

Personalised Ads: Credible or Creepy?

[ADVERTISING](#) [CONSUMER](#) [CONTENT](#)

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At a time where advertising spend continues to grow and consumers are faced with a myriad of messages from brands on a daily basis, the perennial challenge of standing out from the crowd has never been more prevalent for brands and agencies. Personalisation has long been proposed as a way of improving the experience for the customer and efficiency for the advertiser. The reality of whether this is actually happening, however, is open to debate.

A recent survey by Adobe Digital Index (ADI) across Europe and the US revealed that 41% of respondents didn't want ads to be personalised and even though the younger 18-34 bracket were more open to the idea of personalised ads (only 22% were against them), they overwhelmingly called for future campaigns do be done better and "less creepily". Which begs the question, 'is personalisation the wrong way for brands to communicate to potential customers?' Or perhaps 'is personalisation a valuable way to speak to interested

parties, but at present just being executed poorly?"

Interestingly there was a mixed view on whether the personalised message actually improved the content that the audience was being served. Respondents in the UK and US were more likely to claim that the content was improved by personalisation, however respondents in France were more likely to claim that the content was made worse and more intrusive or ‘creepy’. Perhaps the starker finding was that 28%, 30% and 35% of the younger demographics in the UK, US and France respectively felt that personalised ads were no more compelling than a standard ad. This arguably is the result of this millennial audience being accustomed to the likes of online retargeting, sequential messaging, personalised ads and, crucially, not feeling any sense of value in this messaging to their everyday experiences.

This neatly brings us on to what, I believe, are two fundamentals in getting the personalisation right. Firstly, the people who are being targeted need to be the right people, in the words of John Watton, director of digital marketing EMEA at Adobe, “advertisers who attempt personalised advertising before they have built centralised, cross-device audience databases risk turning consumers off completely”. It is critical to be confident that the audience that are being targeted are known customers willing to hear more, or people that are almost guaranteed to be interested in what a brand has to say – that whatever a brand has to offer them is going to provide them with a real sense of value. This emphasizes the second fundamental, that the content they are being served is absolutely relevant, interesting and valuable to them. This value could be any amount of things, shareability for example ('Share a Coke' springs to mind), is a perfectly valuable commodity for a brand today.

The 'Share a Coke' campaign was a success and certainly proves that, given the right execution (scale, the right use of data, social value), personalisation can resonate with an audience and produce end results. Coca Cola's partnership with Channel 4 delivered the UK's first fully personalised AV campaign via 4OD. It had scale- accessing 11 million logged in users of 4OD, it only used a small but valuable amount of data- people's first names and, importantly, it had a tangible social value- shareability (the social reach of

#shareacoke reached a peak of 11 million people). The results of the campaign speak for themselves: campaign awareness increased by 17%, ad recall was 71% and purchase intent increased by 24%. So taking this level of success, there is a vindication of personalisation, but it has to be done carefully.

In summary, if you have content that is going to genuinely enrich the customer's daily life or provide them with a tangible value and you know they are willing to receive it, then personalisation has a place. If not, leave it to brands that have these kind of attributes ready to use and concentrate on other routes in your messaging, or risk appearing trite or contrived. There is nothing wrong in realising you shouldn't personalise your message, plenty of brands simply are not viable for this. Self-awareness of your brand, tone, customer base and public perception of your proposition is the important thing to recognise in this instance. Don't be a stranger that tries to put their arm around someone and talk at them, be a pleasant surprise that puts a smile on their face.

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