

XMOS Case Study: VeriSign: Repositioning the B2B Brand

The Cross Media Optimization Study (XMOS)

The objective of Marketing Evolution's XMOS analysis is to help marketers and their agencies answer the question "What is the optimal mix of advertising vehicles across different media, in terms of frequency, reach and budget allocation, for a given campaign to achieve its marketing goals?" Using methodology designed by the research firm Marketing Evolution and supported by the Advertising Research Foundation and recognized for international research excellence by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), the XMOS study simultaneously measures online and offline advertising in the same campaign to determine the optimal mix and weight of each medium.

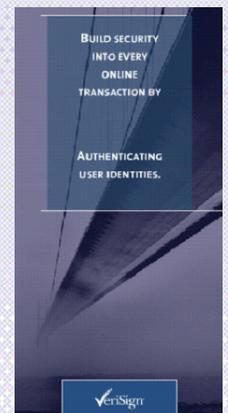
The Challenge

VeriSign sought to reposition its image in the minds of a core segment of business customers from that of a provider of domain names and e-commerce solutions to that of a trusted, enterprise-level provider of key infrastructure services for web and telecom solutions. At the same time, the campaign had a direct-response objective namely to get viewers of the ads to download a VeriSign white paper on the subject of its new services. The target audience was managers making decisions about security, telecommunications, and identity management.

The Campaign

The campaign ran in several business and technology magazines, including Forbes, CIO, Computer World and Network Computing, as well as targeting a B2B technology audience via online sites. The magazine ran one-page and two-page ads of striking black-and-white photos of large building projects, emphasizing by analogy the reliability of VeriSign's infrastructure. Online, the ads were graphically similar but simpler, presented in leaderboard, large rectangle and skyscraper formats, with the copy emphasizing security services.

The objectives of the campaign were many. First, the ads were intended to generate awareness, association, familiarity and purchase intent for VeriSign as a supplier of security, telecom and directory services. Second, the ads were meant to convey specific brand messages, namely that VeriSign is "customer-focused," "reliable," "innovative," "trustworthy" and a "technology leader." Finally, the campaign was split between these brand objectives and a direct-response mandate: to drive online downloads of a white paper. In the case of the online ads, the white paper download was deemed half of the ads' job, while that direct-response mandate was only 30% of the magazine ads' job.



Methodology

Marketing Evolution surveyed readers of both the print and online readers to measure attitudes about VeriSign's brand. Subscribers to magazines in which the campaign ran were surveyed both before and after the campaign (a so-called "continuous-tracking pre/post" study) to measure the increase that the campaign had on the perceptions of the audience who had the opportunity to see it. Online, respondents were surveyed based on a classic research construct known as "experimental design," where approximately 5% of all those who could have seen the VeriSign ads were instead shown control ads for American Red Cross. Online respondents were also surveyed to measure the effectiveness of the TV ads in the campaign. In total, 5,111 respondents were surveyed.

Results

The campaign was only modestly successful in achieving its specific brand objectives. By themselves, the magazines were most successful in conveying the brand's attributes as "reliable" (a gain of 8 points) and "innovative" (a gain of 6 points). The online ads, at a frequency level of 4+, produced moderate lift in all the brand attributes (from 4 points for "reliable" to 7 points for both "technology leader" and "customer-focused"). When readers saw both the magazine and online ads, their awareness, association and purchase intent for the security and directory services raised slightly (3-4 points), as did their impression of the brand as innovative (4 points).

As for the white paper downloads, which was half of the measure of the online ads' success, the interactive ads were highly effective in doing so, generating more than 2,000 downloads, which exceeded the campaign's goal, compared to only 16 downloads attributable to the magazine ads.

Implications

The results demonstrated that while print media offered a more cost-efficient reach (with a lower CPM) to top-level job titles, interactive proved more effective at increasing brand awareness and association, and, with higher frequency, at improving brand image.

It was determined, however, that the differences between the online and offline creative communication strategies made direct comparisons of media cost-effectiveness difficult. In order to better understand the relative merits of each medium, VeriSign and the IAB agree that more fieldwork would need to be done. The bottom line is that the results of this study were inconclusive and point foremost to the need for more research into the nature of business-to-business campaigns in a cross-media environment.