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## Putting Digital Media in Its Place



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**Jumpstart Automotive Media's product development VP points out three major developments that are shaping how autos will be marketed this year.**

The level of growth and opportunity in the automotive online advertising world has elevated the importance of digital media to astounding levels for each tier of advertiser-- from dealers to regional dealer associations to the manufacturers.

Digital media is no longer the final marketing meeting point in which a junior planner stands up and eagerly says, "...and we're doing a \$70,000 web buy." Digital marketing is locked and loaded as part of every facet of an auto company's advertising plan, and that's only going to become more prevalent in 2007.

Here are some key trends that auto advertisers should look out for in 2007:

### **User-generated media will grow in importance**

Though auto shoppers continue to rely on various third-party research sites that contain vehicle specs, trim levels, pricing and more, this ultimately won't be enough to satisfy the consumer's appetite for information. You see, the peer-to-peer world isn't just for teenagers anymore-- it's for anyone looking to benefit from the experience of others when making a purchasing decision. It's already happening in travel, health and other industries at a rampant level, and as autos are such a big-ticket, heavily researched purchase, the industry is bound to take a higher profile position in the field.

You've already seen signs of how upper funnel branding campaigns are leveraging UGC. And the deeper, more involved shopper may seek out forum-type properties like AutoForums or CarDomain. Comparison sites like Shopping.com also make it easy for the general consumer to post a comment or read others' reviews.

Expect to see more of your traditional third-party research sites taking on user-generated content plays-- sites like Consumer Guide Automotive, KBB.com and others will find ways to incorporate the consumer's point of view about cars throughout the research process.

### **The "funnel" will continue to be blown to bits**

Regardless of surfing patterns, search queries or any other actions and behaviors that auto shoppers demonstrate, the only thing that auto advertisers will truly know about the "in-market" audience is that they are in-market. So the consumer who submits a request for a quote or the consumer who simply searched the word "cars" could be at the same point in their purchase process. Auto shoppers simply approach the process in their own customized fashion, which is why more than 70 percent of auto shoppers use the internet to decide what vehicle to purchase. They can do it how and when they want it.

So how will auto advertisers handle this lack of a funnel? Message differentiation is the key. As in-market shoppers wade their way through articles, data, photos and videos, they'll be exposed to hundreds of ads-- ads that contain a picture of a vehicle and a company moniker, or a dealership location or an incentive opportunity. Ensuring that the message is relevant, timely and more intriguing than the competition's will be imperative to an advertiser's engagement of the consumer. Utilizing rich media (I know it sounds crazy, but general HTML and flash ads are still the prevailing mechanism), streaming video or ads tailored to specific behavior segments can help move the needle further. And a good product helps too.

### **Digital video will grow up**

We've been dealing with the re-purposed 30-second spots for far too long. It's time that auto advertisers began creating takes on their commercial shoots that are custom-built for the web. A 30-second spot simply doesn't translate well to the web; more custom content needs to be created for online advertising. While pre-roll remains a dominant facilitator of video ads, 2007 will be a year where a more integrated approach will drive a better video ad experience. Employing various available assets to create a storyboard-type approach -- as opposed to a generic spot -- will make a bigger splash for advertisers. Companies like Vimation and Brightcove are innovators in this arena, as they are developing ways to create video content that represent enjoyable user experiences. In addition, sites like Vehix.com have proven that people want to watch videos about cars, and sites like CarDomain have proven that people want to post videos about their own tricked out cars.

Video-on-demand will also see growth in the auto sector. As the on-screen navigation continues to improve via the remote control, more people will enjoy the rich and big-box nature of viewing vehicle information on television.

2007 has the makings of an explosive year for digital automotive advertising. It'll be interesting to absorb and watch these trends emerge in our dynamic medium.

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