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Zig When Everyone Else is Zagging: Standing Out in Paid Social Advertising

Don't always follow the crowd with paid social advertising. Here are some ways to do something unexpected and stand out from others.

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In paid social advertising, trends often emerge as marketers flock to popular strategies. While this can provide short-term gains, it's easy to fall into the conformity trap, where your ads look and feel like everyone else's. Instead, consider the power of zagging—doing something unexpected that captures attention.

DISCLAIMER: Before I dig into some recommendations and ideas for how to zig, it's critical to set up and employ a reliable and agile testing and optimization strategy. Going against the trends to stand out requires detailed, iterative testing, real-time analysis, and the ability to understand exactly what's working and what's not to be able to make the budget shifts and optimizations necessary to improve ROAS.

### Embrace Visual Contrast in a Video-Dominated Landscape

Visual content is king, and videos have dominated social media for quite some time. However, the rush towards video has created a unique opportunity for marketers to zig by utilizing images. In a sea of moving visuals, a well-crafted static image can create a striking contrast that draws the eye and piques curiosity.

Bonus tip!

Yes, many of us know that the algorithms typically prefer videos. So, a great trick we've been testing is to work the algorithms by creating an ad that's technically "video" but appears as an image. The recipe: use a static image set to audio – use music or a voiceover. It will appear as an image, but the social platform will recognize it as a video, preferring it in the algorithm.

### Craft Compelling Stories in a World of Snippets

With the rise of short-form content, longer narratives often get sidelined. This presents a chance to zag by creating ads that tell compelling stories. By providing depth and context, you can stand out in a landscape dominated by quick snippets and make a lasting impression on your audience.

Just remember, consumer attention spans are still short. So, if you have a longer message or story, include things that will keep the consumer's attention, such as quick cuts, visual pop-ups, and a great narrative for your video. Your first three seconds buy your next three seconds, which buy you your next three seconds, and so forth.

## Take a Minimalist Approach for a Breath of Fresh Air

Alternatively, simplicity becomes a powerful way to zag as platforms become increasingly cluttered with information. While others are cramming their ads with data, consider embracing a minimalist approach. A clean, uncluttered design can convey confidence and elegance that captures attention in unexpected ways. Then, use landing pages to convey the details. Just have a strong landing page optimization strategy to ensure you're getting the most out of this tactic. You don't have to tell the whole story in your ad, just enough to pique the consumer's curiosity and let your landing page finish the sale.

## Use Personalization in a Cookie-Cutter World

In the age of data-driven marketing, personalization has become a buzzword. Yet, many advertisers fall into the trap of using generic personalization techniques. To truly stand out, consider taking personalization to the next level. Craft tailored messages that resonate deeply with your audience's pain points and desires. The best way to do this is to use advanced targeting techniques and segmentation, remarketing, and cross-channel tactics.

## Create Interactive Experiences in a Passive Scroll-Fest

Passive scrolling is the norm on social media, but interactive content offers a unique way to zag. Create ads encouraging engagement, such as polls, quizzes, and interactive stories. Inviting users to participate rather than passively consume can create a memorable experience that stands out.

## Test Creative Formats

We're constantly testing glossy, aspirational, beautiful style user-generated content vs. generic, scrappier UGC for our clients to understand which performs better (more on this in an upcoming blog post!), and the truth is, it depends on the client and campaign. But we have seen trends shifting towards gritty, unpolished content performing well for many brands, so this is another area to test some refreshing, relatable content, like demoing a meal kit in a messy kitchen among a sea of spotless and renovated kitchens!

The best way to know whether your zigzag approach works is to test, optimize, and test again. Try different creatives, messaging, and targeting tactics that test your theories, and be ready to adjust your campaign spending toward what's working.

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