

How to Put Millennials (or any Target Group) in your Advertising's Crosshairs

By Dan Novalis, President & Owner, 2Novas Inc.

In our work with banks of all sizes, from less than \$100M community banks to mega-banks like Citibank, we've set up campaigns that target very thin slices of people: those likely to get approved for a credit card offer, those within three miles of each retail branch, and even cross-sell campaigns targeting current customers as they're browsing the web and social media. These are fairly common tactics, but as banks move from traditional to digital media, what's often overlooked is the ability to customize the content of these campaigns to speak directly to each of these groups.

As a hypothetical, let's consider two people who are in the market for a new credit card: one is a new college graduate, and the other is a head of household with several young children. Their goals, fears, challenges and ultimately their reasons for wanting the card are very different. Therefore, instead of running a generic credit card campaign, run several mini-campaigns, each of which targets each group directly. Each ad should speak individually to the college grad, or to the mom or dad. With traditional media this would be expensive and inefficient, but with digital, this approach is both manageable and cost-effective.

If this is the case, why is this tactic often overlooked? We frequently hear that bankers are just not sure digital will work in their market. But we've heard this from markets of all shapes and sizes: small, large, low competition, heavy competition, you name it. Truth is, digital will work in your market if it's set up properly; it just takes some heavy lifting at the beginning to do it right.

Here are the five steps we follow when setting up a digital campaign:

1. Identify your core persona. Who are you trying to target? Think about the customer first, rather than the media. What are your customers' goals, fears and challenges? How can the product or service you offer help them solve to that? For most banks, this can involve multiple customer personas, which taken together typically describe the goals of 70-80% of their customer base. There are myriad persona worksheets available online. (Or, I'd be happy to send you the actual worksheet we use on our client engagements – see my contact information in the by-line).

2) Identify the media they're most likely to be on. Start with the most recognized players: Facebook, Google, LinkedIn and Instagram (or even Pandora and streaming television). Look at the possible targeting options on each of these platforms. On Facebook, it's by interest (e.g., what posts and pages they're interacting with), industry, age, location and more. On Google, it's by search term – you can target very specific searches. Google will cost more, but that spend allows you to reach customers who are much closer to their purchase point. LinkedIn enables you to target job titles or companies, which is useful for small business products or if there are big employers in your area.

3) Create a chart of the precise topics you can target each group with. The chart should detail each persona, the media you're planning to use reach those personas, the targeting options you intend to utilize, and message options. Those messages should be tied directly to each of your targets. For example, if you're targeting employees of a certain large insurance company in Bloomington, your message should speak directly to them: "Hey, Insurance Company employee, our bank is located close. Join hundreds of your fellow employees and apply for our card today." Your message should be at the same level of precision as your targeting.

4) Determine your budget. Start small and ramp up. Many of our smallest clients have seen success with as little as \$5 to \$15 per day, per target. Bigger banks typically start higher, but they also spread their spend across a dozen or more branch locations and personae. The key rule is to target precisely but aim for at least \$5/day for each target group; any less than that and you won't have enough volume to optimize your ROI. Ramp up your budget around 10%-20% per week as you begin to see results.

5) Test and Learn. Launch the campaigns but watch them on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Evaluate which creative messages perform best for which audiences. Tweak the text and test variations to see what works best. It may take three or four months for the typical digital campaign to hit its stride, so secure a commitment from your leadership or board so they don't get cold feet and pull the plug too soon. Optimally, you should allow your campaigns to run for at least a quarter so you can obtain enough data to truly determine how your campaigns have performed.

Several years ago, when data-based targeting was spinning up, I ran a campaign for a big credit card company. We spent weeks researching available data, running small test campaigns, and prepping for the wider launch. When we launched the campaign, we had a very highly-tuned target audience and geography that we were sure would work. However, the company opted to go for a very general brand message, one that did not speak to the precise target groups we'd developed, let alone to those groups' goals and challenges. Needless to say, the campaign did not perform as well as we'd hoped out of the gate. When we adjusted the campaign messages to speak directly and uniquely to each target group, our click-through rate doubled and card applications attributable to the campaign went up by 30%.

So, as you're setting up your next advertising campaign, think personas, then media, then target groups, and then personalize your messages explicitly to those groups. Your ROI will show for it.

Dan Novalis is the president & Owner of 2Novas, a St. Louis-based digital advertising firm specializing in community and regional banks. 2Novas provides free digital spend audits, that will give you quick-hit ideas on how you can improve ROI from your existing paid advertising. Reach out to Dan at dan@2novas.com, or call 314-966-2430 for more information.