

Cisco Describes Native Ad Efforts that Lengthen Engagement

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Ask 10 different marketers what “native advertising” means to them and you’re likely to get 10 different answers. For Cisco Systems, native ad content is a component of a larger campaign and is used for brand awareness and engagement purposes, but Cisco is eyeing its use for lower-funnel marketing goals as well. Radhika Narang, global media director for the internet networking giant, discussed this strategy, including examples, with eMarketer’s Tobi Elkin.

eMarketer: What does Cisco use native advertising for?

Radhika Narang: My team is responsible for managing Cisco’s global media campaigns and they’re mostly full-funnel campaigns. However, we’ve indulged in native efforts more for awareness and engagement and not as much with demand generation in mind.

eMarketer: How does Cisco characterize native?

Narang: The way we understand native is it’s a seamless journey from editorial to brand content on a single delivery platform. Within native you can have different kinds of content and user experiences. You can share stories through videos. In many cases native content will have social-sharing capabilities.

At the corporate level, we have resisted participating in efforts that blatantly place native content next to editorial content without having much contextual reasoning. We want to make sure that we don’t blur the lines between editorial and native advertising or brand content. When we engage in native advertising, we want the content clearly identified.

The key to getting native right is it adds value to the user’s experience, as well as furthering Cisco’s storytelling. The result is the audience finds the brand content equally—or at times, even more—relevant than the editorial content.

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eMarketer: How does Cisco use native?

Narang: The marketing goals for doing native executions are pretty similar to the goals for the rest of the advertising—to get credible engagement for Cisco’s message, its content and storytelling.

Our goal for native is to use it for establishing a leadership message and focusing on an audience of senior decision-makers whose media space is quite fragmented. We want to offer them valuable content that they’ll engage with and walk away with a piece of Cisco’s story.

eMarketer: What’s an example of Cisco storytelling that used native for awareness and engagement?

Narang: Our City of Tomorrow executions with CNN, and The Connective and The Connective 2.0 with Wired.

The CNN effort launched in May and was an on-air series of video vignettes that looked at cities around the world and how they’re using technology to become more efficient and productive. It was a 13-week series that also looked at how the internet of everything (IOE) is transforming cities and the citizen experience.

Barcelona is one of the best examples of a smart, connected city where Cisco technology is being leveraged. The IOE has been our brand campaign platform for the last two years. We created a City of Tomorrow hub on CNN.com and we also had a TV spot created for us as part of the partnership.

With Wired, in Year One, we came up with a tablet publication called The Connective and in Year Two, The Connective 2.0: The Internet of Everything. Essentially we created a digital magazine on the subject of the internet of everything that had a lot of dynamic content that the Wired editorial team generated via crowd-sourcing.

By dynamic content, I mean we used real-time APIs and feeds to update the content, so it was basically a live demonstration of the IOE in action. Our creative agency, Goodby, created custom interactive ads with data feeds embedded in them. The ads in the tablet edition told an IOE story from the time a person wakes up until they go to sleep and also used real-time APIs.

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For The Connective 2.0, we created the Cisco Connected City, a data-driven, interactive experience that illustrated how the internet of everything can change everything in your connected city.

eMarketer:How did these native programs perform?

Narang: I don’t have too many metrics to share on the CNN native content because they owe us another report. What I can share is that once we started using native content on the City of Tomorrow hub, the completion rate for the Barcelona video increased by 28%.

In the case of *Wired*, we saw the average time spent with the Cisco ad (a five-page interactive ad in the tablet edition) was nearly 2.5 times what *Wired* sees in engagement with its premium interactive ads on the tablet and 5.5 times the amount of time spent with a static ad in a *Wired* tablet edition. The average time readers spent per reading session on the connected content was around 5.5 minutes. That's higher than the usual tablet edition average.

If native is part of an awareness campaign, we look at whether there was a shift in awareness: Did it move perceptions about Cisco and its association with IOE in a positive way? We also look at targeted reach or targeted impressions, and KPIs like engagement—going from high-level awareness—shift in perception—to targeted reach. If it was a full-funnel campaign, we would go down to things like registrations and marketing qualified leads but we haven't used native for middle and lower funnel campaigns just yet.