

The power of a customised online advertising strategy

 By [Greg Mason](#)

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So, you are a media strategist controlling considerable budget and managing large accounts; your mandate is to drive sales, generate a very favourable ROI and to pivot your client into social media fame almost instantly. The ideas are larger than life and the pace is furious. One day your brand is ['Old Spicing'](#) its way to more YouTube views than Obama's victory speech and the next it's a bored topic.

This is the cutting-edge environment of online advertising, where each new day brings the possibility of the next hot viral marketing campaign to occupy the infectious attention of the public.

Like a game of golf

Digital media is perhaps somewhat like the game of golf. That one straight 250-yard drive down the middle of the fairway gives you the *chutzpah* to hack, drop and chip your way out the rough, water and bunkers round after round.

However, with some fine tuning, you can quickly learn that using the right club for the right shot and having the correct expectations of your clubs will unlock massive potential time after time. It's not the long drives that win a game of golf (sure, they feel good) but instead it's the consistent accuracy and continued good advice from your caddy (the ad agency) and correct use of clubs (the online platforms) that win games.

This is where I feel smaller publishers in South Africa are currently caught between a rock and a hard place. All too often, advertisers and their agencies are trying to execute each campaign with the same creative and strategy - a "Click Here" call to action and a benchmark performance of 0.30% click-through rate (CTR). This is like telling a golfer, "Well, as long as you playing off a handicap, you on track."

"Industry-average" approach

I feel this "industry-average" approach has come about because agencies stand a massive risk of losing their clients if they don't play cautiously and achieve industry average results, while the advertiser is going home feeling like a long drive champion after a round on a mashie course.

I believe this leads to advertisers and agencies not always operating with the same objectives.

I believe advertisers secretly hold expectations of massive digital advertising success while the agencies are trying to play the game safely and secure the industry average click-through in order to retain their client and keep them happy.

Strategy discrepancy leads to mediocre results

Now, it's no secret that advertisers would be the first to unleash the fury if the dazzling 300-yard drive didn't work out. So an agency playing it safe is totally understandable. However, I believe this discrepancy in strategy leads to mediocre results, under-performance and agencies simply booking on sites they know. Professional golfers don't play on the same course all the time because they are familiar with them but instead prepare and learn to adapt their game to multiple environments.

This is why I feel it is vitally important for advertisers and agencies to form a deep relationship whereby they share the exact same strategies and objectives. The South African online landscape is exploding with websites and blogs popping up faster than an October flush of Namaqualand daisies. With each of these attempting to grab their little part of the advertising pie, it is becoming increasingly harder for digital strategists to effectively spread their brands across all these digital platforms.

So how do the agencies separate the weeds from the plants?

Start with clear objectives

The answer is to start with clear objectives. I believe every advertising campaign should only go live with clear answers to the following two questions:

1. Is the campaign driving sales or creating brand awareness?
2. What metrics are going to be used to measure the success of the campaign?

All too often I see creative executions created for large sites with a "Click here" call to action and nothing too enticing for the browser. However, translate the average 0.30% CTR to a bucket load of impressions, and the economies of scale work.

But what blows my mind is to see advertisers try 'test' a new website by using these same creatives and wondering why a month's worth of niche, expensive impressions failed, securing a handful of clicks only.

How many are interested in the ad's message?

Perhaps the industry average CTR isn't 0.30% because that's how many ~~advertisers look at advertising on websites~~ people are interested in the ad's offer but instead that is how many people were actually interested in ~~what the ad had to say~~ how the message was communicated to them?

Next time you drive around, see what percentage of cars you are aware of. If it were only 0.30%, I bet you your car would live at the panel beaters. I would also bet that not only do you notice the cars around you but that you will identify the colour, brand, model, speed and perhaps the driver all within a couple seconds.

Our brains can take in so much information so I just don't buy it that such a small percentage of ads on websites are noticed and relevant enough for browsers to click on. For this reason alone, I don't agree that 0.30% is an acceptable benchmark. What is that really measuring? How good the creative is?

Work closely with publishers

This is why I urge advertisers and their agencies to work off the same objectives. They need to first identify the objectives and the measures of success. In addition to that, I urge agencies to work closely with publishers out there. I understand there are too many platforms to know but don't be shy to ask for help from publishers and, most importantly, start considering new and emerging platforms.

Once you have all this information, it will be so easy to decide what websites out of the thousands will work best and exactly how to execute each website differently.

You can't just play every shot in a round of golf with the same club. You need to change your club, grip and stance to suit each shot and only then will you be consistently accurate and up your game from the industry average.

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ABOUT GREG MASON

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