LinkedIn
Advertising 101
for B2B Digital Marketing

INTRODUCTION

When companies consider which social media platforms to run their marketing campaigns on, they typically want to gravitate toward Instagram and Facebook due to the sheer popularity of these platforms. B2B companies, however, should reconsider. LinkedIn has become a powerful B2B marketing channel for paid social media advertising. With better targeting and an improved ROI, LinkedIn has set itself apart from other social media platforms to become an invaluable asset in a B2B marketer's toolkit.

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What is LinkedIn Advertising?

LinkedIn advertising is a highly effective form of digital marketing that serves ads to target audiences, similar to the Facebook and Instagram ads consumers are well-accustomed to. Where LinkedIn differs, though, is in its ability to refine target audiences with more business-related filters such as company, company size, job title, and industry—filters not available on any other social media platforms.

The use of these filters is instrumental in creating successful demand generation and account-based marketing (ABM) campaigns. There's no guesswork surrounding your B2B buyer persona—it's all found on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn offers three types of ads:

Sponsored content ads promote content to a target audience; this would include blog posts or white papers.

Text ads are similar to Google Ads and allow marketers to create engaging text advertisements to increase campaign reach and drive conversions.

Sponsored InMail ads are a way to deliver personalized content directly to a target audience's inbox.

Advantages of Using LinkedIn Advertising for B2B Marketing

Improved Targeting

LinkedIn's refined targeting features is one of the biggest advantages to advertising on LinkedIn, so it's important to understand how targeting within LinkedIn works. A LinkedIn audience can be refined by the following criteria:

- Location
- Company
- Demographics
- Education
- Job experience
- Interests

When creating a new target audience, the only mandatory target field is location. Location is based on both the IP address of your target audience as well as the location listed in their profile. Outside of location, each of the other target categories can be refined even further. When you filter by company, you can target a specific company name, size, or industry. When refining the audience demographics, users can customize age and gender parameters. Education can be targeted by a specific school, field of study, or even a specific degree. You can also create target audiences based on job experience, titles held, years of experience, and years of seniority. Lastly, targeted audiences can be segmented based on interests stated on individual LinkedIn profiles.

With LinkedIn targeting, marketers have a greater ability to perform A/B testing; you can test different ad sets to gauge engagement and overall performance. Outside of testing, you can also use LinkedIn to either expand an audience or create a lookalike audience. According to LinkedIn's targeting best practices, "When using either option, LinkedIn's algorithms will identify additional audience members similar to your target audience. As you're beginning to test and refine, these options will help you reach a broader (but still relevant) audience and generate more data to help you optimize your campaigns."

Think of targeting audiences and executing paid social ads within LinkedIn as a mini-ABM campaign. It starts with choosing your objective (awareness, consideration, or conversions), then selecting your target criteria (company size, company

name, job title, etc), picking your ad format, confirming your budget and schedule, then measuring and optimizing your campaign. If you truly want campaign success, research and knowledge around the ideal target audience will be extremely beneficial. This means knowing who they are, where they are in the sales funnel, what type of content they're most likely to engage with, and what your ROI would be if and when you close a sale or land a new client.

Meet Your Audience Where They Are

If account-based marketing and demand generation are the best marketing strategies for building profitable relationships and nurturing leads, LinkedIn is the social media equivalent. In Q3 of 2020, LinkedIn saw "record levels of engagement." LinkedIn has become the go-to professional platform where people connect with businesses, apply for jobs, engage with industry leaders, and catch up on industry news. According to a study done by Demand Wave, LinkedIn is the top performing social media platform for lead and revenue generation, and 71% of businesses surveyed claimed LinkedIn was a major part of their advertising strategy. This is the platform where networking and finding new business opportunities are paramount. As a B2B company, you can share relevant content, use social listening techniques, and follow industry trends and leaders.

The Difference Between Boosted and Dark Posts

There are two ways paid posts can be executed on LinkedIn: as a boosted or a dark post. **A boosted post** is content posted directly to a LinkedIn page; you can then pay to have the content promoted—or boosted—to be seen by a wider audience segment and prioritized over organic posts. The post will appear on the feed of your followers as well as on the feed of people who match your audience criteria but do not follow your page yet. Boosted posts are a great way to share valuable industry-specific content to your followers and generate engagement with new audiences.

A dark post, on the other hand, is a paid ad that is promoted to target audiences without the content being posted organically to a LinkedIn page. LinkedIn dark posts provide greater customization of target

audiences than boosted posts; most importantly, they can be targeted by job title, company, and industry.

Dark posts can also easily be delivered to multiple target audiences simultaneously without posting multiple times on your feed. If you want to reach multiple different audiences with a boosted post, you have to create multiple posts, each slightly modified to resonate with the various audiences. Multiple boosted posts create clutter in your profile and the feed of your followers—and could actually deter audiences from engagement.

Dark posts are also great for performing A/B testing. Since target audiences can be customized, and the ad is not posted to your profile, you can experiment and see which ad performs better among your ideal customer profile. You can create a unique headline, tagline, call-to-action, and body copy for two separate dark posts and run the posts targeting the specified audience. LinkedIn's algorithm will deliver both ads to unique matching audience segments so no account sees both ads. From there, the data can be analyzed to see which ad performed better.
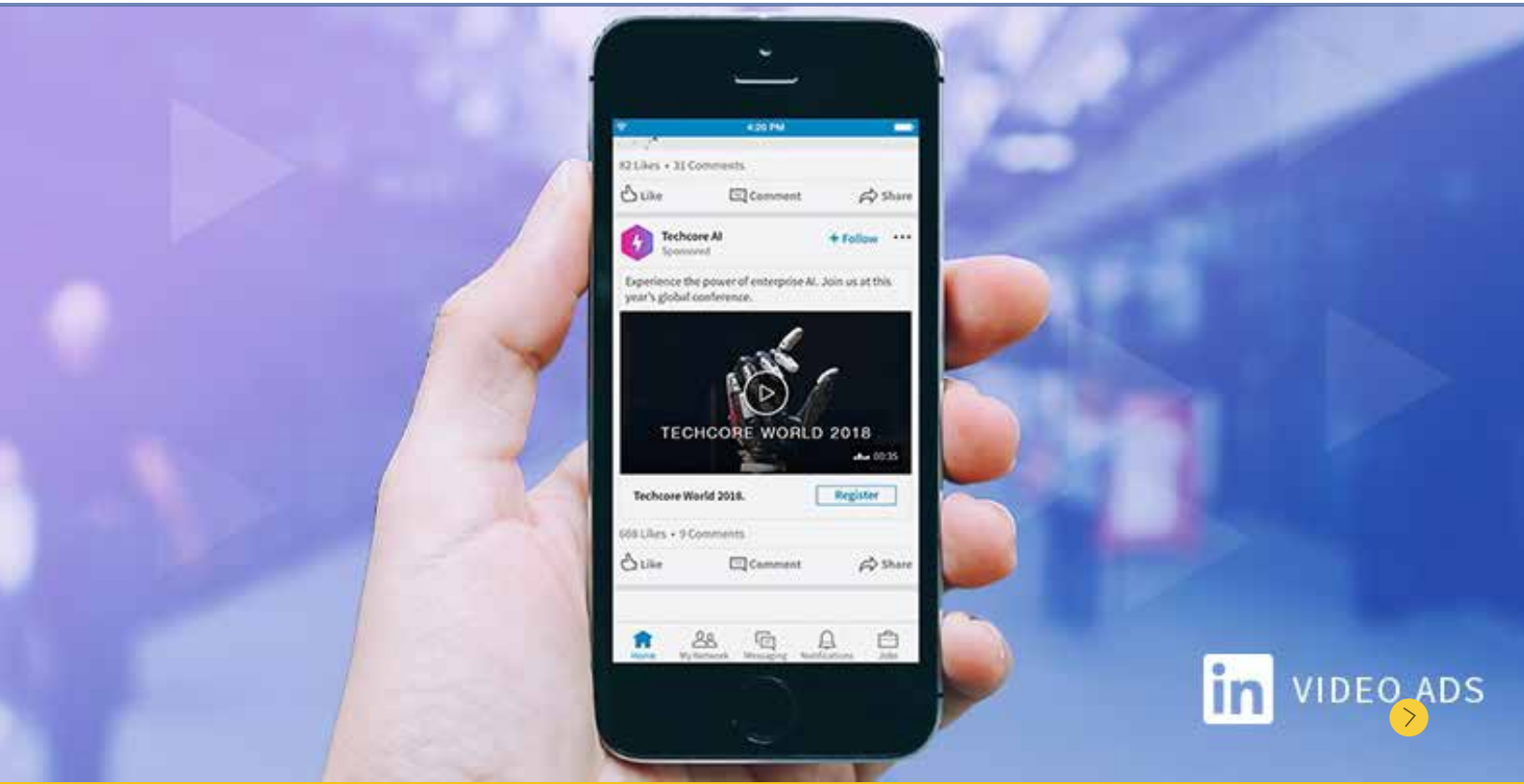
Where LinkedIn Advertising Fits in the Sales Funnel

A well-designed LinkedIn advertising campaign helps advance target audiences through each stage of the sales funnel from awareness through evaluation. Here's how.

Awareness

A recent study found that LinkedIn was responsible for 64% of social media-generated corporate website visits—a stark contrast to the meager 17% and 14% generated by Facebook and Twitter, respectively—making LinkedIn the perfect channel for generating B2B company awareness. LinkedIn awareness campaigns typically involve using various types of ad formats including single image ads, carousel ads, video ads, text ads, spotlight ads, and follower ads. These ad types are designed to be engaging and easily digestible to encourage interaction. Furthermore, LinkedIn's precision targeting and lookalike audiences give marketers the ability to reach prospective customers that may not be familiar with their company, but given parameters such as industry or job function, they might be interested in the service or product offered.

Consideration and Validation

Using LinkedIn advertising, you can maintain engagement with these target audiences as they move beyond awareness by delivering compelling content that inspires them to interact with your brand in some way; e.g. a website visit, an ad click, or asset download. LinkedIn's in-depth industry targeting features lead to a cost per lead that is "28% lower than Google AdWords." The decreased cost per lead is attributed to LinkedIn's unique ability to focus your campaigns on more relevant audiences, filling your funnel with in-market decision-makers. To engage with these audiences, marketers use single image ads, text ads, video ads, follower ads, or conversation ads.

Evaluation

As leads move through the funnel into the evaluation stage, LinkedIn's valuable insights and data into the journey of their target audience become even more important. Understanding your audience's buying behavior and journey helps deliver the most relevant content to influence targets as they make final decisions. LinkedIn's conversion tracking system provides increased insights into a target audience's behavior displaying not only when a user clicks an ad but also when a user views an ad and then visits your website. At this stage of the funnel, LinkedIn recommends using single image ads, text ads, conversation ads, and Inmail ads to deliver relevant and personalized content to your target audience to increase conversions.

Evaluating Success of LinkedIn Advertising

To measure the success of LinkedIn campaigns, many B2B marketers use key performance indicators (KPIs) as a set of measurable and achievable goals. It's important to understand, however, that success looks very different at each stage of the sales funnel.

In the awareness stage, success is typically determined by the reach of the campaign. To measure reach, establish your KPI as a certain number of impressions or unique impressions in the LinkedIn dashboard; impressions indicate how often a LinkedIn ad gets shown, potential number of LinkedIn profiles who viewed the ad, and the location of viewers. Understanding the reach of your campaigns provides the necessary insights to improve the quality of campaigns and strategies can be adjusted accordingly.

In the consideration and validation stages, focus on user engagement. Marketers use LinkedIn's Engagement Rate to understand more "about the specific action that was taken on [their] company page: like, comment or share." Learning more about audience engagement increases a B2B company's ability to refine LinkedIn campaigns and assets to focus on generating more audience engagement.

In the evaluation stage, you want to see the total number of conversions, the cost of customer acquisition, and how many conversions originated from LinkedIn interactions.

Conclusion

LinkedIn has emerged as the leader of social media marketing for B2B campaigns, displaying a clear value over Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In fact, research from Hubspot found that compared to Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn is 277% more effective at generating new leads. That said, if you're looking to refine target audiences more efficiently, increase engagement, and drive conversions, spend your paid social budget on LinkedIn; you'll reap the benefits.

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