

Dynamic Creative Optimization

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brands to-do list

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Dynamic Creative Optimization Should Be On Every Brand's To-Do List

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I'm not usually one for resolutions, but this year I've decided to set a different tone and commit to three goals: catch up on my dream travel destinations, take a pottery class to design my own noodle bowl, and help brands minimize the risk of underperforming creative content. While the first two resolutions are still a work in progress, I got a head start on the last one.

Across markets, brands are met with complex issues like the current economic downturn, inflation and third-party cookie deprecation. Budget cuts and layoffs have led them to reduce their media and content production budgets for 2023 and, as a result, raised their interest in automation solutions for production and advertising operations. With the aim to complete the same workload in the best way possible, many brands are shifting their focus to lower-funnel, performance-driven activities, while seeking ways to use resources more wisely. As they embark on new paths to growth—or dial up investments in innovation to diversify marketing strategies—now is the time for brands to automate whatever formats and assets they can to unlock the time and budget necessary for more outstanding activations.

Fear of taking big creative risks during tough economic times makes it difficult to deliver groundbreaking creative. Besides, the traditional creative process is often expensive and doesn't guarantee a campaign will perform well. I believe this is a result of a linear and rigid process which doesn't allow for iteration, thereby leaving mid-flight performance insights to go unaddressed. Traditional big idea campaigns have their place, but there's a more cost-effective and efficient solution to develop truly groundbreaking creative: Dynamic Creative Optimization.

DCO is a silver bullet as brands streamline budgets and teams.

DCO is the process of producing modular creatives that can serve personalized creative variants to users based on different attributes, from their demographics and location to their behavioral and psychographic tendencies. In a time of economic uncertainty and evolving consumer expectations, the ability to quickly adapt creatives to address new challenges, trends or "moments" is a game changer.

Looking at additional benefits, DCO allows you to streamline creative iteration and corresponding AdOps processes and shorten the activation process. My colleague Mitchell Pok, Director of Creative Services & Technology, says the typical creative process too often ends at delivery, and getting any iterations or changes done can take a long time. "However, by pairing templates that pull and render content from a spreadsheet of copy and image inputs, new assets can be activated much more quickly by simply updating feeds," he says. This also means that the lift required to run tests has been reduced, allowing brands to do more proper testing. By methodically iterating on high performing content, brands are able to learn what works best for their target consumers and adjust messaging on the fly.

As you can see, DCO is a means to increase operational efficiency. By templating high volume and repetitive creative assets, brands save time and budget, which they can reinvest into other areas: developing innovative formats for new platforms, designing creative for channels that require a more bespoke approach, or fine-tuning low-scale but high-performing tactics to drive personalization at scale—the choice is yours.

Successful DCO is a true interdepartmental effort.

To realize the full benefits of DCO, collaboration across multiple teams is required to ensure a seamless process from asset iteration to activation. Unfortunately, different departments like media and creative are often siloed. Historically, the media landscape has always consisted of niche occupations, with specialists rarely moving out of their specific realms. As for creative teams, they're further downstream and don't really get to see the results of the assets they deliver, but are left in the dark until the next request comes in.

However, constant collaboration between these teams helps tie everything together. That's why we focus on breaking down barriers and making sure everyone involved in a project understands what other departments are doing. As much as there are limitations from a media perspective that creatives need to consider, there are limitations from the creative perspective that media teams need to take into account. The key to bringing these two together is helping them see things from the other's perspective—for example, by showing designers the granularity at which media can be purchased, thereby empowering them to create more relevant imagery to serve these tactics.

Cold feet? Run a pilot and see where it takes you.

To brands that still shy away from DCO, I say: let's run a pilot. It's complementary to other measures, and thus can play a big or a smaller role in your strategy. Additionally, if you're already used to creating and running animated HTML5 creatives, the DCO production process is only marginally more complex, but provides the benefits of quickly updating messaging and testing new variations. Start out by teaming up with a partner who can help you run a pilot and see where it takes you.

Ultimately, the more you systematically test your creatives and generate insights, the more DCO will help you fine-tune your whole marketing strategy across creative and media. My advice to brands that are ready to become smarter in their creative production is the same as to myself when I browse pottery courses: it's time to take your chances, because fortune favors the bold.

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