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How Self-Media Can Monetize Traffic in the Second Half of the Internet: Postprint of an Exclusive Interview with Yundui CEO Zhang Guohong

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Abstract

In the mobile internet era, how can the fragmented dissemination of self-media meet advertisers' demand for "centralized" information? How can the value of mid-to-long-tail self-media be tapped? Yundui uses big data technology to connect advertisers and self-media through a "Didi Chuxing" model. Zhang Guohong, CEO of Yundui, states: "At present, self-media is an industry filled with anxiety; innovative services and content are the only way to sustain 'blood production'." This interview explores ...

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Preamble

In the mobile internet era, how can the fragmented dissemination of self-media meet advertisers' demand for "centralized" information? How can the value of mid-to-long-tail self-media be tapped? Yundui uses big data technology to connect advertisers and self-media through a "Didi Chuxing" model. Zhang Guohong, CEO of Yundui, states: "At present, self-media is an industry filled with anxiety; innovative services and content are the only way to sustain 'blood production'." This interview explores how self-media can monetize traffic in the second half of the internet era.

Interview with Zhang Guohong, CEO of Yundui

By Chen Xuguan, Journalist at China Media Technology

Self-Media Development Trends

China Media Technology: From creating influence rankings to establishing Yundui's traffic trading platform, what changes do you think self-media has

undergone, and what development trends will it show in the future?

Zhang Guohong: Our team began exploring advertising cooperation in the self-media space as early as 2013, and started formal data analysis in 2014. At that time, WeChat's open rate was 15%, but it has now dropped below 4%. From this perspective, self-media open rates are continuously declining. A second trend is the rapid expansion in the number of self-media accounts—our system detected over 3 million self-media accounts back then, whereas today there are 25 million.

Overall, the self-media industry is in a state of anxiety. On one hand, declining open rates and negative fan growth trends cause anxiety among self-media operators. On the other hand, overall revenue from advertising alone is also decreasing. Simultaneously, advertisers are anxious too: they desire centralized dissemination, while self-media trends toward fragmented dissemination, creating a contradiction that fuels anxiety on both sides.

Given these industry developments, I believe future self-media will present six major trends:

First, **audience fan-ification**. Only by turning audiences into fans can user stickiness be increased.

Second, **advertising nativization**. Advertising is content, and content is advertising. Only when advertising itself constitutes good content can users actively seek it out; advertising that shifts from passive to active acquisition is truly valuable.

Third, **dissemination fragmentation**. This is both an inherent characteristic of self-media and a current development trend. This fragmentation will continue to intensify, moving toward increasingly smaller granularities.

Fourth, **transaction traffic-ification**. The traditional advertising model is shifting toward traffic-based standards for ad placement.

Fifth, **content video-ification**. Video is the most primitive and effective means of acquiring and storing information. In the past, video was less convenient than graphics and text due to bandwidth and cost constraints, but as video production efficiency improves and traffic costs decline, the video trend will become increasingly prominent. I strongly recommend that self-media creators experiment with video content.

Sixth, **advertising effect e-commerce-ification**. Due to the natural attributes of advertising, it will increasingly present an e-commerce trend, which we are currently exploring.

Choosing Technology Over Content Entrepreneurship

China Media Technology: We understand that many traditional media professionals who transition to new media focus primarily on content entrepreneurship. Why did you choose to focus on the technology domain?

Zhang Guohong: On one hand, many people were pursuing content entrepreneurship at the time, and I understood their challenges. Compared with my peers, I had experience founding a website in 2005, which gave me accumulated knowledge in internet operations, technology, and data. In 2014, when traditional media experienced a major downturn, many media colleagues tried their hand at self-media, but there was still a lack of scientific evaluation criteria. Advertisers couldn't understand self-media's communication effectiveness, and there was a strong demand for data judgment. When advertising has data support, both dissemination effectiveness and placement precision improve dramatically. Starting from this need and leveraging my previous technical accumulation, I assembled our current technology team.

Initially, we built a self-media evaluation system based on open data—the Yundui New Media Influence Rankings—to help advertisers. From this foundation, we built a trading system with data as the core reference.

Helping Self-Media Monetize Traffic

China Media Technology: How does Yundui help self-media achieve traffic monetization?

Zhang Guohong: We currently have a “Youth Cultivation Plan” (青培计划), an entrepreneurship program for young self-media. It primarily focuses on business training for non-headline self-media. By gathering self-media in niche fields and facilitating deep communication between them and advertisers to understand both parties' needs and pain points, we build a service platform that expands monetization opportunities.

Advertiser Trends and Bridging Needs

China Media Technology: In the mobile internet era, what changes are occurring among advertisers, and how does Yundui bridge the needs of both parties?

Zhang Guohong: The biggest change for advertisers is the increasingly obvious trend that advertising is content. Traditional advertising is forced upon audiences, whereas mobile internet advertising itself is a form of content that users actively seek out.

The second trend is channel shift from centralization to fragmentation. How to precisely place ads amid massive fragmented information represents a channel revolution. With 25 million self-media accounts nationwide and users scattered across them, data is essential for extracting effective users.

Between advertisers and self-media, Yundui uses big data technology to establish the Yundui Index for advertiser decision-making. We also employ sophisticated self-media user profiling technology, analyzing and classifying self-media content to evaluate user structure and create user portraits. Through this analysis, self-media users with high ad appeal matching and high historical conversion rates receive priority for ads on the platform.

Our platform operates through a “Didi Chuxing” model: advertisers are the “riders” and self-media are the “drivers.” Eligible self-media can spontaneously “grab orders” on the platform. An ad with a total budget of 10,000 yuan can be published by over a hundred self-media accounts—something almost impossible in traditional media. Through data, we collect scattered small and medium users nationwide via self-media nodes and directly connect advertisers with self-media through system distribution. This model’s greatest advantage is tapping the monetization potential of mid-to-long-tail self-media. I believe the power of these long-tail accounts in the middle and lower streams is also formidable.

Views on Content Payment

China Media Technology: What are your views on content payment itself?

Zhang Guohong: Content payment is not a new topic. For example, buying props on QQ in the past was a form of content payment. It has only flourished in recent years, and its future remains an exploratory question. Content payment forms are diverse, such as tipping on video and live-streaming platforms. People have recently presented it as a new monetization method, but I personally believe the monetization approach still needs discussion. While paid reading and gaming may be developing well, successful cases remain few.

Future Monetization Plans

China Media Technology: What other plans does Yundui have for self-media traffic monetization in the future?

Zhang Guohong: We currently have a three-pronged approach: KOL trading, automated traffic monetization, and content e-commerce monetization. I personally believe e-commerce-ification will be the mainstream trend for future advertising, so our team continues to mine data in this area. Going forward, we will still rely on data as support to create new approaches and grow together with the entire industry.

Combating Fake Traffic

China Media Technology: As an open traffic trading platform, how do you deal with fake traffic?

Zhang Guohong: We have an NGR anti-cheating system that identifies non-user click behavior data on the internet. Once advertising is placed, the system tracks all media in real-time, including user behavior and reading data. Through multiple evaluation dimensions—such as reading change comparison, reading increment differences, reading growth speed, and reading curve slope—it intelligently identifies accounts suspected of fraud. Only when advertisers increasingly trust the self-media industry can it grow healthily. Only when self-media obtains certain economic benefits can they focus on creating quality content. This ecosystem must be a closed loop with mutual promotion for benign development.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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