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Thursday, January 15, 2003

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WeatherBug Creates Perfect Marketing Storm

Online weather oracle has built exceptional user trust and loyalty, which offers clients unusually effective targeting to willing recipients.

By [Nancy Wong Bryan](#), Associate Editor

The astounding thing about WeatherBug is not that 100 percent of its users are registered—it's what the company has managed to do with the data since launching its desktop weather application in 2000. The company touts 100 percent penetration in its advertisers' targeted markets. And it's willing to take risks to see what works—instead of silently tracking who's viewing what on the sidelines, for example, WeatherBug takes a straightforward approach and asks users about the ads they're most interested in.

iMedia Connection spoke with Andy Jedynek, senior vice president and general manager, to discover what exactly WeatherBug does to pinpoint its clients' key audiences.

iMedia Connection: How does WeatherBug target ads so successfully?

Jedynek: Obviously, advertisers want to be able to target the audiences that their strategies call for. Many major brand advertisers still target some of the core demographics—age, gender, income, geographic location, those kinds of things.

As we started WeatherBug a few years ago, we decided that we would gather that information from our customers through the registration process. So we actually register our customers as they start to download the application. That's an important distinction we've found is key, because if you have your customers register—we ask for name, age, gender, income, occupation, zip code at work, zip code at home—that helps us help our advertising clients target exactly to where their broader media plans call for. Even though we're a weather site, we can target, for example, women who are 18- to 34-years-old with absolute, 100-percent efficiency. Eighty percent of our buys are targeted, and that is something that has made us very successful. Because we gather a person's gender and age, we simply won't serve an ad that doesn't fit within our advertising client's target

profile, which makes the buy extremely efficient.

That's where interactive media really has power: To be able to register people. We're not the only ones now; other Web sites have begun to work really hard to get registration information because they have found out how useful that is for their advertisers to be able to have more efficient buys meeting their performance or reach and frequency objectives.

iMedia Connection: One issue that arises around registration is whether the consumer trusts you enough to give you his or her data. Is users' trust an issue in WeatherBug's registration process?

Jedynak: We have much less of a problem with that than most other publishers and online media companies. The reason for that goes back to the core of our business. WeatherBug has been around for just a few years, but our core business is we're a broadcast television syndicator. We've been working with NBC, ABC and CBS broadcast television stations since the early 1990s, providing them weather solutions for TV newscasts as well as for weather information online. When most people hear about WeatherBug, they hear about WeatherBug, for example, in New York City on WNBC, and in San Francisco they hear about WeatherBug from CBS 5. We have more than 100 broadcast television stations.

How is that pertinent? Well, those folks who promote their respective WeatherBugs market by market across the country are very well-known and very well-trusted. They're the ones people watch for news and information. So when you start hearing about the ABC 5 WeatherBug in Minneapolis-St. Paul, for example, it's coming from a very authoritative source. When people are asked to put in registration information, they're really providing it to us in concert with our broadcast TV partner whom they have trusted for years and years. That doesn't mean we always get accurate information. It doesn't mean we always have someone fill every bit of it. But what we've found it's pretty accurate compared to other registration-based sources because of our relationship with broadcasters who distribute WeatherBug.

iMedia Connection: Which WeatherBug ad program is the best example of audience targeting?

Jedynak: The most exciting is a patent-pending program, an advertising method called Sponsor Select. We ask all of the consumers on WeatherBug on a monthly basis to select a sponsor they have the most interest in. For example, they're presented with many categories: house and home, automotive, health and beauty, travel, Web offers, these kinds of things. Then they pick the category they're most interested in. If they pick automotive, they're likely in the market or interested for some reason in the automotive area. They click on that, and they'll see several different automotive advertisers, brands, automotive Web sites, all these kinds of things. They look through that list of automotive sponsors and select the one that's of most interest to them. That's the ad they get that month.

This is something that, probably more than anything else we offer, matches the concept of predictive behavior, and it's something no one else does—being straight up with people and asking, "Hey, whose advertising are you most interested in seeing? Which of these value propositions have the greatest interest to you?" If you give consumers control, if you give them choice—which is why the program has become successful—chances are you've done a really good job matching the consumer who wants to buy a product or service with an advertiser who would like to get the word out about it.

We have dozens and dozens of clients in the program now, and they absolutely want to be selected. If you're advertising a product or service, and someone sends you a list and says "I want to see that ad," as an advertiser, you want to be sure that person who wants to see the ad does get to see it. That's the idea of being able to predict consumer behavior on a very straightforward fashion. Which of these products, services, brands or

basis.' And with toward that goal Online Advertising industry has developed products more complex than anything that has been available - sophisticated servers, broadband, biased rich media formats, day-part targeting, and an exhaustive array of advertising forms.

All of these are impressive, but potentially missing ingredient necessities make one-to-one marketing truly - relevance.

Relevance turns advertising into information...

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value propositions do you have an interest in hearing more about?

iMedia Connection: Being so frank with the consumer is impressive. But does it really work?

Jedynak: Again, it's pretty groundbreaking. No one has done it before, and we've been doing it now for close to two years and have been very successful. We have advertisers who have been there for months and months, and simply want to be there. In a way, it's like search. As long as people are asking to see your ad [category], you want to be there on the list. I think what has happened is the advertisers in the program are finding that when they do get a lead from the folks who selected their advertisement, the conversions are much higher than a typical click-through to their Web site.

Typically, the cost people pay for being selected is within the 50 to 75 cent range per selection. It varies depending on the client and what their needs are and what their cost-per-acquisition goals are. The bottom line is once someone selects them, there's a series of advertisements that go sequentially to that consumer who selected them, that are all from that advertiser, be it emails or large ads on WeatherBug or additional information. Every time you as a consumer select an advertiser, you are also given a visit to that advertiser's Web page. Once a consumer has selected you, one of those methods of advertising is likely to convert someone to buy. There are enough exposures there that if you are going to buy as a consumer, you've got the opportunity to do so.

iMedia Connection: How does WeatherBug extend this relationship with the consumer?

Jedynak: What we've found oftentimes for advertisers who've been in the program for a long time, there are tens of thousands of people who have selected them to be their advertiser at some point in the past, these advertisers really want to send display advertising to these same consumers later because they know that at one point in time that person showed a real interest and selected them. So we call these "reminder campaigns" once a person has selected a certain advertiser, the advertiser will want to come back in the months afterward to readvertise to those kinds of people who would choose them, primarily through display ads on WeatherBug. We have a real loyal audience, so the people who use WeatherBug come back many days every month. It's one of the most loyal sites on the Web, and that helps make sure the customers who selected an advertiser will be back at a later time so that we can readvertise to them for that advertiser.

iMedia Connection: What challenges does WeatherBug still have to overcome to further refine its targeting capabilities?

Jedynak: One of our next main areas of focus will be psychographics. These are beyond consumer demos, beyond consumer purchase habits, and beyond consumer buying intent. Psychographics is all about people's values, attitudes and lifestyles. So many major traditional advertisers use VALS, or RISC, or PRISM Clusters or other psychographic profiling systems to help determine targeting and also creative development. Advertisers ask the question: what key words, images and themes are turn-ons to our buyers? The answer is found in consumer psychographics. And as Internet advertising becomes more sophisticated, our job will be to help our advertising clients target by psychographics in the same way we already do it through registration-based demographic targeting.

For more insight from Jedynak on how to improve targeting, read [Four Ways to Aim Better](#).

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