

Banner Ads

By Bob Osgoodby

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When Internet Advertising was in its infancy, banner ads quickly became a major player. Statistics were readily available, and they allowed campaigns to be planned, evaluated, and changed within a matter of days instead of weeks.

Businesses developed with the sole purpose of managing and distributing these ads. Click-thru rates were developed, and people started placing banner ads on their web pages. Three basic plans ultimately evolved. The first was basically a "swap arrangement" where people simply traded banner ads with one another. This was difficult to manage and people usually kept these swaps buried in some remote corner of their web site. The resultant traffic they generated was minimal to say the least.

The next iteration, promised a bit more as they actually tracked the click-thrus, and for each one you got for them, they would put your ad up for a like number. When that turned into a business, they typically traded on a two for one basis. They would give you one exposure for each two you generated. Others actually paid for the click-thrus instead of making trades, but very few people retired on the income generated that way. Some actually sold banner ads on their web sites, and while that was viable in the early days, it is of questionable value today.

A third method uses banner ads on your web site, either for affiliate programs you might be involved with, or to allow someone to easily navigate about your site. This will probably be the sole survivor in the saga of the banner ads. Now that the medium has matured and the novelty has worn off, click-thru rates will continue to drop. Trading banner ads is a thing of the past, and all but gone. People realize that the banner ads take away from the primary message they are trying to get across on their web site.

Careful banner placement however, can still be a valuable player in your advertising campaign, but they must be used wisely. We've all seen web sites with indiscriminate use of banner ads, and this should be avoided. Sometimes it's almost impossible to determine what the site is all about because of all the home page ads that are displayed.

The Internet is constantly evolving with new technology and functionality, but the banner will continue to have value. One tool however, cannot be the only advertising vehicle. A lot of people are loading their sites with animation and music. Many times it takes so long to load, that people simply click away. This is a case where a simple banner might be more effective. Any advertising program cannot stand on the merits of only one method.

While banner ads have their place, unless they are on other web sites they won't generate any traffic to your web site. In the online arena, ezine advertising continues to be one of the strongest methods of reaching large numbers. A coordinated program of web ads and ezine ads is still probably your best bet.

Are banner ads passe'? As far as building traffic, I feel they have passed their prime. Proponents of banner ads however will claim you will get large numbers of hits to your site, and this is true. But hits are not sales and should not be your primary concern.

Everything you do in your advertising program should be geared toward doing business. If you think about it, even with an aggressive banner ad campaign that points people to your web site, other than banner ads which then point them someplace else, what will they see when they get there? Most people today are not willing to place them on their home page as they distract from the primary purpose of the site.

One of the strongest use of banners is to help brand your product, and build your company name identification. While it is true that traffic to your web site is important, when they get there the sole purpose at that point should be to close the sale. Anything that dilutes that should be avoided.

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