

2020 Election Advertising: Get Ready for a Wild Ride!

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If previous election cycles are any indication, the upcoming political advertising scene is about to get wild. With political ad spending expected to hit an all-time high of nearly \$10 billion (\$3.6 billion more than the 2016 election) it is safe to say we're in for a multi-channel assault.

And, with some relatively new channels in the mix, along with new restrictions at stalwarts like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, 2020 will likely be one of the most interesting—and potentially challenging—years for advertisers, both political, and non-political.

Here are a few of the main story lines we can look for in the coming year:

- **Increased scrutiny on fact-checking.** The hangover effect from the Russian election interference of 2016, new regulations on social platforms, and the decision to cut ads entirely on Twitter will create much greater scrutiny on the validity of claims. And, as Facebook seemingly moves toward eliminating micro-targeting, it could help to curb the false propaganda machines.
- **Greater demand for transparency.** Along with the fact-checking scrutiny, we'll see greater interest in the digital paper trail. Audiences will want to know who's paying for the ads and more about their position and agenda. Publishers and platforms will need to implement systems that do a better job of tracking this source attribution in order to demonstrate transparency to audiences.
- **Coverage of antics will drive more programmatic spend.** I

suspect it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy: as the major publishing and news entities spend a majority of their time analyzing the legitimacy of campaign tactics, that in turn will drive an increase in programmatic spend based on that contextual relevance. For example, if a publisher is covering Facebook's handling of the president's reelection campaign, more political ad traffic that relates to that coverage will be seen. Publishers will have to be careful not to inadvertently send themselves down a partisan rabbit hole.

- **OTT will become highly relevant for local races.** While OTT was relatively nascent in 2016, moving into 2020, we'll see a shift toward the ability to target locally, even down to city council and mayoral races. The OTT market is small and accessible enough for local candidates to take advantage of, and we'll see it play a major role as even more voters have cut the cord since the last election cycle. In fact, Tru Optik estimates OTT/CTV platforms will see \$500 million to \$720 million in political ads for 2020, with an additional ~\$90 million for streaming audio.
- **Mobile will be key to grassroots event promotions.** Mobile will continue to be a valuable play for retargeting, but we'll see it play an even bigger role in promoting events and locations—meet-and-greets, rallies, town halls, voter registration locations, and of course, polling sites. Taking a page from the David Axelrod grassroots strategy of the Obama campaign, mobile will be used increasingly to drive traffic to the polls and campaign rallies.
- **More precise retargeting with richer content.** Targeting technology has accelerated dramatically, allowing skilled media buyers to identify voters much more precisely based on mobile ID, IP address, and ZIP code. With sophisticated multi-channel data capture, it's much easier for campaigns to deliver targeted in-banner and mobile content. As 5G coverage grows, this will enable

richer messaging experiences based on that precision targeting.

- **Democratization.** With digital ad tech so much more accessible and easier to implement, we'll even see small-town politicians running for local, county, and regional elections getting in on the game. They know as well as the big billion-dollar campaigns do, that mobile, digital, and OTT is where they have to be to reach the majority of voters.
- **Brand advocacy for causes.** Associating with candidates or causes, even inadvertently, can be a minefield. In fact, we're aware of a car manufacturer that has delayed a campaign until January, which is unheard of to miss the holiday opportunity, because they don't want to share voice with the impeachment proceedings. But we'll see many make advocacy a strong part of their brand this year as taking a stand becomes a strong differentiator. For example, Microsoft and many other tech firms stepped-up to fight against the DACA repeal, and when Trump announced the reduction in national park territories a few years ago, brands like Patagonia kicked-off campaigns to reverse that policy to protect those lands, and even sued the president. Such a move reinforces the brand message for some, where others are more hesitant to be so overt.

Without a doubt we are living in unprecedented political times, approaching an election year on the heels of impeachment proceedings amid arguably the most highly legalized presidency in our history. For both candidates and brands, it's truly uncharted territory, and we'll see a lot of testing, experimentation, some extreme caution, and throwing caution to the wind. The spectrum of advertising strategies will be as broad as the range of opinions among voters.

For those of us in the industry, it's certain to be a fascinating, eye-opening, and maybe even cringe-worthy year to

watch.



About the Author: Tiffany has been conceiving and launching platform-agnostic, idea-centric marketing communications programs, platforms, and products since her teens at global communications networks like Grey Worldwide, McCann Worldgroup and ambitious independent shops like Eleven Inc. and Translation. She's partnered with brands, independent agencies and holding companies to create new operational strategies, business development plans, digital team connectivity, and creative infiltration of traditional systems. As EVP of Marketing at Digital Remedy, she is responsible for global positioning, client acquisition, business development strategy, and marketing execution. Additionally, she partners with clients to ensure digital sales strategy success to meet desired business outcomes. Having partnered with brands across many industries including auto, beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic), CPG, finance, gaming, not-for-profit, retail, sports, travel, and technology, Tiffany has a knack for building future-facing operational structures and strategic positioning of internal teams to deliver on business opportunities. These achievements earned her the distinction of AdAge "Woman to Watch" and the "Outstanding Achievement in Business" recognition by The Lab School, Washington, D.C., a merit she shared with Dannel Malloy, former Governor of Connecticut. Tiffany is an avid supporter of education, sitting on the board of the Haan Foundation for Children and is a founding board member of Literate Nation. In addition, she maintains the title of Demoiselle of Grace with the Venerable Order of St. John, Knights Hospitaller, a global organization focused on community outreach and support of children and their families

in need during times of poverty or illness. She resides in New York.