

DVR fast-forwarding may not be fatal to TV advertising

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Fast-forwarded advertisements with brand information located outside of screen center -- such as in this frame from a restaurant ad -- are of virtually no value, Boston College researchers report in the November edition of the Journal of Marketing. Photo courtesy the Journal of Marketing

While digital video recorders and products like TiVo allow television viewers to skip past commercials, Boston College researchers have found that fast-forwarding viewers actually pay more attention and can be influenced by brand images they view only for a fraction of a second.

Tracking the eye movements of viewers, Carroll School of Management Professors S. Adam Brasel and James Gips found that ads with brand information placed in the center of the screen still create brand memory despite a 95% reduction in frames viewed and complete loss of audio.

Their results are reported in the November edition of the *Journal of Marketing*.

"In the age of DVRs, advertisers who place their brands anywhere outside the center of the viewing screen do so at their own brand peril," said Brasel, an assistant professor of marketing. "Even in fast forward, consumers can focus in on a product logo or brand and that fraction of a second can later influence their preferences."

Ads with brand information located on the periphery of the TV screen are of virtually no value, according to the study "Breaking Through Fast-Forwarding: Brand Information and Visual Attention."

Fast-forwarded commercials containing extensive central brand information can even have a positive effect on a consumer's brand attitude, behavioral intent and actual choice behavior, the researchers found.

The findings show that marketers can counteract the impact of DVRs by ensuring their ads are heavily branded and the branding is centrally located.

"Everybody is saying that TV advertising is doomed – TiVo has broken it and DVR will kill it," said Brasel. "But it's not like the advertising disappears when you use TiVo. We wanted to find out what happens when you fast-forward through these ads."

Brasel and Gips found that people who fast forward through shows actually pay more attention to the screen than those who view at regular speed. That's good news for advertisers, as long as their commercials feature their brands in the center of the screen.

When a viewer hits fast forward, he or she only sees about 1 out of every

24 frames, reducing brand ID to a little less than a third of a second out of a 30-second spot, Brasel said. But the speed of the play-back removes visual cues and motion that attract attention to brand images that lay along the periphery of the TV screen. Instead, television watchers concentrate on the center of the screen.

Curious about how attention on the central image might impact consumer behavior, the researchers created a pair of mock commercials for two British chocolate bar brands. One was heavily branded, the other lightly branded. After the research subjects had viewed the content and were preparing to leave the lab, they were invited to choose one of the candy bars. Subjects chose the heavily branded bar twice as often as the lightly branded bar.

"We created a massive shift in behavior from a commercial lasting just over one second," said Brasel. "It's clear that just because an ad is being fast-forwarded, doesn't mean it is a wasted ad."

The onus now is on brand marketers not to forsake TV advertising or to look for ways to block the increasingly popular technology. "DVRs aren't going anywhere," said Brasel. "So it's up to advertisers to work with these new technologies."

Source: Boston College

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