Contextual Targeting – Myths and Facts

MYTH 1: In-image targeting is inaccurate

FACTS: Whatever the ad format and placement, the quality of data that you begin with will significantly shape the decisions that can be made. There is, for example, always room for error with AI-powered subject recognition, so any in-image targeting system that relies on this will only ever be accurate to a certain degree. More sophisticated solutions only depend on AI to a limited extent, and make broader use of known, verifiable details for key decisions. Image metadata, which can be specified by the photographer or image rights owner, can reveal a wealth of additional information that AI tools cannot extract through subject analysis alone.

MYTH 2: You need plenty of data for contextual advertising

FACTS: With behavioral-based targeting systems, the more information you have on an individual and their interests the better, as this can help you to determine who stands to be most receptive to an advertisement. But with contextual targeting, you're not assessing an individual with masses of data, but an online environment that will comprise a narrower set of contextual signals – and getting the best data out of these signals is preferable to having a lot of data of varying relevance. AI tools may be able to scan and recognize all images on a page and determine what is being presented, but there is always room for error. A system that makes use of AI, but that's ultimately centered around sound, verifiable information such as metadata, skips the guesswork and ensures improved accuracy.

MYTH 3: Contextual advertising does not improve ad performance

FACTS: Contextual targeting does not rely on user data from tracking cookies. Instead, it customizes ads to a particular online environment. This targeting method relies on algorithms to select ad placements based on keywords, website content, topics, and metadata among other things. The ads that are served are based on the interest of the user, which is proven to increase their performance. Research carried out by [Nielsen] on behalf of SmartFrame showed SmartFrame's in-image ads to be 34% more relevant and 14% more memorable than traditional display ads, with a 22% increase in engagement.

MYTH 4: Contextual targeting can harm a brand's image

FACTS: Without the necessary safeguards in place, any kind of advertising can present issues for brands. But the reality is that brands cannot afford to have their reputations sullied by having their ads shown in inappropriate environments, and many tools have existed for some time to ensure this doesn't happen. PPC campaigns, for example, have long allowed for negative keywords to be specified to ensure that ads do not appear in search results for an undesirable term. With on-page contextual targeting, the blocking of sensitive categories – such as religion, politics, sex, and drugs – ensures that advertisements are not placed alongside problematic content. On top of this, AI-based tools are today used to detect nuances in content that keywording alone may fail to spot, as well as elements like nudity in images. This multi-pronged approach helps to combat threats on all levels.

MYTH 5: Contextual targeting is too simplistic because it is based on keywords

FACTS: At a basic level, contextual targeting works by noticing words and phrases on a website – such as those within the headline, body copy, and so on – and matching this to relevant ads. Today's contextual targeting systems, however, are considerably more sophisticated than this, and can detect many other contextual signals. Natural language processing, for example, can identify elements like tone of voice and sentiment to better understand the nature of the content that's being presented. Contextual targeting continues to evolve and now takes image metadata into account to fine-tune accuracy and develop a more thorough understanding of what's going on. As a result, better judgements can be made as to the specific ads that would be ideally suited to a particular online environment.