

Published: June 18, 2007  
Audiences Matter, Demos Don't



By [Mitch Lowe](#)  
[More by this Author](#)  
[Contact Author](#)

**Jumpstart Automotive Media's CEO explains that while demographic targeting is a guessing game, there are still ways automotive can slice and dice user data to hone in on true in-market buyers.**

One of the unfortunate legacies of the way traditional offline media was sold and bought is that generations of media buyers and sellers grew up thinking that there was something mystical, if not holy, about demographic targeting. For years billions of dollars were spend on vague targeting notions such as "women, 18-35" or "men, 35-50." I say vague because it should be self-evident that an 18-year-old has almost nothing in common with the 35-year-old (or a 25-year-old for that matter, if you want to narrow the range). And even more importantly, just because someone is 18 doesn't mean that he or she is a video gamer (there are many 60-year-old gamers out there and more women than you would ever guess). Demographic targeting is a "guessing game." But the emergence of online media allows the guessing to stop and for marketers to target their advertising to the right people; in this case people who really *are* gamers, no matter what their age or gender.

Demographic targeting emerged as the "industry standard" simply because it was all that traditional media could offer. The numbers were based on relatively small sample bases of interviews or questionnaires, then projected into the millions. Media was bought and sold on answers that were often years old and were hardly a snapshot of real-time audience composition. As an industry we need to move beyond demographic targeting because it is by its very nature inaccurate *and* because we can do better.

"You can observe a lot just by watching," Yogi Berra once said, and as funny as that sounds, you really can observe a lot just by watching what people do online. Without being asked in a survey or mall-intercept, online visitors will tell you a great deal about their interests by how and what they consume online. Would it not stand to reason that if a user visited their online portfolio nearly every hour of every day that he or she is an active stock trader? Now collect thousands of similar users and you have an audience segment that is of considerable interest to a wide variety of financial service advertisers.

Part of our business is to track online auto buyers and deliver them to advertisers. We do it with nary a demographic profile, but rather with audience segments comprised of thousands of people who exhibit similar online behaviors. For example by tracking visitors to the Jumpstart Network (a group of 10 automotive research publishers where consumers go to read about cars and trucks and begin to research information as steps in the buying process), we can separate out visitors into audience segments such as "read content" or "clicked on an ad for a hybrid." Now, does that mean these people are necessary going to buy a hybrid? Of course not, but the fact they are even interested in *learning* more about them makes them much more of a prospect than someone who is "male, 18-35."

We can slice and dice our user data in ways that help advertisers really hone in on true in-market buyers. For example combine the data sets of visitors "who read about high performance cars" with "searched for racing tires" or "visited the (insert muscle car brand here) section of RoadandTrack.com" and you can make some pretty safe assumptions about this person. You can then group that person in with others

who have shown similar behaviors to produce an audience that will be highly receptive to performance car advertising, especially if it is served out of context.

For regional and local dealers, user consumption can be cross matched with ISP addresses to identify in-market consumers who are within driving distance of local showrooms. Rather than accept the waste inherent in a local TV or newspaper buy, dealers can target all of the in-market buyers in their area/DMA.

The bottom line is that better targeting leads to more efficiency and the ability to get more successful results with *less* marketing spend. With online targeting based on user behavior, you eliminate advertising to folks who are not really in-market buyers, and you reach a great many more prospects who are in the buying funnel. Moreover, you can do both by spending less than on "demographic" buys. This means more money for *your* bottom line.

*Mitch Lowe is CEO of [Jumpstart Automotive Media](#). [Read full bio](#).*