

How Publishers Can Profit from Buying Facebook Traffic

Facebook's News Feed change incentivizes traffic purchasing

INTERVIEW | **FEBRUARY 2018**

Ross Benes



An interview with:

Clark Benson

CEO
Ranker

Since Facebook tweaked its News Feed in January to deprioritize publishers' posts, some media companies have scrambled to replace the social giant's referral traffic. Clark Benson, CEO of listicle publisher Ranker, spoke with eMarketer's Ross Benes about how publishers can buy traffic from Facebook in a cost-effective way.

eMarketer:

What should publishers know if they are going to buy Facebook traffic?

Clark Benson:

The thing that you have to understand about Facebook advertising is you just have to test a ton of stuff, and most of what you test is going to fail for all kinds of different reasons that only Facebook knows.

But if you test enough things, the ones that survive can perform quite well for you.

eMarketer:

How do you allocate resources to Facebook?

Clark Benson:

We have 13 full-time [staffers] focused entirely on Facebook traffic. That number doesn't count our video team. We have a paid team of four people that is focused on taking the top 15% to 20% of our organic Facebook posts and putting money behind them.

The real key there is that it's important to really think about your audiences, and use data to target your audiences when you put page spend behind them.

eMarketer:

Can you elaborate on how you have to target your audiences before spending money to boost the posts?

Clark Benson:

If we have a piece of content about the movie “Iron Man,” we can use our data to see if fans of Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson are also “Iron Man” fans. So when it comes to targeting for that “Iron Man” post, we will do one version of that post that goes just to fans of The Rock. This data is based on all of the voting on Ranker that tells us fans of X also like Y.

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eMarketer:

Has Ranker been hit hard by Facebook’s News Feed change?

Clark Benson:

We haven’t been hit much by Facebook’s various algorithm changes, other than the fact that we don’t have as many viral home runs anymore.

eMarketer:

How much does it cost to buy traffic from Facebook?

Clark Benson:

It really depends so much on if you are on mobile vs. desktop, and on how granular your targeting is. But I'll just say this: We're able to consistently buy volumes of traffic on Facebook for less than 2 cents a click.

But you have to understand that for every [paid post] that works at that price point, there are seven or eight that didn't work at that price point that we killed. So it's really a gigantic testing ground. It's not like you can just assume that you can always buy everything cheaply—it doesn't work that way. We run our business a lot like a conversion marketer, in the sense that we're just constantly testing variations and options.

eMarketer:

Are paid Facebook visits your largest source of traffic?

Clark Benson:

No. We get half of our unique visitors from organic search.

eMarketer:

Some publishers are trying to become tech companies. The Washington Post and Purch **sell ad tech to other publishers**. IBM's Watson Advertising **sells data to advertisers** for use outside of its properties. Are you getting into the business of selling software to publishers?

Clark Benson:

We're actually starting to license this software to other publishers. We have done a successful test with one large publisher, and we're open to taking on others. We have a queue of seven other publishers lined up to test it.

We're still first and foremost a publisher, but similar to what you said about the Post and Purch, we definitely view [selling tech] as a proper

piece of the revenue puzzle.

eMarketer:

Is paid distribution going to become a bigger deal for publishers?

Clark Benson:

Pay to play is here to stay as a piece of the Facebook traffic puzzle. It's not the only part, but it's an increasing part of it.

Interview conducted on February 5, 2018