Does advertising kill technology?

Kasey Panetta, Associate Editor

It’s something we hear a lot: “The [xyz] technology sounds amazing; too bad the advertisers are going to ruin it.”

For example, Google Glass [1]. A seemingly exciting and ambitious piece of technology -- until you realize it means having involuntary, interactive advertising experiences one inch from your eye all day.

Suddenly, it becomes less of a toy and more of a headache.

Consider less innovative technology like online video players for the major television networks. To watch a five- minute clip from a show, you watch a three-minute advertisement. Bonus, it’s the same advertisement for every simulated online commercial break.

What happens when innovative technology becomes so besieged by ads it’s rendered nearly unusable for the consumer?

Product vs. advertising
A clear division exists between creators and advertisers, despite the symbiotic nature of the relationship. The creative team designs a product and the advertisements pay for the product. One cannot exist without the other, but which is more important?

Functionality must take precedence over advertising. Without a quality product consumers are excited (or ambivalent) about using—and I assure you no one wants to watch a two minute commercial every five seconds—the entire issue is rendered irrelevant. If consumers are so annoyed by the advertisements, the annoyance overwhelms any desire to use the product, and nobody will be happy.

Look at the increasingly annoying usage of holograms or QR codes chock- full of advertising goodness. Apps for the iPad and other tablets are so inundated with ads, the user spends more time closing ads than using the app.

Advertising-mania

Perhaps even more painful is when advertisers hijack new technology completely. This is a growing problem with the invention and introduction of new and interesting technology.

For example, the new technology from Novo Ad [2], which embeds motion-activated LED screens into mirrors in public restrooms to serve as platforms for advertisements.

Clearly, nothing is sacred.

When advertisers use semi-interesting technology in a way that elicits a groan from the general population, is it effective? Will the platform for advertising actually turn people off the product?

So, what's the solution?
Short of eliminating all advertising (a girl can dream), several viable solutions currently exist and are available in the future to smart advertisers.

1. Change the format
Take the example of video players for major networks. A few shows allow you to watch one long commercial before viewing your show. Instead of watching the same short commercial four times, you end up watching one in- depth commercial. Not only are you learning more about the product or show, but you're more focused on the product itself instead of using that time for a bathroom break between segments. A simple solution, which utilizes the platform and demographic with regard to advertising, but isn't inherently disruptive to the technology.

2. Target specific demographics
As much as I enjoy watching commercials for Home Depot's outdoor garden center offering me a lawnmower I don't want, for a yard I don't have, and near a house I can't afford, I'd much rather spend three minutes watching the trailer for the newest box office hit. The rumor in the technology business is that Intel [3]is shopping a facial recognition device for televisions. The device can't tell specifically who you are, but it can decipher age and gender to show ads specifically targeted towards its viewer. It's a little creepy, but it also means advertisers are only paying for commercials people are watching.. This is a few years away from implementation in TVs let alone tablets or computers, but it's a solid solution. For now, simply offering viewers a choice of two or three commercials to view would suffice.

3. Make ads more interesting
If advertisers utilized the platform in a more innovative way, it would be less of a turnoff. Right now, it's the equivalent of taking a print magazine and dropping it as-

is on an iPad. It’s a wasted opportunity to use technology. Ads shouldn’t be torn directly from television –not when there are so many possibilities for interaction with the consumer. Ads can offer games or ask questions about the product. A car dealer could allow you to manipulate the car to see all the angles or design your own. For Google Glass, an advertisement that takes advantage of the voice recognition would be better. The key is deciphering the one unique aspect of the technology and using it to engage the consumer. Not only would advertisements get more time with the customer, but ads wouldn’t hold consumers hostage.

4. Use common sense
It’s easy to sit and cast aspirations on advertisements as a consumer. On the one hand, I applaud the mirror advertisements for using technology, but I think it’s a misplaced effort in this case. Motion-sensor LED screens should be reserved for ads at bus stops and in malls, not bathrooms. At best, it’s creepy and at worst, it’s a self-esteem killer. Companies should make sure their advertising vehicles aren’t going to drive consumers away before they see the ad.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/10/2014 - 11:04pm*):
http://www.ecnmag.com/articles/2012/06/does-advertising-kill-technology

Links:
[1] http://www.ecnmag.com/articles/2012/05/google-glass-too-ambitious
[2] http://www.novoad.net/
[3] http://www.redorbit.com/news/technology/1112551156/intel-wants-to-sell-your-face-to-advertisers/