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Direct Response Radio: *Strategy • Media • Creative*

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Integrate the Advantages of the Web with the Power of Direct Response Radio

By Jeff Small, CEO and Brett Astor, Vice President of Strategic Media, Inc. This is a reprint of an article that appeared in Electronic Retailer Magazine in February 2006.

The benefits of the web as a direct response sales channel are undeniable. It is a 24-hour, seven day a week sales representative, and one that can handle virtually any number of calls regardless of the size or frequency of call spikes. The web allows for consistent sales message delivery to every customer. It is flexible, scalable, and much less costly than staffing a call center and paying sales commissions or per-minute charges. In addition, customers who go to the web first become better educated about the product, so if they choose to call instead of buy online, they are much more likely to buy, and their call duration is typically shorter.

Most direct response radio ads still contain toll free phone numbers, and for good reason. The core strength of direct response advertising is the ability to track the profitability of each media dollar spent, analyze it, distill insights, and deploy those insights to enhance campaign profitability. Without the tracking ability enabled by the unique toll free number, the rest isn't possible. The largest problem with driving leads to the web is the loss of this ability to track. While it is true that a few companies offer services designed to address the tracking issue, these services can be complex or costly and therefore impractical.

So what is the solution? The one we've found strikes the best balance between integrating the benefits of the web while minimizing additional complexity or cost is what we call the "dovetail" approach. Here's how it works: First, all new media begins with a unique toll free number only. Once the media outlet, whether it's a remnant network or broadcast station, is tested and shown to achieve the acceptable CPL (or whichever metric you choose), it then receives the web URL in place of the phone number. This establishes a pool of tested, profitable media outlets using the URL. Then, about every 4-6 weeks, each media outlet in that pool is re-tested with a toll-free number to measure the CPL and ensure it is meeting the required hurdle.

This approach works well because it leverages the existing infrastructure in the direct business model. We aren't introducing radically new technologies,

or asking all of the vendors involved in a campaign to adopt new processes. We're simply fully leveraging a) existing processes at the media agency for managing phone numbers and URL's, and b) the media agency's ability to track and analyze station-level media profitability. And we're using these to build a customized "network" of media that drives profitable leads to a web site.

There are undoubtedly other ways to approach leveraging the web with direct response radio. We've found a process that's clean, effective, and relatively easily implemented. One thing is certain, however, and that is that the web will increasingly become either a primary or strongly complementary sales channel in direct response radio advertising campaigns. The benefits are simply too significant to ignore.

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