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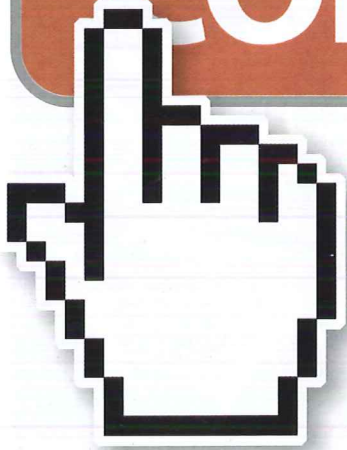
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MODERN CONNECTIONS



In the recent years, Oman's corporates have slowly realised that one of the most effective mediums to highlight their brands and connect with their audience is the digital space. Business Today speaks to executives from 11 companies with a prominent presence in digital advertising to get their predictions on how advertising in this medium could develop in Oman by 2015



Divyendu Kumar

MANAGING DIRECTOR, SUHAIL BAHWAN AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

The digital advertising scenario in Oman is changing fast with the younger generation's acceptance of the digital media. While digital media has become a must-have in the basket of any media plan, a huge array of technologies and trends are transforming online marketing. By 2015, the line of demarcation between mobile devices and desktop will completely disappear. It has been established that the Click-through rate is not truly an efficient way to measure an ad's success, especially for brand advertising. However, ascent of 'heat-mapping' technology that aggregates and visualises where users have moused over an ad and for how long can safely be foretold. Most of us don't click on ads, but we certainly notice them, and hover our mouse on them. Each data will help advertisers better understand which parts of their ad users are engaged with, and how intensely. The Suhail Bahwan Automotive Group is fully aware of the potential of this medium and have aligned our media advertising strategy accordingly. We are primed to create specialised content for the digital media to make the consumer's mouse hover most and not worry about the clicks.



Mohamed Mubarak Al Shikely

GENERAL MANAGER,
MARKETING, OMAN AIR

The global digital ad spend in 2011 hit the US\$80bn mark and is projected to increase to over US\$132bn by 2015. Therefore, some key digital marketing streams will change the landscape of advertising. We also expect mobile advertising to undergo a rapid growth as the sale of smart phones is expected to rise to over 650mn units in 2012. Although mobile ad units are smaller and harder to read, Google, Facebook and YouTube will continue to significantly invest in mobile platforms. Social advertising will go deeper than just advertising on Facebook or other social platforms. It is all about engagement and Oman Air will play a part in this by developing social games which go beyond traditional concepts to branded game experiences. In the area of video advertising, ads could be bought on a pay-per-view basis. Online videos will be viewed through television or will be on the move through mobile devices.

When planning a social media strategy for the future, one needs to remember that the social media landscape is changing faster than anything we have ever seen, so one word of advice – always keep your options open, base your strategy around the fact where your customer is headed and where he wants to be and not necessarily where he is today.



Rajive Ahuja

HEAD OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION,
KHIJMI RAMDAS GROUP

Digital advertising has been growing at a very rapid pace in the last one year. Khimji Ramdas was the first to start a corporate blog in Oman and the enquiries on our blog itself has been increasing by the day which is indicative of the high exposure to the digital world. By 2015, I predict an increase in online shopping through the adverts where people can order by clicking on the ads that will have a link to their website. Particularly, the food and beverages category could see a rapid increase in digital advertising. It would work very well for promotional offers. Ads by supermarkets, urging people to order for groceries could also be placed in a similar manner through links on social networking sites.

For the digital space, our next project is going to be Pizza Hut to introduce web ordering through ad pop ups. We are looking to roll out this offering within the next one year, but it is a bit complicated as we are looking to marry systems from the web, the call centres and the 28 different outlets.



Khalid al Haribi

MANAGING DIRECTOR, TAWASUL

By 2015, digital advertising in the Sultanate of Oman is poised to rise dramatically as internet penetration in the country increases. With an increase in the youth purchase power and demographics, we will see more online shopping through digital adverts. Digital advertising could become as important as print media in the coming days, even if it does not overtake this platform as the preferred medium of advertising. But this also indicates that online security features in Oman will ramp up so that consumers could get more comfortable in using the digital space to make their online payments. Companies will seek discussion forums more actively to advertise their products instead of just targeting Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest that could go the MySpace way, as other social networking sites will gain popularity.



Annurag Chawla

HEAD OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS,
TOWELL AUTO CENTER

I predict a very bright future for digital advertising in Oman. With a bulk of young population and increasing Internet penetration, the digital advertising and social media scene is going to get exciting by the day. Our website has been winning awards for the last three years, and today digital marketing, especially in social media, is playing a very vital role in our overall marketing and media strategy. I predict that very soon, most ad agencies in Muscat will start offering more digital advertising products and services, as the creative work right now is mostly for the print media. However, the decision to use digital advertising and social media must be taken very carefully, as this medium is much beyond just advertising on Facebook or Twitter. It must be managed by experts who should be prepared to handle positive or negative feedback from customers and stakeholders, and also be able to maintain and enhance brand reputation.



Christoph Franzen

GENERAL MANAGER, GRAND HYATT MUSCAT

Advertising in the social networking space is a good way to measure demographics as one can predict which age group responded to which ad effectively. With the youth becoming more tech savvy, companies are already looking at designing ads and applications based on their product for iPhones and tablets. By 2015, if more publishers in Oman have content designed for digital platforms like e-readers and tablets, the revenue share of print versus digital will come down, tilting in favour of digital media. But that doesn't mean the print medium will die, it will exist for some hoteliers, certain sections of the target audience in a market who are best reached through the print medium. The next step in digital advertising is also customising ads according to consumer preferences where providers will send only that information a consumer would like to receive. At the Grand Hyatt in Oman, we are designing our social networking ad based on the same structure as the official website through which people can seek information and book rooms.





Raed Mohammed Dawood

DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND
ACTING DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, NAWRAS

The biggest online innovation in recent times has been the growth of social media. If your business is not online, it is invisible. Digital advertising is our future. The key to successful digital advertising, going forward, is offering a simple and familiar customer experience. Customers go to websites with a purpose and their visits are often short and the interaction is often intuitive.

Our expectations for 2015 in digital advertising depend on some key aspects which include technology in relation to network upgrades such as our 4G network and LTE technology and the introduction of new devices such as Android phones. Social networking is a huge driver in the telecommunications industry whereby the likes of bloggers want people to "listen" to them and enter a debate on certain issues related to the field on various social media platforms and digital advertising will be influenced by this. We are also witnessing a growing competition in the cost of devices and broadband service plans thus affecting the trends, usage and exchange of data. Finally, the deregulation of programmes such as Skype will definitely see an increase in the proliferation of broadband services and accessibility.



Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Hassani

AGM - CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS &
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY,
BANKMUSCAT

According to the Middle East online advertising network ikoo, internet advertising in the Arab world is forecast to hit US\$250mn this year and Oman, too, is taking giant steps forward in the domain. From the miniscule digital budgets that most organizations have been experimenting with currently, it will not be a surprise if by 2015, about 30-40 per cent of advertising budgets are allocated to the digital space.

With the latest trends in digital advertising leading to very high expectations, there is also a dilemma whether the digital medium is welcomed by people, especially due to the invasion of privacy resulting from online communication. BankMuscat is aware of the need to develop the right content which will facilitate engaging communication in line with the new digital trends. We are still going through a learning experience in terms of using the digital space.

Focused content development and engaging communication will be the characteristics of successful use of the digital medium as a channel of communication in the coming years. The message will require to be targeted at a specific audience, catering to what they like, rather than resorting to mass advertising.

