

Making Use of Programmatic Advertising

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a growing topic in the legal world and has been discussed at both the regional and national levels of LMA conferences. Presenters have talked about its impact and how can it be used to improve efficiency in all aspects of a law firm, from writing contracts and proposals to assisting the legal marketer. The decision to use AI can be a fine line between how much control you delegate to automation versus how much personal attention you exert to oversee the process.

A prime example of AI can be seen in programmatic advertising, which has risen to dominate the digital display market in just a few years. Having accounted for only 13 percent of display ad spending (\$5 billion) in 2012, in the U.S., it grew to \$39 billion in 2016, at an average rate of 71 percent a year. Programmatic advertising is expected to grow 31 percent in 2017 -- faster than all other digital media channels, according to Zenith's "Programmatic Marketing Forecasts" report published late last year.

What Is Programmatic Advertising?

The short answer is that programmatic advertising is the buying of ad space in an automated way. Using a variety of information sources, it captures audience data and insights to allow advertisers to show highly relevant ads to a selected audience, at the right time and in the right place. Users can target where their ads appear with almost an infinite number of criteria combinations, such as industry, age, gender, location, etc.

Programmatic campaigns accomplish this feat by using AI to automate the decision-making process of where to place an ad. The technology relies on highly developed algorithms to analyze data and "think" in real time, taking away the need for manual research and saving countless hours and amounts of money.

Types of Programmatic Advertising

There are two main types of programmatic advertising: Real Time Bidding (RTB) and Programmatic Direct.

RTB is an automated process of buying digital display ad space in real time using a bidding process based on your selected target audience choices. As part of this process, publishers make their ad space available to ad exchanges (like the Google Display Network) beforehand. Next, advertisers decide roughly which audiences they want to target with their ads. When a visitor loads a webpage, information about the visitor to that page – along with the page's content – is gathered and reported back to the ad exchange.

If the website user on the site matches the targeting defined by the advertiser, the advertiser will be entered into an auction to bid against all the other advertisers who are also bidding for ad space. The advertiser that has the highest bid will win the ad space,



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and their ad will be shown to that user during that particular visit.

Publishers only get paid for the ads they show on their sites. This all happens at lightning speed and has no effect on the user experience.

The Programmatic Direct ad space is still purchased programmatically, but is done so in advance, allowing the digital advertiser to place ads on premium sites they know will match the publisher's content or to plan out a specific digital campaign. This method still allows you to set a number of impressions or fixed budget and to target your audience.

The Benefits of Programmatic Advertising

Once you have defined your law firm's target audience, buying digital advertising space becomes very efficient. The ad buying takes place in real time with data-driven information. This results in less hands-on work and less human error, since technology guides the process with up-to-date data, allowing you to reach your target audience. This process also allows your marketing staff to move on to other more strategy-oriented projects.

Staying on Top of Your Campaign

Using programmatic advertising within your law firm marketing department can be a big time saver, but with any AI platform, there has to be some human assistance and ongoing review. Once you get a display ad campaign up and running, you need to set time aside to review the data being collected on how your campaign is performing, along with your ROI. Did you target the right audience? Are your ads appearing on quality sites? Ads that are placed on sites that do not fit your brand or style, or are low in quality, is money wasted and can be potentially harmful to your brand.

In a recent *New York Times* article, JPMorgan Chase discussed how they went from advertising on 40,000 sites down to approximately 5,000. This was a decision they made after they were shown that some of their ads were appearing on toxic or offensive sites that did not match their brand message or values. They took the human approach to the automated campaigns, went through the list of sites they wanted to target, and preapproved or whitelisted where they wanted their ads to appear. The result is a better-targeted audience with little change to the overall performance metrics.

As technology evolves and AI takes on more of our day-to-day mundane responsibilities, it will still be important for companies to insert the human element into any automated program and not forget that leaving it left unchecked could result in damage to the brand. Done right, online advertising can help build your firm's presence or niche practice.

Have anything to add about programmatic advertising for law firms? Leave a comment below, or reach out to me, [Alan E. Singles](mailto:Asingles@jaffepr.com), at Asingles@jaffepr.com.