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Diversify and Conquer: The Horizontal Scaling Strategy for Marketers

When it comes to scalability and results, businesses often focus too heavily on vertical scale to reach more people instead of horizontal scale to improve the quality of those connections.

Lazer Mangel

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Why Your Campaigns Need Horizontal Scale

There's no denying that reaching as many people as possible with your message is typically the top goal of any campaign strategy. However, when it comes to scalability and results, businesses often focus too heavily on vertical scale to reach more people instead of horizontal scale to improve the quality of those connections.

While both strategies can be essential for bringing success and growth to your campaigns, businesses should consider taking a horizontal-scale approach, and test out a variety of ideas across different channels to create maximum impact and reach more people.

Defining horizontal scale in marketing and advertising

Horizontal scale refers to a marketing and advertising approach of executing multiple campaigns simultaneously instead of doubling down on just one that works. It involves testing a variety of ideas across different channels in order to create maximum impact and reach more people. For example, you could create and test separate social media posts or campaigns that target different personas (offering users a more personalized experience—and thus increasing engagement) that all run alongside each other. You could also test different angles within the same or across different personas.

Vertical scaling is when businesses focus their spend on one particular channel or approach instead of diversifying their efforts. This approach generally requires a longer timeline and involves investing more resources into a single strategy, such as running several tests or increasing ad spend on an existing campaign.

Why it works

Adopting horizontal scaling allows for greater flexibility and better optimization within your campaigns by allowing you to make changes or try new approaches in real-time rather than wait for the results of one campaign before moving on to another. This makes for faster iterative improvements, enabling you to capitalize on opportunities as they arise, and better measure success metrics and ROAS.

A horizontal scaling strategy also increases awareness about your product or brand, as users will be exposed to even more content from your brand than if you stuck to just one message or angle.

Running ads with various messaging, formats, and creatives across channels, you're able to target different demographics with a more personalized experience. So, increase your relevance to improve engagement—and overall, you should see a higher ROAS.

For example, we looked at two campaigns we ran for a lead gen client where we targeted two new personas with a dedicated campaign instead of focusing spend only on evergreen campaigns targeted at the core audience.

For both personas, the data shows a decreasing CPL:

New Persona 1: 43% lower CPL than core audience

New Persona 2: 17% lower CPL than core audience

In this case, expanding horizontally to new personas and audiences unlocked 15% extra scale, while driving down the overall account CPL by a significant margin.

Finding new horizontal scale opportunities, whether through new audiences, new positioning, new products, etc. is the key to long-term sustainable performance. You're likely to be more successful in reaching more people faster with smaller amounts of resources invested into a variety of tactics. Plus, it gives you greater flexibility when it comes time for making adjustments – everything from altering copy or visuals to launching entirely new campaigns can be done in real-time without having to wait for the results of one strategy before moving on to another.

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