A data revolution in marketing takes creativity to a new level

Creative marketing can be a ruthless field. Players have to come up with flashy, engaging, customer-centric campaigns, but they also need to prove that their work is driving sales and growth for their clients. To complicate matters, there is no precise way to measure the success of an ad campaign. It’s impossible, for example, to determine how many sales dollars are generated by each advertising dollar spent. For that reason, ad agencies have had to be creative with their analytics, and clients have had to settle for more holistic definitions of success. However, the end goal will always be an increase in direct sales, and it is ultimately harder to prove causation between a campaign and sales uplift.

By developing a thorough analytics strategy, the executives at J. Walter Thompson are pioneers in developing and pursuing a data-driven approach to advertising. The company has a strong tradition of innovation and creativity; it was founded in 1864 selling ad space in religious publications at a time when marketing and advertising was still in its infancy in the US. J. Walter Thompson was one of the first American ad agencies to branch out internationally and the first to employ artists and writers to create bespoke ads for clients. And now it is leading the way once more by developing and pursuing a data-driven approach to advertising.

Analytics is the future of advertising strategy

Huw Davis is J. Walter Thompson’s Data and Analytics Lead for Asia Pacific. He is an expert in the application of data science in marketing, sales and general business environments, and he has been leading the company’s efforts to increasingly put data at the center of its creative process. His first move was to introduce JMP® Pro software, which he chose over building a proprietary suite of tools because “for us it’s about rapid development, not an exercise in developing software.” And, he says, JMP Pro is easy to use and offers all the necessary functionalities and workflows in one place. What Davis and his growing team are trying to achieve is to create a measure of success; results that can be put in front of clients. “We want to show uplift,” he explains. “It’s about proving how effective we are.”

The goal is to work with the various data generated from a client’s marketing campaign – which can include email newsletters, social media posts, TV and radio spots, magazine ads and myriad other channels – unify that data, process it and come up with a credible measure of correlation between content and sales returns. It seems simple, but an agency with as broad a global reach as J. Walter Thompson generates a lot of data and, due to differences in market maturity, much of it is to varying standards.

Processing data to increase the efficiency of communication

In a recent project for a major multinational manufacturer of consumer electronics, Davis had 59 different data files from 15 different sales territories and products. “I used JMP Pro to clean it all up and do the interrogation,” he explains. “For example: if you bought a model of [this company’s] product in Hong Kong, you could register it there, along with the accessories that go with that product, because they’re individually uniquely identified. You could also go to a school run by the brand to learn to use the product.” Each of these points of contact between brand and consumer created a data point, but they all had different values.

“We de-duped and merged the files and pulled it together. We started with about 2.2 million records, and after cleaning ended up with about 900,000 records, consolidated by individual consumer. We created a
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dashboard so that the client could see these records in a visually pleasing way. JMP Pro is the actual driver; there’s no point in having a nice dashboard if the data is corrupt.”

With this in-depth analysis, Davis was able to devise a strategy for his client to optimize their email marketing strategy. “They send a newsletter every two weeks, so I’ve been analyzing the people who are clicking through on the newsletter to see what they’re clicking on, what content they’re interested in, and if they’re not, why they’re not clicking on the content. I used JMP Pro to do some partitioning, which allowed us to really start honing in on people who have high-performing response rates.”

This highly targeted approach has allowed J. Walter Thompson to adapt its content to be as efficient as possible on an individual client level. “We want to make it more relevant to people who are more responsive, but we don’t have to leave anybody behind. We want to bring in people who aren’t responding to this content, but maybe would identify with content of a different nature.” Ultimately Davis’ analysis created a proof of concept that guided the implementation of a standardized sales strategy rolled out across the client’s offices in different countries.

This is just one example of the work J. Walter Thompson is doing using data to construct for clients a comprehensive and successful digital marketing strategy. In this instance what Davis has been able to prove is that by targeting the right customers with the right message, brands can increase their return by a substantial margin. He has used this case study as an example in some of the in-house training he carries out. “JMP Pro is ideal because quite a lot of what we do is not about trying to implement long-term systems. We also work with one-off projects.”

Digital knowledge boosts the effectiveness of creative content

As online and digital marketing grow in importance, it becomes easier for brands to adapt their message, tweak marketing communications strategy and respond to their customers, but that can only be achieved through efficient and accurate data processing. “I’m also doing a lot of work with JMP analyzing social media content. We’re looking at the effectiveness of our content by deconstructing the individual bits of content into attributes,” Davis explains. “Knowing that one piece of content has worked online socially is great, but why has it worked compared to something else?”

Davis’ work also serves to educate J. Walter Thompson clients on the benefits of this data-led approach. “The client always wants to have more effective content. We use the digital knowledge we have by tracking people through the social content we’re producing, and then work out which specific types of content increase the effectiveness of the creative strategy we’re building.”

‘To be accountable we need to start measuring things in a structured way’

Even if brands come to J. Walter Thompson seeking more conventional ad strategies, Davis is sure that the data adds extra value and ultimately converts even the most digitally prosaic brands. “It’s about being accountable, and to become more accountable we have to start measuring things in a structured way,” he says. “It’s not about just measuring the research results of brand uplift, it’s about how we increase shareholder value by growing the number of people purchasing these products. That’s why I’m trying to get people to use JMP.”

Unlike other data-driven strategy, Davis is using hard analytics to engage end-customers in soft metrics: conversations about brands, brand engagement and new ideas. Ultimately, though less easily measurable, these conversations are what will create lifetime consumers — and returns — for brands that work with J. Walter Thompson.

Solution

Analyze the data trail left by online shoppers, their interaction with branded content, and use the highly processed data to target engagement on an individual level, tailored to each J. Walter Thompson client.

Results

An effective results dashboard that allows clients to visualize the data, the reach of their content, and conversion rates, all measured accurately but still easily digestible.