

What you need to know about paid social in 2024

I believe we're going through a once-in-a-generational shift of how businesses grow. The 2010s were about short termism, left brain immediacy and logic. But we have just been through/are living through a generational shift in culture, business, and technology.

So as we all navigate a new normal, and face what for many have been existential challenges – from changing consumer habits to a dramatically different investor landscape – we need to think about things differently. In marketing terms, we're entering a new wave of creativity, advertising and growth.

For consumer brands, getting your performance marketing right – and in particular, paid social – is the highest priority and most common problem to solve. That's why we're launching the Ballpoint Paid Social Accelerator, open to early stage companies that want to get the foundations of their strategy right. Applications are [open now](#).

In the meantime, here are the things I think you need to know if you're investing in paid social in 2024.

Reaching your audience has nothing to do with demographics

When most people think of targeting ads they think about demographics – a 34 year old woman in Manchester who is University educated, interested in fitness and shops at Sainsbury's. But when we work with new clients, this is always the first thing we change. Why?

You can find people who are demographically opposite, and yet both fulfil the exact same buying reason – a 25 year old woman from north Hackney and a 50 year old man from Cornwall may seem very different on paper, but they may both be sober curious foodies who share the same problem and motivation. They'll likely respond to the same ad.

So lesson one, do away with demographics – make your approach to paid social broad. Don't exclude anyone. Use smart creative to speak meaningfully to a wide group of people with the same needs and wants.

As a rule of thumb – creative should use simple language which mirrors your audiences, use their quotes, reflect their culture and tap into zeitgeist or memes, and don't crowbar your visual style into their feed. This is the new targeting. Be as broad as possible in your media buying, and as relevant and mirroring as you can in your creative strategy.

2. Stop measuring stuff that doesn't matter. Learn to live with uncertainty.

Firstly, it's time to stop using platform metrics to measure performance of that channel. Platform metrics, and by that we mean the numbers reported in each tool's Ads Manager, are still brilliant for measuring the comparative performance of campaigns within them. But the last three years has seen a trend from device and browser developers to lessen data sharing. As a result, they are far less effective at showing the true view of those platforms.

And you can save your complex measurement models. CPMs, reach, impressions – these are vanity metrics and are rarely important to measure when you're small.

Instead, prioritise the stuff that has an impact on your business – paying customers. Always optimise for lower funnel items (purchase) over clicks or

page views – clicks do not correlate to conversions and multiple studies have shown this to be true.

A simpler, more holistic view also reflects the buying journey. Imagine you watch a Tiktok ad on your commute. You arrive at work 30 minutes later, and go direct to that website on your laptop. Then send a link via WhatsApp to your partner, who later searches it, clicks a PPC ad and goes on to purchase. What platform is responsible for that sale? Google would claim a conversion, and Tiktok wouldn't claim anything despite being arguably the most important impression.

Your measurement should be reflective of where you are as a business. Data is likely only ever about 80% of the true story and that's in the most data rich businesses in the world. So as an early stage business you won't get there. Learn to live with uncertainty.

3. Treat paid social like an organic channel

For the vast majority of brands, the volume of creative execution (by that I mean ads) needs to be much much higher.

Generally what works the best on organic will work on paid. At Ballpoint, we borrow a lot with our paid strategy that you might typically see in an organic strategy. By this, we mean freshness of content, responding to trends, and the agility to see certain content as appropriate for the day or week, without having to be seen as evergreen.

The best run paid social accounts have new content being launched all the time and involve experimenting with new styles and messaging.

Jump on trends or viral content, and try to keep the speed at which you produce an ad as fast as an organic post – keep it fresh and reactive and learn on the go.

Finally, just like organic content you need to make sure ads are platform centric, and by this I mean very simply make it appropriate for the channel and organic in feeling. Don't put a polished ad in a TikTok feed, make sure it feels like it belongs there.

Think about paid social as experimentation – ads are your tool to learn what your customers want.

4. Look for new features and channel opportunities

Finally – keep an eye out on when the ad platforms release new features because this will usually give you an opportunity to stand out. Keeping tabs on this means you can be an early entrant, with less competition and more novelty ads will have a stronger chance of being more successful. Lots of paid marketers are often cynical of new features, but we welcome them – new features mean less competition. Lean in.

Just like when Reels ads or TikTok ads were introduced, new opportunities arise so you should be prepared to take advantage. One to keep an eye on now is YouTube Shorts which is relatively new and might offer some opportunities for growth.

Again this boils down to experimentation and being open to testing and learning.

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