exactly how their investment is performing, without ambiguity.

Lastly, there's **adaptability**. Things have changed so much in the media throughout the last 20 years, and it's continuing to evolve. Publishers need to be ready, with systems that can integrate new capabilities simply, when needed.

The gap between advertisers and publishers comes from a lack of understanding. And it needs to be addressed. Publishers not prepared to move towards the delivery of meaningful, connected experiences, will risk becoming irrelevant.

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