Most users won't mind ads, if they are relevant, timely and of good quality!

By Daan Du Toit , issued by Mark1   21 Aug 2018

A few years ago, it was hard to get through a meeting without someone throwing the term "big data" around. Today, we all still cringe when we hear that phrase, and the most annoying part is that those who talk about big data, usually don't have a solid understanding of what it really means. In an ever-evolving digital world, where we consume content across several digital devices, data is collected on all of us, all the time.

I think if we really knew the amount of data Google, Facebook and Apple have on us, we'd be astounded! They know pretty much everything there is to know about us. With location data, they potentially know where we live, where we work, when we travel, where we travel to, how we get there and who we're with.

With sensitive information collected on consumers every minute of the day, it is no surprise that new legislations are coming into effect to protect us. In May, Global Data Protection Rights (GDPR) came into effect in Europe and in South Africa the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI) is set to come into effect sometime later this year. These laws will continue to evolve, as more and more data is collected. The fact that data collection is now regulated is defiantly a step in the right direction. We all want everything for free, yet nothing in life is really free, right? Facebook – one of the world's fastest growing and most profitable social media sites is 100% "free". The social media giant has recently been rocked by a privacy scandal and during court proceedings in April, when the judge asked how Facebook could possibly provide this amazing service free of charge, Mark Zuckerberg plainly said: "We sell ads sir." He could have elaborated and said: "We collect data and sell very targeted ads," but since the case involved a data breach, I'm pretty sure he wanted to minimise the use of the word data in his response.

We all know Google, as with most publishers, operates mostly on an ad-funded model and in some rare cases with a paywall – a function that allows you to pay to access premium content which is very often ad-free. The reality is that very few publishers have seen any success with a paywall model, as we all want things for free. In fact, 99% of people on the internet will rather see a few ads than pay for a subscription. Yet, our parents happily paid for the daily newspaper to stay abreast of what is happening, and never expected that to be free.

By collecting data on users, Facebook, Google and the likes allow advertisers to run more targeted campaigns and therefore charge higher prices for the more relevant ads they serve. Audience profiles could include gender, age, area of residence, employment area, sport interest, browsing behaviour or purchase intent. Extremely valuable information to a marketer wanting to target these specific audiences.

The big question is: what is the actual cost to the consumer of the media? Do you mind being offered options for hotels when you're looking at hotels anyway? There might just be a better deal out there. If you are looking at a Ford Figo, do you mind being showed ads of similar cars in the same class that might interest you? If your wife just had a baby and you bought some nappies, would you mind seeing ads of *nappies on special* a few weeks later when you need to buy again?

As much as we are sometimes freaked out by this information being continuously collected on us and the perceived invasion on our privacy, the reality is, relevant ads will improve our lives and we need to "pay" publishers that produce quality journalism. At a recent event, a representative of a well-known local news publisher urged marketers to not always try to push down prices of local publishers, as these guys have huge costs and need the revenue to survive and to keep providing a service. A news publisher has editorial teams and journalists in the field to be our eyes and ears and report accurately on what is happening out there. We will all miss their presence if these publishers don't survive because of a lack of support. It is the duty of marketers to support these publishers and the duty of readers to accept a few ads in return for consuming great content.

Publishers have the biggest responsibility though! They need to make sure that they have accurate data and that ads are therefore relevant to users. As important - ads need to be of better quality. There has been some great improvement in the design of digital ads, but there is plenty more room for improvement and publishers should not allow ads on their sites that devalue their carefully crafted content. No one wants to be bombarded with the same brand's ads everywhere, so also control the frequency of ads shown to one user. Ads should be informative and helpful not disruptive and annoying.

We have all accepted ads on TV and radio since the beginning of time, why are we resistant to ads on the internet? If you would rather pay, then pay for that paywall, but if you're like the rest of us who wants it for free, accept those few ads and support local publishers to produce accurate journalism and other forms of high-quality content for the years to come.

ABOUT DAAN DU TOIT

Daan Du Toit is the co-founder and MD of Mark1, a full service media agency part of the proudly 100% Black-owned Duke Group of companies.
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