

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

Why media partnerships are worth more than the trouble

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Partnerships are routine considerations for our industry. They are not routine to deliver however.

First off, they require some definition. People mean different things by them. Is a simple badging of a sponsorship a partnership? If we work collaboratively with content creators aren't we in partnership? Or is a true media partnership one where unique content is created by the content creator (media owner, publisher, influencer etc) specifically for a brand?

This last option is especially a tough one to deliver. The objective, to create content that will uniquely promote the brand in the tone of voice of the publisher, must deliver not just added value to the marketing effort, but also to the consumers (readers, viewers, listeners etc) of the publisher.

These are the partnerships that we love, the winners of awards and the real deliverers of added value.

They can be hard work, compared for example with planning ad space in the right places which will be filled by advertising, with one clear message, created carefully to run in all the media booked.

The human effort involved can be heavy. One situation springs to mind, from many years ago, when a hair styling brand took the outside back cover of some selected women's magazines and re-styled the front cover model's hair. This ad looked and felt like the front cover, but with a different hairstyle. The good news was that it drove distribution and in-store presence. It only ran for one campaign however. The reason was that the effort to create multiple different images felt unjustifiable. Not in terms of cost (that was factored into the media buy) but in terms of sheer effort for the client. Signing off each image for each issue of each magazine was high stakes (compared with the single image that they traditionally ran), and managing internal stakeholders required much more time than normal.

When reviewing the project all the hard KPIs (key performance indicators) were successful. The stakes just felt emotionally too high for it to be repeated. The client involved said to the planner on the account: "I loved the project, it was the right thing to do. But I am never, ever going to do it again. I had sold in the idea that running magazine specific copy was better than running one single ad campaign. For two weeks, as I was attending shoots with each mag, my boss kept asking me: "Are you sure?" My answer was always yes, but it was just too stressful".

This project was many years ago, and of course there are much better ways of working and proper project management in play today. But a good partnership will usually still require more effort than running one brand campaign. Is it worth it?

This has been a difficult question to answer. Until now. MediaCom's new econometric study into the value of partnerships has revealed exactly how much the extra effort in delivering them is worth. For large and small projects.

The news is good for those who have so far just had blind faith that they are a good thing.

Media partnerships can drive up to twice as much effectiveness for a brand campaign over and above advertising. This is not marginal gain, which might be undermined by increased human effort in terms of overall return. This is a significant leap in brand delivery.

The full research looks in detail at budget parameters, campaign duration and the specific metrics that partnerships are best at shifting, and whether it is best to run them stand alone or alongside an ad campaign.

Brand partnerships work. They are more than worth the trouble.

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