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## Online Advertising: Overwhelmed or Overjoyed?

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## Online Advertising: Overwhelmed or Overjoyed?

By William Steiger  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Online advertising flooded into my computer and phone during the holiday-selling season: banner ads, email advertising including spam, Facebook ads, sponsored tweets, rich-media ads, pop-ups and pop-unders, and my personal favorite: pre-video ads that slow me down when I'm checking out the sports highlights from the previous night.

As a sales guy, I understand that we need to sell stuff and the internet is the new retail trading space – and it's going to get busier because more folks are getting connected.

Information-technology researcher Gartner predicts that there will be 30 percent more connected devices in 2016 than last year. That represents 6.4 billion more devices. If you're going fishing, go to where the fish are!

As an instructor with a large academic family and a grandparent with a large personal family, I'm used to processing 150+ text messages and 100+ emails every day before I even touch social media. The sheer volume of "online stuff" doesn't overwhelm me. I've developed an immediate filtering sense that sorts the legitimate messages from businesses with which I'm not familiar.

I'm also grateful that the "cold call" messages are more targeted to products and services that match my age and consumer behavior. I rarely receive online ads for speed dating, music that I've never heard of, or nightclubs that open after I'm already in bed. At the same time, I'm not overjoyed by the ads for Viagra, senior-living apartments, Medicare Part D and reverse mortgages.

So, how exactly are these companies targeting me? We're familiar with the online tracking tools consumers seem to have no concerns with: cookies, profiles and other online tools that identify our shopping habits.

It's the *speed* that this information is available that is striking. An acquaintance who works for a technology-research business told me the analytics to process and make sense of data captured from online habits is moving faster and faster. It is giving the end-user the tools to evaluate the data and operationalize a marketing solution online.

I purchased two pairs of slacks online over the holidays. Within one hour, I had a tile ad on my web browser for belts, socks and shoes to go with the slacks. I have to admit, this was pretty creepy.

This tracking is being extended into the bricks and mortar retailers, as well. Nordstrom ran a test to track the cell phone signals of shoppers in the store to determine optimal store layout and the opportunity to offer in-store coupons. While consumers seem to be OK with the online tracking, the in-store tracking got some pushback from consumers who viewed it as a form of stalking.

So did the online retailer think I needed a new belt, socks or shoes just because I purchased a pair of slacks? A behavioral psychologist who consults with my sales students at UCF told me that it's not a practical sales message, it's an emotional pitch. They want me to feel like I'll look better in these items. That I'll be more professional, credible and perhaps comfortable. It's the dirty little secret of tracking and online marketing analytics.

I like to shop but I don't like to spend a lot of time shopping. For me, convenience is king because time is so precious.

As a veteran of the advertising business, I love selling with ads. As a result, I'm OK with the emotional pitches.

The best endorsement is a happy customer – and if I feel better, look better and get a compliment or two, I'm a happy customer. Bring on the ads!

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