

Integrated Multi-Channel Communication Strategies: Evaluating the Return on Marketing Objectives - The Case of the 2004 Ford F-150 Launch

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Abstract

Companies have made major improvements in improving the ROI in areas such as production, logistics and services. However, examining the productivity of marketing has long been ignored and has led many companies to view it as an expenditure that can be cut in difficult economic times. Calculating ROI for marketing expenditures such as media can help marketers defend their decisions, allocate limited resources the most profitably and perhaps obtain larger budgets. In the study presented here, we perform a cross media analysis to compare interactive and traditional media. The Ford F-150 is used as a case example to illustrate how effectively comparing media results can improve resource allocation and maximize productivity from media expenditures.

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Marketing is changing. It is moving toward a systematic approach where marketing productivity is defined, measured and improved. At the same time it is moving away from managing customer transactions to managing internal and external relationships (Vargo and Lusch 2004), and from passive communication strategies to integrated multi-channel interactive marketing strategies. Many of these functions are increasingly carried out by non-marketing departments within an organization: Supply chain functions are carried out by operations; Co-opting customers in designing products and services is becoming popular with R&D; and the IT department manages transactions, customer data, on-line websites (and even in some cases Online media). With all these changes, it appears difficult to measure and improve marketing productivity. Although there is some truth in the claim that multi-faceted marketing activities such as these make it difficult to quantitatively manage marketing productivity, the same thing was said about quality. It was once believed that quality was difficult or impossible to define, measure, and improve. But many companies proved the skeptics wrong by defining and measuring quality with great precision. They used these measurements to improve their process and generate productive return on their assets. Six Sigma quality improvement programs of the 1980's led to quality metrics for measuring manufacturing performance. Productivity gains have been squeezed out of design, engineering, manufacturing and the supply chain. Two decades of focus on these areas have delivered tremendous gains in the areas of design, engineering, manufacturing and supply chain.(Krishnan, Shani, Grant and Baer 1983; Grant, Shani and Krishnan 1994). We believe the same advances can be made in the area of marketing. Top management's demand for better ROI calls for new approaches for measuring the productivity of marketing activities in this new environment (O'Halloran and Mosher 1993).

Increased marketing productivity, we suggest, is a key area of corporate focus. Chief Marketing Officers on a recent panel on *ROI: CMO Speaks*, stressed the importance of innovative branding initiatives and the need to push profitability, as well as the growing need to combine marketing's creative components with the hard science that drives it (Kaye 2004). The reasons are clear. The top 100 marketers spent \$300 billion in 2003. A 10% gain in productivity amounts to \$30 billion dollars among the top 100 marketers. While the use of quality metrics is widespread and responsible for many manufacturing innovations, the use of marketing "quality" metrics is still in its infancy. Many practitioners have questioned the added value of marketing activities to corporation and shareholders in relation to its costs (Sheth, Sisodia and Sharma 2000). Marketing productivity has been largely overlooked and may provide the next huge opportunity for corporate profitability (Srivastava, Shervani and Fahey 1998). To some, in a business environment that rewards productivity gains, marketing seems a bit out-of-step.

Marketing productivity is having an increasingly important role in many firms' strategy sessions. Whether it's the increasing costs and clutter of traditional media such as television; increasing skepticism of measurements such as reach and frequency; or simply the demands from upper management to demonstrate profitability there is now an added focus on returns from media expenditures. Member companies of the Marketing Science Institute have identified assessing marketing productivity including tying internal marketing program metrics such as awareness to external financial metrics such as return on investment as a top priority research topic. Measurement of marketing productivity has become a top priority for academic researchers as well (Rust, Lemon and Zeithmal 2004).

In this paper, we will explore the effectiveness of multi-channel marketing campaigns by Ford Inc. Given the plethora of media options, the need to integrate marketing communication efforts across these media options to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of budget is becoming very critical (Edell and Keller 1999). We describe how Ford Inc., partnering with Advertising Agency J. Walter Thompson, and Marketing Evolution, a specialist in marketing measurements, quantified advertising impact and cost efficiency and used the insight to deliver bottom line productivity gains through advertising. We discuss the 2004 F-150 pickup launch and the need for a high impact media campaign. The media plan of the truck is presented with the results of the key outcome variables. Finally, we discuss the relative effectiveness and potential synergies of the different media options and discuss the implications for future strategies.

Multi-Channel Marketing Campaigns

Traditional media is experiencing declining audiences due to fragmentation of media channels and the rise of non-traditional channels. While TV is still the dominant media for most companies, our study will show that it is not the most cost efficient media. Online advertising, on the other hand, is becoming a powerful medium for driving sales through multiple channels delivering relevant, high-impact, targeted messages and building brands. Online is being routinely used as a part of the marketing mix and is being integrated in a way that supports campaigns running across all media. While the amount of money spent in online advertising is quite small compared to the traditional media, online media is experiencing exponential growth across many key industry segments. Internet-based advertising grew six times the rate of overall advertising making it the fastest-growing segment of the media (Elkin 2004). Savvy corporations are using online medium by integrating their use with mass media campaigns and leveraging the interactive capabilities of the online medium, something that the mass media cannot offer (Mandese 2004). Companies are employing “the surround-sound strategy”, recognizing that consumers are influenced by a multiplicity of influences, from TV, the Internet, cell phones, radio, magazines, and so on (Naik and Raman 2003).

What is advertising doing to ensure that media spending is optimized? The important productivity issue is the **relative** return on investment of online in the media mix. Unfortunately, there are many well-established obstacles that hinder the ability to provide ROI data that would improve decision-making. Historically, most of advertising’s reward system focuses on creativity and winning awards over business results. Key metrics such as sales and brand health are rarely measured; even when they are measured, little is done in terms of optimizing results and cost-efficiency. Furthermore there is a great deal of resistance to changing the current measurement techniques. Industry professionals often fear that measuring advertising effectiveness will limit creative flexibility and add costs that will impact an already tight bottom line. Measurement also can risk the agency relationship. Some agencies believe it is better to assert the campaign was a success based on their own criteria than to have independent measurement. Finally, there can be a conflict of interest when the advertising agency is either directly responsible for screening, hiring, or managing the firm that measures the effect of the advertising. These challenges can be overcome and marketing optimized. The 2004 Ford F-150 launch is one such example of measuring an integrated, multi-faceted marketing program that spanned organizational departments. It is an example of how marketing productivity can be improved through precise quantification.

The 2004 Ford F-150 Launch

According to William Ford III, Chairman of Ford Motor Company, “The F-150 is the most important launch in the history of Ford.” According to Car and Driver, “The launch of the brand-new 2004 F-150 pickup may be the most important such event in Ford’s 100-year history. It is the struggling company’s most profitable model and it’s been the bestselling vehicle in the world for the past 23 years.... Taken as a whole, this new pickup yields nothing to the competition, and to keep it in first place, Ford is launching it with the biggest ad blitz in its history” (Car and Driver 2004). The F-150 has been the number one selling vehicle for 22 years, but the Chevrolet Silverado and Dodge Ram are challenging its leadership position.

F-150 Media Plan & Cross-Media Analysis

The Ford campaign was massive. In the first two months of the campaign, Ford spent over \$60 million in advertising, nearly 90% which went into Television. On average, each male between the ages of 25 and 49 saw the F-150 ad thirty times during the sixty-day launch period. The online campaign employed page takeovers of major portals and auto sites and portal “roadblocks.” Roadblocks involved the simultaneous display of ads on multiple sites. The online roadblocks campaign reinforced the “rugged and tough” image the F-150 was after. Ford also used radio, print, outdoor, direct mail, to support the launch. A typical leading brand in consumer packaged goods (CPG) will spend one-tenth the cost and achieve an average frequency of six over the same sixty-day period. In other words, Ford’s campaign yielded five times more advertising impressions (volume) than a typical CPG campaign and cost twice as much for every impression purchased.

Measuring the effectiveness of this level of spending was important for Ford. Ford’s Marketing Communication Manager, Richard Stoddart, knew that accountability is a key issue for Ford. It was critical for Mr. Stoddart to meet awareness and consideration goals, support sales and revenue objectives and do this all within an intensely competitive media environment (Stoddart 2003).

Unfortunately past media research at Ford had not been used very effectively. Typically, the results came in weeks or months later and the insightful question of cost-efficiency was never considered. Moreover, the measurements rarely allowed Ford and its agency J. Walter Thompson, Detroit, to examine the relative impact and cost efficiency of different marketing element vehicles in the media mix.

Ford was faced with the same questions all marketers deal with. Would a dollar in Magazine do better than a dollar invested in having the truck on display at a rodeo? Would a dollar invested in the premiere of Fox’s TV show 24 do better than in an on-line home page takeover on MSN? Since an Online Roadblock ad can cost one quarter of a TV ad, but TV ads are more effective, which provides the better return-on-investment? Given the importance of the launch, answering these questions was critical for Ford and was the focus of their cross media analysis.

Cross Media Optimization

The Cross Media Optimization Study (XMOS) had been developed by Marketing Evolution, a specialist marketing measurement firm, in conjunction with the Advertising Research

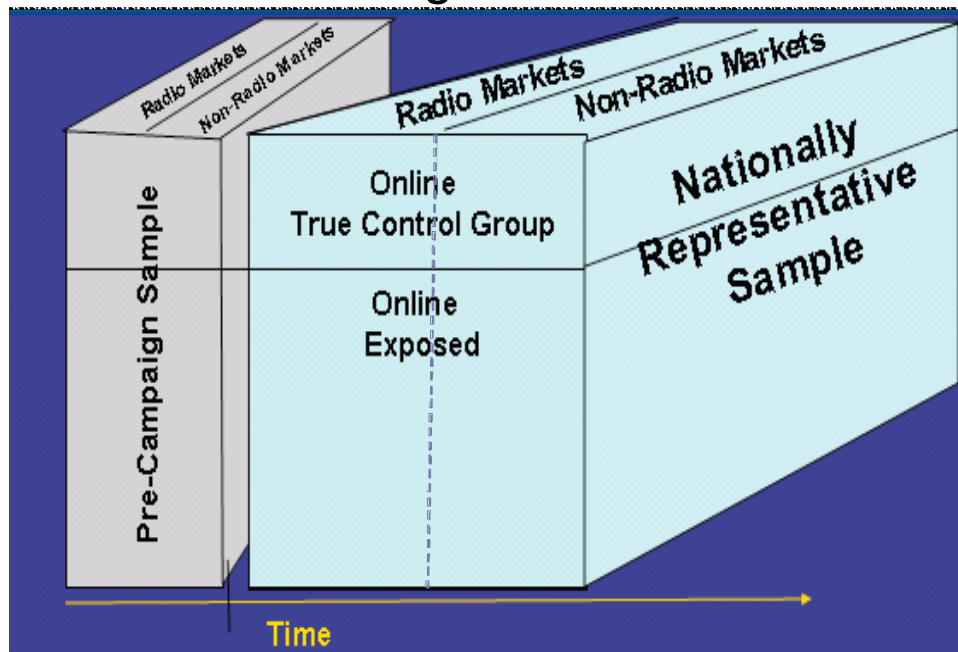
Foundation, a media neutral research association founded by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) with the mission to support best research practice. XMOS offered direct measurement not only of the effect of the campaign, but of the cost-efficiency. Companies such as Procter & Gamble, Colgate Palmolive, Kraft Foods, Kimberly Clark, Johnson & Johnson, Unilever, Nestle, McDonald's and others have used Marketing Evolution's XMOS for marketing measurement.

The XMOS analysis consists of six key steps:

1. Plot the effectiveness of the combined campaign
2. Isolate the effects of different media
3. Examine complementary effects and synergies
4. Perform a dollar-for-dollar comparison (return on marketing objectives (ROMO) calculation) of each media
5. Recommend budget re-allocations if applicable
6. Provide descriptive advertising and media suggestions.

XMOS uses a combination of time series and factorial experimental design to isolate the effects of different media as shown in an example for radio and online advertising in Figure 1. In XMOS, matched markets and ad serving experimental design targeting is used to create identical "exposed" and "control" groups. XMOS translates campaign goals into survey questions and uses consumer's response to the survey to quantify each branding metric. Typically, XMOS measures three core branding metrics: brand awareness (unaided and aided), brand image, and intent to take action (such as purchase of the product). In addition, XMOS measures actual sales to analyze both the branding and sales effects.

Figure 1



Ford wanted to apply the methodology developed by Marketing Evolution to the F-150 launch. This was the largest marketing campaign ever done by Ford and disentangling the effects of TV, Magazine and Online was thought to be a difficult challenge. The advertising agency was a bit skeptical of measuring a campaign this large. J. Walter Thompson Senior Partner Jeff Voight, put his support behind the XMOS methodology, but suggested “Perhaps we should start with a brand that has a less complex media plan. But the F-150 was such an important priority, XMOS was applied nonetheless” (Voight 2003).

According to Ethan Rapp, Managing Partner at Marketing Evolution, “XMOS measures the F-150 campaign by surveying over 10,000 consumers continuously fielded each day and grouping consumers based on the experimental design to measure media. It also can link sales data into the analysis of attitudinal branding metrics. In other words, we can isolate the impact of Magazine ads, or On-line banners from that of TV advertisements. We can even examine the effect of events such as the Texas Rodeo, which had F-150 on display and important TV programming elements like the premiere of 24, where Ford bought out all advertising. By separating these factors, we can report the individual and combined effects on key branding success metrics” (Rapp 2004).

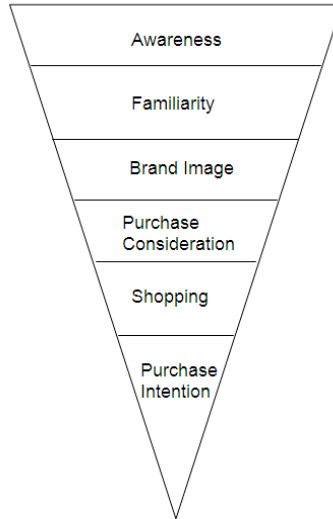
The advertising effect analysis is only a prelude to the key analysis that is central to improving marketing productivity. This analysis is a side-by-side comparison of cost efficiency. For the F-150 Marketing Evolution calculated the Return-on-marketing-objectives (ROMO), which represents the relative cost efficiency of each marketing element against any key advertising objective from awareness to brand imagery, to sales. The cost-efficiency index is a powerful marketing management tool because it eliminates all the challenges of comparing different media on such “rubber yardsticks” such as impressions, or rating points. An impression in Online media is not measured the same as an impression in Magazine, and a magazine impression is not measured the same way as an impression on Television. While many marketers do their best to make comparison of media in terms of impressions and rating points, XMOS goes an important step further and looks at the effect derived per dollar spent.

Results of the F-150 Campaign

Brand Metrics

Success of the campaign was measured at every level of the “purchase funnel”. The purchase funnel (Figure 2) is a standard way that most automotive brands think about marketing. At the upper end of the funnel, the brand needs to get noticed. Ad recall and awareness are the key metrics. The lower funnel is about converting market shoppers to buyers. Increasing purchase consideration, and generating shopping activity are examples of success metrics.

Figure 2 Brand Funnel



Trend charts, pre/post tables, and exposed/control group comparisons were used to analyze the success of the campaign over the first two months. In total, the XMOS measurement continued for six months.

Figure 3 displays the results for brand recall which rose 26% over the six month campaign. Brand image was measured through a series of questions related to automobile attributes. Figure 4 demonstrates that over the course of the campaign there was a large improvement in brand image. The table shows the post minus pre difference. For example, if agreement with a brand attribute stated at 10% and increased to 30%, the reported difference is +20%. According to Marketing Evolution's Ethan Rapp, "Ford's F-150 campaign created strong branding results across the board."

Figure 3

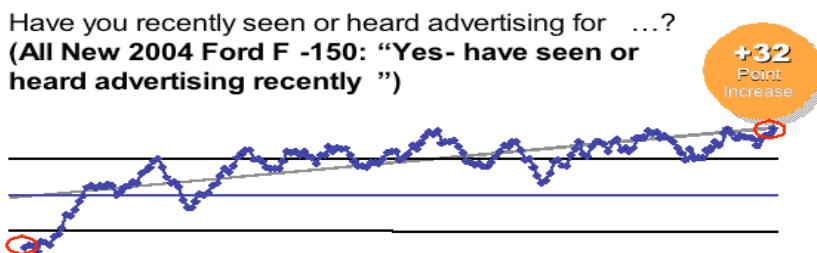


Figure 4

Considering everything you have seen or heard about the All New 2004 Ford F -150 and your own personal opinions, please indicate the degree to which you Agree or Disagree with the following statements. Strongly agree/agree (net), point gain from August 2003 to February 2004)

| | Difference | Strongly Agree/Agree (net) | Difference |
|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| • Good Looking | +22% | Totally Redesigned | +12% |
| • Rugged/Tough | +12% | Excellent Handling | +12% |
| • Excellent Payroll Capacity | +15% | Fun to Drive | +19% |
| • Dependable | +16% | Excellent Workmanship | +19% |
| • Tried and Tested | +6% | Exceptionally Quiet Interior | +13% |
| • Viewed as a Leader | +5% | Excellent Ride | +16% |
| • Excellent Towing Capacity | +6% | Good Value | +12% |
| • Lasts Long | +14% | | |

Media specific results are shown in Figure 5. The results demonstrated variability in the advertising impact on brand metrics across the different media. Although internet and magazine had brand metric improvements that were comparable with television, television was still the most effective at achieving high levels on the brand metrics, especially in terms of the so called “upper funnel” metrics such as a recall and brand image. The key question though is what is the marketing mix that will yield the best return-on-investment?

Figure 5

Individual Media Effects *Branding Metrics Summary*

| | Overall | TV | Magazine | Roadblock | Online |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|--------|
| Ad Recall | +32 | +18pts | +13pts | +6pts | +15pts |
| Familiarity | +9 | +3pts | +11pts | Not Sig | +10pts |
| Average Brand Image Attributes | +13 | +12pts | +8pts | Not Sig | +9pts |
| Purchase Consideration | +17 | +6pts | +6pts | +4pts | +6pts |
| Shopping | +12 | Not Sig | +4pts | +6pts | +6pts |
| Purchase Intention (unaided) | +4 | +2pts | +3pts | +5pts | +12pts |

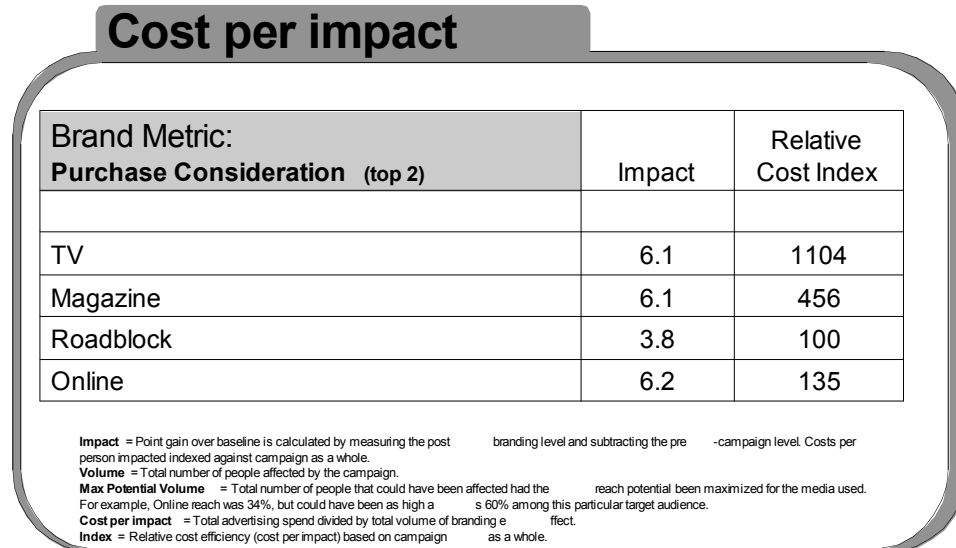
* Point difference observed is based on the Online over difference from last ad exposure to survey intercept -sample, which has an average time

ROMO – Return on Marketing Objectives

Based on the standard brand metrics the campaign appeared successful but Ford was interested in new measures that would demonstrate marketing productivity and allow them to determine the relative values of different media. According to Rapp, “The point of XMOS analysis is not whether the campaign is a success or not – that’s only half the story. The more important part of the story is cost-efficiency.”

Figure 6 presents the ROMO for each of the primary media Ford used. ROMO is a “cost per impact” analysis that tells the marketer the average cost to influence each person on a particular branding metric. ROMO is calculated by Total cost of the media divided by total population exhibiting that effect. While nearly 90% of the budget was spent on Television, it was clear that better ROMO was coming from Magazines and Online advertising. The ROMO analysis also indicates why using only the overall branding impact can be misleading. While television and magazine advertising produced similar point gains (+6 points) in impact, magazine was less than half the cost per person influenced. The online roadblock, though less effective on an absolute basis, was an even better value.

Figure 6
Return-On-Marketing -Objectives Analysis
Relative Cost Index



Reallocating Media Dollars at Ford

TV is very effective, especially on the upper funnel metrics. But compared to the three other advertising elements (magazines, Online in market advertisements and Online Roadblock ads), TV is not very cost-efficient. The implication of this finding is a rethinking of the marketing mix.

Based on the results it was recommended that Ford reallocate expenditures from TV to online. However, this recommendation might be controversial because online was relatively new. Therefore the branding analysis was extended to examine the impact of online on sales of the all new 2004 F-150. Marketing Evolution examined the incremental impact of Online advertising, both the roadblock and the display ads by comparing a control group and the exposed group against the F-150 buyer list in the first three months of the campaign. The results showed that those in the exposed group bought 20% more than the control group. In sum, this incremental impact caused by Online advertisements accounted for 6% of total vehicle sales. This application of an experimental design allowed Marketing Evolution to precisely quantify the impact of online ads. The ROMO analysis against sales confirmed the branding analysis and suggested that Ford could improve overall sales by as much as 5% through re-allocation.

Additional Implications for Traditional Media

The XMOS study showed that the media plans must methodically diversify the advertising mix to simultaneously transfer media weight to Magazine and Online media while exploring and measuring alternative strategies for purchasing TV to improve TV’s price value ratio. Further analysis demonstrated that a reallocation of expenditures was not the only source of upside

potential. For example, XMOS highlighted the value of creatively experimenting with new advertising models. Ford bought out all advertising on the Fox premiere of the TV program 24. It was an expensive proposition, but the results demonstrated that it was worth it. Ford must continue to explore and experiment with other ways to make Television advertising work harder and smarter.

Many managers question the value of placing ads in magazines pointing out that magazines charge as much as a thirty second spot for a spread, and more for a gatefold ad. They point out that the average time spent looking at a full-page magazine ad is two seconds on average and is consumed mainly in planes, trains and bathrooms. However, the analysis done in this campaign showed otherwise. The Ford F-150 magazine ads performed exceptionally well. In fact, the effect was generally greater than the very effective TV ad. Best practice use of white background with plenty of white space around an interesting visual of the truck and strong, clear copy (judiciously limited in word count) translated into strong ROMO performance (Figure 7). Ford's F-150 ads in Magazines were a great value relative to TV.

Figure 7

F-150 Magazine Ads



Reinventing Online Advertising with Roadblocks

The Ford F-150 online campaign was aggressive in a number of ways. Generally, auto manufacturers have concentrated their online ad buys to auto specific content sites in an attempt to reach those who are very close to making a purchase. And, even the companies that do buy reach oriented websites tend to buy a fraction of the inventory. It is not atypical to see as little as 10 GRPs over a two month campaign because many marketers buy only a few million banner

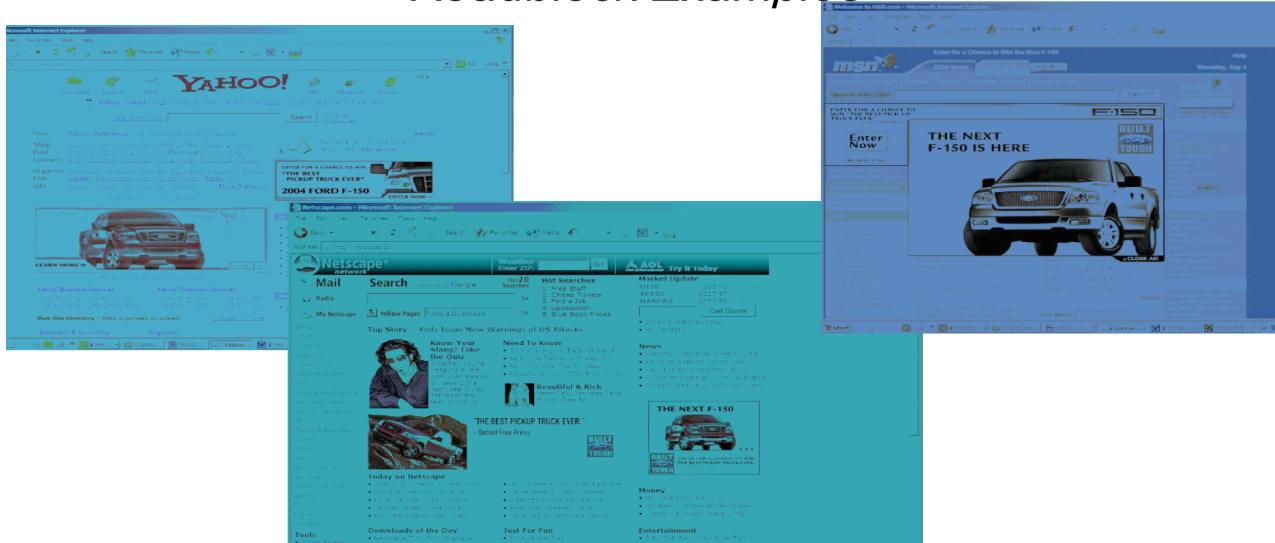
impressions over the course of the campaign. This is much smaller compared to the ad weight in magazines or on TV. Ford took a large step away from conventional practice and bought over 100 GRPs in a single day. That amounted to more than 250 million impressions on that day. Figure 6 clearly demonstrates that roadblocking was an effective use of the media budget.

Ford's concentrated "roadblock" was also creatively different from the typical online advertising fare. The F-150 was an eye-catching page overlay (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Campaign Details

Roadblock Examples



What did Ford learn?

After the campaign and analysis Jeff Voight, J. Walter Thompson Senior Partner reflected, "I have to admit. I was pushing for XMOS to be applied to (Ford's minivan) Freestar since it was a more straight-forward campaign, but XMOS lived up to its promise and did a phenomenal job of analyzing the key elements of the F-150 campaign." Based on the XMOS results, Ford not only learned that the campaign was successful across the board, they also learned valuable insights on how to increase marketing productivity. In a competitive category like autos, every edge helps.

Ford executives came away with a number of key takeaways from the analysis of the F-150 campaign including:

- Advertising works, but the price of some media has been bid-up to make it rather inefficient compared to alternatives.
- TV generates the greatest level of absolute reach and produces high levels of purchase consideration impact, but is less cost effective compared to magazine and online.
- Magazines and online category related sites are similar in their impact, being very selective and efficiently delivering “in-market” prospects.
- Electronic roadblocks are the most cost efficient, and can produce significant daily reach (40%+), however they are not as scalable as TV. While roadblocks delivered 40% reach in a day, TV can deliver nearly twice the level in a single day.
- Due to changing media habits of consumers, Ford’s campaign could be fine-tuned to increase sales by 5% without spending a dollar more. According to Ethan Rapp, “The Ford Campaign was more successful than any of its peers. It was more successful than Chevrolet and Dodge, but there is still room for improvement.”

The research affirmed the value of a diversified marketing mix, and provided new insight on television advertising. On the one hand, the virtues of television are its reach. Television put the Ford message in front of nearly every American male 25 to 54 during the course of the campaign. TV works and has such a large reach footprint there is no easy replacement. On the other hand, TV has a significantly lower ROMO compared to magazine and online advertising. Based on the results of this project Ford has learned that diversification can pay off. The findings led them to fine-tune their Super Duty truck launch and they are applying the learning to their upcoming vehicle launches.

Conclusions

Many marketers base their media plans on minor adjustments from last year’s plan, which in turn are based on minor adjustment from the previous year. This approach is fraught with oversights. Namely, such an approach lacks analytic rigor to justify media budgets. The only defense to such an approach is that “it’s worked for us in the past,” but such appeal to tradition would not succeed in many areas of business decision making. Instead, a careful analytic study of marketing success drivers and media allocation decisions should be the guiding light for budget allocations.

Companies have made major improvements in improving the ROI in areas such as production, logistics and services. However, examining the productivity of marketing has long been ignored and has led many companies to view it as an expenditure that can be cut in difficult economic times. Calculating ROI for marketing expenditures such as media can help marketers defend their decisions, allocate limited resources the most profitably and perhaps obtain larger budgets. In the study presented here, Ford has used cross media analysis to improve their resource allocation to maximize the productivity from their media expenditures.

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