



How to use dynamic creative to enhance your personalisation strategy

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Digital technology makes targeting much more precise and it can also make creative more personalised than ever before, says MediaCom's Nicole Amodeo

The concept of targeting specific groups of consumers is not a new one for media folk. In fact, we've been doing it pretty much since the first ad appeared; selecting ads by location or by daypart from example.

What we haven't been doing is adjusting the message depending on who we are targeting unless there are large numbers of consumers in each distinct group.

Thanks to technology, we now have an opportunity to change that approach. To make sure that the right time, right place, right message mantra truly is a reality, personalised at scale.

Dynamic creative platforms can now deliver this as part of a programmatic strategy but it takes work to make it happen and human insight to get it right.

The business advantages are huge because failure to produce high quality, personalised 'brand level' messages is an expensive missed opportunity.

Part of the problem is one of resource allocation. Most brands allocate 90% of their digital budgets to media, while just 10% goes into producing the creative. The result is that just 1% of ads served to consumers are dynamic and tailored based on programmatic data. Meaning 99% of ads are behind the curve and less effective than they might be.

What is dynamic creative?

At its most basic, dynamic creative lets advertisers adapt and tailor ads for specific audiences, formats and contexts. It does this by allowing advertisers to create messages for each impression without building thousands of ads by hand. Instead, it uses ad templates containing various interchangeable creative elements. These might include imagery, copy, video assets and calls-to-action.

The media agency can then deliver tailored versions of these ads based on audience segments and relevant data signals such as time of day, weather, demographics, interests and e-commerce behaviours. For example, if a car manufacturer offers a car configurator on its site, the brand could enhance its retargeting efforts by including the user's personally-designed car in their ad.

Dynamic creative is not bad retargeting. Everyone has had ads for 'that pair of shoes' or 'that designer jacket' following them around the internet, even after they've bought it.

Proper dynamic creative is a brand level process not a call to action following you around the web. Consumers are also wary of ads that look like templates or excessive frequency.

What resources do you need?

The good news for brands is that effective dynamic creative can often be implemented using existing technology relationships. This is not always about new technology, it's about making those tools work smarter. Tech should be minimised for both cost and complexities sake.

Any Demand Side Platform (DSP) and most media owners can plug into a dynamic creative ad server and pass on the data required to trigger ads based on the right audience.

That data could come from multiple sources. First-party data is clearly the most valuable, it means you already know the customer, making the delivery of personalised and relevant messages much easier.

Data sources based on cookies and online behaviours are more affected by the recently implemented General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Brands that want to deliver more personalised messaging at scale should consider working with contextual data partners (which only place the ad in a relevant environment at the impression level).

Wherever the data comes from, however, it should always be used with care, respecting consumers' opt-in and opt-out choices.

The key resources required are human ones – people with the specialisms needed to be able to design these ads to look premium and integrate the data in the right way that delivers the right message to the right person.

Technology can't distinguish between good and bad ad design, so we need creative minds and production specialists to design and develop bespoke templates that look premium and are built-for-purpose.

The teams can be different for different clients but usually include designers, developers and copywriters, who work closely with the account and programmatic buying teams.

At the centre of each operation is a technical creative producer who is the single point of

contact to drive all elements and guide decisions. They are in-house at the agency and this structure means that creative decisions are made with data and insights that inform the media targeting and optimisation potential.

How to get the most out of dynamic creative

The most successful dynamic systems will always be those designed with the context of the media environment and the consumer journey in mind. This not only includes ensuring that the consumer isn't retargeted after purchase but also means that each message is designed for the platform on which it's being viewed.

Brands should focus on three key areas if they want to take advantage of everything dynamic content has to offer:

- 1. Brief media, creative and technology together:** It sounds very basic, but by doing this, all teams are automatically aligned on consumer insights, data sources, targeting strategies and creative campaign concepts from the start. This will let the media targeting and ad variation decisions required for dynamic creative to be made more efficiently. Dynamic creative tech partners (internal or external), as well as ad operations, should be included as early as possible as well.
- 2. Start simple to test and learn:** If you're experimenting with dynamic creative for the first time, it's a smart move to build a small decision tree or matrix of ad versions first to ensure the campaign is manageable and testable. Test a hypothesis such as "personalised creative performs better than standard ads" to see if adding tailored creative shifts the needle for your brand and evolve the strategy and level of complexity from there. Every business will have its own optimum level of dynamic creative that delivers the best ROI (both short and long-term).
- 3. Consider the entire consumer journey:** Many advertisers get lost in the ad tech discussions, particularly around tagging and retargeting tactics. That's because consumer activity on site is likely the most accessible and valuable data. To get it right, brands should take a step back and look at media spend

allocations and largest growth opportunities, as this could be higher in the funnel.

Case study

Bose, the audio equipment brand, used dynamic creative to produce and deliver tailored imagery and copy for a variety of different products, features, life stages, interests and always-on e-commerce signals.

The project was successful because creative and programmatic teams were briefed together. This allowed them to use actual digital behaviour insights, such as website activity and purchase data, to inform their messaging strategy and creative ideas. It's the modern version of the classic copywriter and art director double act (with faster access to more accurate and timely data).

Together they created a bespoke decision matrix designed to mix and match creative elements with key buying insights and targeting possibilities at scale, across the UK, France and Germany.

Alongside this matrix, a flexible, purpose-built template with an image sequence to provide a striking video-like effect was developed. Dynamic creative then assembled the ads in real-time to showcase the most relevant product in the Bose range.

Copy and images used are based on consumer interests, life stages, purchase behaviours, media environment and seasonal events. For example, if a user likes hiking and outdoor pursuits, they might see an ad for Bose's durable micro speaker attached to a backpack in the snow and rain. Likewise, frequent business travellers can be shown an ad for Bose's noise-cancelling headphones, which they can use to relax on the plane.

The dynamic system provides the agility to optimise creative and adjust certain elements on the fly, without having to rebuild or re-traffic new ads. During the initial campaign period, there was a 30% average media performance uplift from personalised creative.

Key considerations

Personalised marketing strategies have the potential to boost ROI, but only if they are put in place in the correct way.

There's little additional cost involved. For most brands, the tech stack they and their agencies have already built can probably be employed to deliver dynamic creative. In most cases, there is no need for new shiny or expensive tools.

What really makes personalised marketing strategies work, however, is the human insight into the customer journey combined with a team that works together across media, creative and technology.

Brands should focus on getting these ingredients in place as a first step on the journey to more effective personalisation.

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