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## The Transformation of Media Placement Strategies in the Big Data Era: Postprint

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### Abstract

In the digital media era, traditional advertising procurement methods have gradually been supplanted by automated placement models. Thanks to advances in precision marketing technology, advertisers no longer need to pay for non-target audience users, thereby reducing exposure to invalid traffic. However, not all industries are well-suited for committing substantial media budgets to precision advertising; integration with traditional awareness channels or social media dissemination remains necessary to drive brand marketing. Furthermore, amid the fragmentation of user behavior today, many data tags are dynamically changing, and programmatic buying cannot yet achieve absolute “precision.” The actual effectiveness requires continuous optimization and evaluation.

### Full Text

#### Abstract

In the digital media era, traditional advertising procurement methods have gradually been replaced by autonomous placement models. Enabled by the development of precision marketing technologies, advertisers no longer need to pay for non-target audience (non-TA) users, thereby reducing exposure to invalid traffic. However, not all industries are suited to betting large media budgets on precision advertising; they still need to combine traditional exposure channels or social communication to drive brand marketing. Moreover, given the fragmentation of user behavior today, many data tags are dynamically changing, and programmatic buying cannot achieve absolute “precision.” The actual effectiveness requires continuous optimization and evaluation.

**Keywords:** Media procurement; Precision marketing; Programmatic buying; Social communication

## Introduction

From traditional to digital media, advertisers' media placement strategies have undergone multiple transformations. The evaluation criteria have shifted from simply measuring exposure coverage to emphasizing precision marketing, and from unidirectional brand messaging to interactive communication on social media. Advertisers increasingly care about “Who am I trying to reach?” and “How do I communicate with my TA?” Enabled by the organic integration of technology and advertising, along with data accumulation across media platforms, the answers to these questions have become clearer through continuous optimization.

## Traditional Media Procurement and Its Limitations

Traditional media procurement models suffer from numerous drawbacks. In the past, corporate media personnel had to deal with dozens to hundreds of media outlets, incurring substantial communication costs from media selection to traffic purchase, compounded by cumbersome internal corporate processes that made project completion time-consuming and labor-intensive. From an advertising evaluation perspective, media properties varied significantly, and ad placements differed considerably, requiring long-term campaigns and accumulated empirical data to effectively measure placement effectiveness. Additionally, some media outlets employed traffic fraud tactics, increasing the difficulty of authentic advertising effectiveness assessment. In terms of optimization timeliness, traditional placement models offered slow feedback, and since media platforms continuously updated, past placement experience might not apply to future campaigns, with collected data having limited subsequent utility. Furthermore, traditional media procurement relied on media platform audiences, displaying ads to all users on a given platform without a reasonable traffic filtering mechanism, resulting in massive invalid exposure.

## The Rise of Search Engine Marketing

To capture precise traffic, advertisers allocate a portion of their budget to search engine marketing, which helps minimize customer acquisition costs while effectively intercepting competitor users. Simultaneously, the RTB (real-time bidding) settlement method was quickly accepted and recognized by advertisers—at least at this stage, we can clearly track the consumption of every expenditure and optimize placement effectiveness through real-time feedback data, thereby controlling or reducing costs. In the early days of internet popularization, users heavily depended on search engines, and this traffic dividend enabled companies like Baidu, 360, and Sogou to rise rapidly. However, as the e-commerce industry developed swiftly, netizens' search habits changed accordingly. Evidently, a portion of search engine traffic has gradually been diverted to e-commerce platforms. Functionally, users tend to use search engines for things they don't understand or know about, but when they want to learn about different prod-

uct categories, they choose to obtain information directly from e-commerce websites, where purchase intent is often stronger and conversion relatively easier. Advertisers have recognized this shift in precise traffic and begun deploying e-commerce marketing strategies. According to the 2017 iResearch China Online Advertising Market Annual Monitoring Report, e-commerce advertising market share first surpassed search advertising in 2016, ranking first with a 30% share. The significant decline in search advertising, aside from the impact of e-commerce industry entry, was also influenced by relevant policies. Undeniably, benefiting from its traffic precision, SEM/SEO remains one of the major budget items for advertisers in recent years.

Although search advertising is precise, its traffic originates entirely from users' active searches, featuring low volume and high competition, requiring brands to seek alternative pathways for precision coverage. Meanwhile, hundreds or thousands of media outlets have channel sales needs. Consequently, how to leverage big data for effective matching between demand parties and advertising resources to achieve a “matchmaking economy” is precisely the problem that the DSP (Demand Side Platform) industry is addressing. DSP entered the Chinese market in 2011 and began rapid expansion, with over a hundred DSP companies currently existing in the market to provide precision marketing services for enterprises. It has revolutionized traditional media buying models, simplified traffic procurement processes, and enabled one-stop purchasing across platforms and multiple placements.

## DSP and Programmatic Buying

The operational mechanism of DSP advertising is not complex: advertisers simply send their target audience targeting requirements to the DSP platform. When a user triggers an ad placement, the DSP analyzes and compares the user ID and media value to determine whether to display the ad to that user. Simultaneously, the system calculates a reasonable bidding price for advertisers based on click-through rate predictions, finally returning the bid and creative to the ad exchange for auction and display. DSP advertising undoubtedly represents a major transformation in exploring precision marketing, shifting advertising display rules from “ads waiting for users” to “ads finding users.” Enterprises no longer need to pay for non-TA users, and advertisers have begun accepting the allocation of budgets to these “invisible ads.”

## Mainstream DSP Channels and Ad Formats

Currently, mainstream DSP channels include Tencent Guangleitong, Weibo Fensitong, and Toutiao, among others. They possess massive user bases and sufficient data accumulation, supporting multi-dimensional targeting based on demographic attributes, geographic attributes, interest tags, and more. Fensitong even supports granular-level targeting using third-party or client-owned data packages to obtain the most precise placement feedback. DSP advertising

offers various display positions, among which information flow is currently the most popular placement method. Information flow, also known as native advertising, refers to commercial ads interspersed in the conventional information display format of media. Taking WeChat as an example, we often see information with the word “Ad” on the right side in our Moments feed. Its presentation format, complete with avatars and image-text content, resembles friends’ updates and may not be immediately recognizable as an advertisement. Compared with pop-ups, picture-in-picture, or website banners, users have higher acceptance of information flow ads, and placement effectiveness is relatively better.

## Data-Driven Optimization

DSP advertising’s greatest advantage lies in its ability to achieve real-time data feedback and real-time ad optimization. We don’t need to do what we think is right; we only need to do what the “machine” thinks is right. During the ad optimization process, extensive data feedback may reveal that the most effective creative material in terms of clicks might not be what we consider the most visually appealing, and people buying maternal and infant products are not necessarily women of marriageable age. DSP advertising has, to some extent, changed the mental inertia of advertising practitioners and ushered in an era of data-driven decision-making.

## Limitations of Precision Marketing

While DSP advertising can certainly reduce invalid display costs, not all industries are suited to placing large budgets on precision marketing. Last year, P&G reduced its precision marketing budget on Facebook and increased advertising spending on traditional media platforms. Facebook is a leading media platform exploring precision placement, and its massive user data and complex algorithms can quickly help advertisers filter out the “most precise” target audiences. Yet such a strong combination yielded unsatisfactory marketing results. On one hand, large brands may not be suitable for precision marketing, particularly corporations like P&G that need to influence tens of millions of consumers rather than the small group that appears to have purchase intent. Precision advertising is more suitable for niche or segmented industries, such as gaming apps and financial products. On the other hand, the biggest problem facing precision advertising is that in today’s environment of increasingly diversified and fragmented user behavior habits, it is difficult to create a complete and effective user persona with just a few tags. Many platforms’ user tags are dynamic and may change daily. Furthermore, in the mobile big data era, the increased sources of tag acquisition make tags less straightforward than in the search era. Often, we cannot even discover how certain tags were added to us—perhaps through accidental clicks or casual browsing. Therefore, it is evident that precision marketing still has algorithmic shortcomings that are difficult to overcome.

## The Growing Importance of Social Media Marketing

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that social media has gradually gained the attention of numerous advertisers, with both internet companies and traditional industries beginning to deploy socialized new media and implement varying degrees of transformation in their marketing strategies. Particularly for established traditional enterprises wishing to maintain their position among numerous emerging and imported brands, they must inevitably use social media to voice their message, promote their products, and even shape entirely new brand images. Brands are no longer as enthusiastic about talking to themselves as in the past; they have begun to genuinely step before consumers and engage in equal dialogue. Among new media marketing cases, the most noteworthy is the “Haier” official Weibo account. Transforming from a cold, impersonal official account to a corporate dialogue outlet with hundreds of thousands of active followers, it did only one thing: listen. Fans of Taobao Palace Museum suggested to its official account the idea of creating “Cold Palace” refrigerator magnets. After this Weibo post went viral, some fans commented and @mentioned Haier, suggesting it produce a “Cold Palace” refrigerator. Haier’s new media operations team quickly contacted the refrigerator manufacturing department, rushed to produce industrial design drawings, solicited extensive feedback online, and within a week delivered the refrigerator to users through 3D printing technology, successfully shaping a flexible and dynamic brand image. Additionally, Haier’s official Weibo account would timely appear in the comment sections of various popular posts, creating a sense of “contrasting cuteness.” New media communication is highly time-sensitive. To achieve the kind of personified operation exemplified by Haier’s official account, the operations department also needs sufficient authorization, which is no easy feat for large enterprises. Often, new media operations may not directly generate sales, but they represent the best channel for collecting user attitude data and monitoring public opinion, as well as the most effective means for achieving close communication between brands and consumers. Based on recent trends, social media will undoubtedly become the focus of efforts for numerous brands.

## Conclusion

Big data-driven precision marketing has undoubtedly brought a qualitative improvement in advertising transaction efficiency and enabled advertisers to find target audiences as accurately as possible. But does marketing end here? How brands utilize this precise traffic, how they enhance user interaction intention, and optimize the conversion funnel are what enterprises most need to contemplate and improve. Meanwhile, increasing touch-points with customers, seizing every opportunity for dialogue with users, collecting the most authentic feedback, and actively responding to user needs are also indispensable components of the marketing process.

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