

How one travel marketer turned the typical use cases for video and search upside down

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Published

July 2018

Topics

Search, Video, Travel

Since the dawn of the digital advertising era, marketers have used video advertising for upper-funnel brand awareness and search advertising for lower-funnel direct response. But it does make you wonder: If a brand wanted to use the power of video's sight, sound, and motion to drive consumers to take an action, would it work?

A recent marketing push from Hawaiian Airlines provides a resounding "yes." At the start of 2018, the airline and its agency, Cole & Weber, ran a campaign in partnership with Mediacom that turned the typical use cases of video and search advertising upside down. Google Search ads helped get the airline's name in front of people and follow-up YouTube video ads drove them to make incremental purchases.



↑ 185%
increase in **flight bookings**.



↓ 69%
reduction in **cost per acquisition**.

Source: Hawaiian Airlines YouTube Analytics Data, June 2018.

The results speak volumes. Thanks to the month-long campaign, Hawaiian Airlines increased flight bookings by 185%, while reducing cost per acquisition by 69% compared to other campaigns run concurrently.¹

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How the campaign worked

In preparation for the busy summer travel period, the airline wanted to follow up with people in Los Angeles and the Northern California Bay Area who were considering visits to Hawaii. While in the past it has always relied on search ads to push customers to book flights, this time the airline took a cross-channel approach. It used search ads as the first point in a conversation with the aspiring traveler, aiming to build awareness, and then followed up with a video push.

To do that, the marketing team set up a typical search campaign, focusing on branded keywords like “Hawaiian Airlines” and nonbranded keywords like “Flight to Hawaii.” Then it created a set of 15-second and 30-second video ads using the company’s market-specific brand creative and YouTube’s direct-response format, TrueView for action. The call to action in the direct-response format invited people to click-through to “See Fares,” where they were directed to a landing page of flight and pricing options relevant to their area.



To identify the right audience for the video campaign, Hawaiian Airlines turned to the data from its search campaign. Using a new tool from YouTube, the team looked at the keywords that had worked best on search and then brought those over to YouTube. That meant the video ads were only served to people who had already shown an interest in the brand or traveling to Hawaii.

The campaign has made Hawaiian Airlines reconsider the role video ads play in its direct-response marketing pushes. “Combining a qualified audience from search with the targeted reach of YouTube lets us make our video buy more efficient,” said Sandra Wang, global advertising at Hawaiian Airlines.

How your brand can try it

For many brands, direct response is not top of mind when creating digital video campaigns. Here are a few lessons to consider when thinking about your own direct-response video campaign.

- **Use a smart call to action.** Develop a call to action (CTA) and landing page that align with your creative and marketing goals. This doesn't need to be language that promotes buying right away, like “Buy Now” or “Book Now.” Instead, softer CTA language like “Shop Now” or “View Details” can get viewers just as interested in heading to your site.
- **Test direct-response formats against regular formats.** It's hard to know if your campaign is working unless you have a control group to compare it against. Cole & Weber suggests running two or more campaigns simultaneously — one with a direct-response format, like TrueView for action, and one or more with regular formats and audience targeting — to see which performs better.

- **Smart bidding is your friend.** Hawaiian Airlines didn't use smart bidding, like target cost per acquisition, on this campaign, but it plans to test it in the future. By optimizing for conversions, marketers can ensure they're cost-efficiently driving action while still increasing brand awareness.
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Sources

1 Hawaiian Airlines YouTube Analytics Data, June 2018.