



Adobe's Digital Transformation

As transformative disruptions confront businesses around the world, today's consumers are embracing digital Darwinism with a familiar refrain: Evolve or die. Now, smart companies are learning to harness these vast changes in consumer interactions and technological advances. Here's a look at the new frontier, as glimpsed through the eyes of a Bing Ads key partner.

Adobe's Digital Transformation: Using search for more personalized reach and frequency

Reshaping tomorrow in paid search today

Much as caterpillars inside cocoons transform into butterflies, companies in the cloud transform into new businesses. This metamorphosis can touch every part of a company, from operations and culture to the value brought to the customer experience.

Paid search marketers live on the front lines of this disruption. "Customers use search as a first step in making a decision," says Jay Middleton, director of global search marketing at Adobe. "They may reach out to people they trust for opinions, but they turn to search for information that drives their purchasing choices."

As one of the leading digital marketing solution providers, Adobe should know. The company has been riding the digital transformation wave from the beginning. "Moving to the cloud was a big deal for us," says Middleton. "We made digital transformation our mission."

In so doing, the company has evolved from a prominent software company to a leading service provider. Along the way, it has extended deep partnerships with companies like Microsoft, especially in areas such as paid search where Adobe Advertising Cloud relies on Bing Ads as one of its pivotal search engine marketing (SEM) platforms.

Adobe leaders view SEM as a major cog in engaging with customers on a more effective level, one that provides extra value to the customer. A big piece of that belief comes from realizing the changes in human behavior. "Consumers are going more to mobile and social media," says Middleton. "They also don't digest TV in the same way, so we've revisited our strategies." Because of this reality, Adobe has reassessed and recalibrated how it handles paid search.

Breaking down silos

Adobe engages with a lot of different customers and industries. Many of them struggle to wrap their heads around the digital transformation concept. "There's a lot of confusion," says Middleton. "Like data overload. What do you do with all the data you collect? How do you make it actionable so you can deliver the best customer experiences?"

Another challenge concerns brand consistency. Consumers, for example, interact with brands on multiple levels such as computers, smartphones and TV. They expect that brand voice to be consistent across all of them. "When you tell people what you believe within a marketing piece, you must carry that message across all your channels," advises Chris Haleua, senior product marketing manager for Adobe Advertising Cloud. "You can't do that if you plan your media channels separately."

Issues such as these drove Adobe to make organizational changes, ones that broke down information silos by realigning all paid search media channels under a new “One Search” business model. Within this realignment, SEO and SEM now live together as one. “We used to look at search as SEO versus SEM,” says Middleton. “Now we get all the data in one interface and dashboard, which allows us to provide a consistent and relevant customer search experience across all search channels.”

In general, Adobe has used digital marketing to create a full attribution model for gauging its marketing performance. “Nobody’s on the hook anymore for their single silo’s performance,” says Middleton. “We’re all on the hook together for how we handle our customers across all of our media.” Adobe can use its own digital marketing tools to bring in macroeconomic information such as gauging seasonality and using predictive modeling and forecasting.

Removing barriers

Getting employee buy-in to disruption requires getting them excited about new opportunities. Adobe’s leaders had to evangelize to its paid search workforce the value of looking at SEM differently. By removing barriers to communication and collaboration, employees got to learn more about other areas of search and how they play into the overall customer experience. “You have to integrate your information systems and get out of the office and connect with other groups,” says Haleua. “That’s what our most successful teams do and what helps make digital transformation such an amazing experience for us.”

For example, after Adobe acquired video ad company TubeMogul in early 2017, Haleua had a chance to sit down with his new teammates. “They started talking about fraud prevention, brand safety and transparent viewability as major key performance indicators [KPIs] for display and video advertisers,” recalls Haleua. “These terms had never really been a part of my vocabulary as a search marketer before. Understanding and incorporating them required a recommitment to search marketing that made new ideas like these an important part of what I do.”

Adopting new skill sets and perspectives toward paid search required retraining Adobe’s workforce to be more technical and analytical. To help in that cause, Adobe hired people with comprehensive technical experience who could lend their own talents and train current staff.

Engaging customers

Whether it’s through Bing Ads or another search channel, Adobe strives to inject fun into the digital experience. “Our CEO made delighting our customers our number one mission statement,” says Middleton. “It’s a broad initiative, but one that everyone here marches toward.”

To succeed however, you must do more than just transform. “You have to use search as an opportunity for more personalized reach and frequency,” says Haleua.

To Haleua, audience engagement comes with deep personalization and interactive marketing, connecting with customers in ways unlike anything before. “Advertising feels more like an interruption when it isn’t personalized,” says Haleua. “To borrow a phrase, ‘If you’re going to crash a party, you might as well bring the champagne.’ We want to create an experience and the only way you can do that is if you listen to your audience telling you to ‘know and respect me,’ which I think solutions such as Adobe Advertising Cloud and Bing Ads do really well.”

Respect plays a pivotal role in this equation. Basically, it refines the definition of personalization from potential privacy invasion to customized support. It sets boundaries that give control of the experience to users and how they want to interact with an app, service or platform. “We want to show people that they’re more than just a number to us,” says Haleua. “They’re someone that we want to build an ongoing relationship with as a loyal customer.”

Haleua stresses, however, that you don’t have to personalize everything – an assumption that too many search marketers make. “You can offer a promotion to a subset of your most valuable customers,” he points out. “We can set up targeted promotions in a matter of minutes, instead of the hours required to rewrite to every single audience for every demographic or geography and so on.”

Adobe has also shifted to more localization, which basically takes the form of regional personalization. Microsoft, meanwhile, recently announced plans for two new pilot offerings aimed at transforming data audiences, including the “Custom Audiences” remarketing list, powered by Adobe Audience Manager.

“There’s been a big shift in the company toward more regional ownership of our programs,” confides Middleton. “Corporate drives a lot of the overarching strategy, but our local teams know their markets better than anyone else. We also want them to feel invested, to have some skin in the game.”

The future

Where does digital transformation end? What light will companies find at the end of the tunnel? Haleua thinks we’ll see more and more of this cross-channel pollination. “I’ve seen some of our top advertisers take what they learn from search intent and apply it to inform a display ad buy. They take their social reach and match it to people who have expressed interest in a product through search.” Middleton agrees with that assessment, adding, “Data is the foundation to tell us how we’re engaging with our customers. So whatever that data tells us, that’s where we’re going to go, that’s what we’re going to focus our attention and most of our efforts on.”

