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The Power of Asking "Why" in Performance Marketing

Whether a strategy, tactic, ad, or message performs or doesn't, accepting the result at face value limits the impact of the insight you can gain from testing. Marketers should be constantly testing, and the immediate next step after running a test should always be to ask the question, "Why?"

Lazer Mangel
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We often laugh at toddlers for asking "Why?" -- and for many of us, this indomitable curiosity so often found in toddlers is seen as an annoyance rather than a gift. But their ceaseless curiosity is actually a source of all learning.

To truly engage with customers, it takes more than just surface-level understanding. Marketers must uncover the deeper "Why" behind communication efforts and campaign performance outcomes to ensure they are effective. By understanding their motivations, you can create more meaningful experiences for your customers. Nothing you see in performance marketing happens without reason, and as marketers, it's our job to figure out the "Why."

Whether a strategy, tactic, ad, or message performs or doesn't, accepting the result at face value severely limits the impact of the insight you can gain from testing. Regardless of the channel or tactic, marketers should be constantly testing, and the immediate next step after running a test should always be to ask the question "why." Here's my framework for answering the "Why" to get the most out of your testing strategy.

1. Evaluate the data.

Don't dig too deep, yet. The first step is to understand the playing field. Look for anything that seems interesting, unexpected, or is an outlier. Take quick notes so that you know what to dig into deeper.

2. Ask why.

For every data point you flagged, ask yourself why that might be the case. Develop a few hypotheses. Then dig into the data to try to confirm or reject your hypotheses, and ask why again.

3. Test your hypothesis.

Dig into the data to see if there is enough data to validate your hypothesis. If there isn't enough data, devise a test that will give you the data you need to draw insights.

4. Repeat.

The biggest thing is to go two levels deeper than you would expect. As toddlers, nothing is a given or inherently understood. There is always a deeper why. Think about that toddler's line of questioning...it never stops with just one "Why?" While the conversation can theoretically go on forever, the essence is that the more you ask why – the deeper into the rabbit hole you're willing to go – the deeper the resulting insight and the more impactful that insight will be into your campaigns, strategy, and business outcomes.

As experts, it's our responsibility to develop strong hypotheses based on our experience, and then adjust based on our findings. Performance marketing is not about having all the answers right from the start, but if every single action we take has a clear answer to the "Why," we can ensure that our decisions are backed by data and that we are always striving for the best possible outcome.

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