



Google campaign helps Sony BMG artists to top spots in the charts

“Using the content network meant our ads were displayed to great effect on sites that we would be unlikely to pick as relevant in a standard media buy.”

Daniel Ayers, Director of Digital Services, Sony BMG



How do you encourage people to buy albums in the era of ‘try-before-you-buy’ downloads? To maintain sales, the music industry needs to boost the appeal of this once-prevalent format. Engaging consumers while they are exploring and buying music online is an important part of this process.

To promote upcoming albums by leading artists Mark Ronson and Avril Lavigne, Columbia Records (part of Sony BMG) decided to make all tracks available on the artists’ microsites six weeks before release. “It’s increasingly difficult to convince consumers to make the jump from downloading the 1 or 2 tracks they know from an album, to buying the whole record. One way to do this is simply to give the consumer every possible chance to hear the entire release, so they know what they’re getting” says Daniel Ayers, Director of Digital Marketing, Sony BMG.

But for this to work, Sony BMG needed to have effective signposts to the microsites, which sat on the Columbia website. Alongside this, Ayers wanted to raise general awareness of the artists. “To achieve this, we need a format that makes an immediate impression on people, without them necessarily visiting the website.”

Two tactics in one campaign

For Lavigne, Sony BMG wanted to build on the singer’s existing fan base, while Ronson – in terms of the mainstream music market, a new artist – offered a number of opportunities to attract fans because the album features famous collaborators such as Amy Winehouse, Lilly Allen and Robbie Williams.

Previously, Sony BMG had run several small but successful campaigns using Google AdWords – mainly to drive traffic to websites for new artists. For Ronson and Lavigne, Google suggested a dual approach with a strong visual/audio element:

- A search campaign using the Google search page and Google content network to display pay-per-click text-based ads;
- Click-to-play ads placed on relevant sites throughout the content network.

The search campaign was designed to drive microsite traffic, while the click-to-play focused on generating awareness. Preparation began in March 2007, with both campaigns going live in early April and running for six weeks. “Given that the search campaigns included hundreds of keyword combinations for each artist, Google were invaluable in leading us through the potential complexities of the set-up” Ayers says.

“Now we are looking at co-ordinating our online ads with offline media. By making these channels work together, we can build on the success of this campaign.”

Daniel Ayers, Director of Digital Services, Sony BMG

Content network presents new avenues

Following Ayers’ brief, Google’s account strategists devised groups of keywords and corresponding ad copy for each artist. When users ran a Google search including a keyword, the results page displayed a link with a call-to-action such as “Mark Ronson featuring Lilly Allen, listen here.” Ayers says: “One of the biggest benefits of working with Google on a larger scale was access to its expertise in keyword and ad-group creation.”

At the same time, the ads appeared on specific channels across the Google content network. Google’s technology contextually placed the text ads on websites containing relevant content. For example, if a site contained a blog entry on Amy Winehouse, the ad highlighting her collaboration with Mark Ronson would appear there.

“Using the content network meant our ads were displayed on sites that we would never have thought of,” Ayers says. “For the Lavigne campaign, it was no surprise that youtube.com gave us by far the most clickthroughs but we didn’t expect a wedding photography site to be seventh-highest, with a spectacular conversion rate of 42%. This insight into our customers has a value that extends beyond the life of the campaign.”

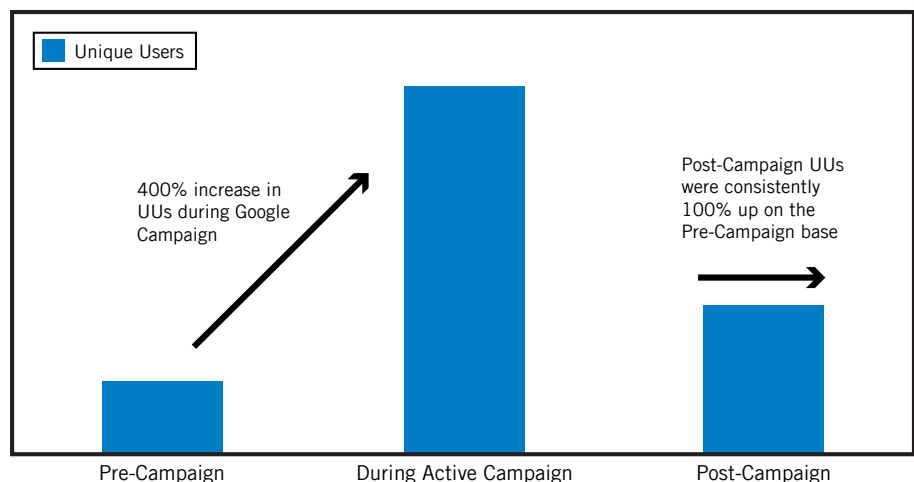
The Google team changed the ad copy to flag the launch of each album – from ‘pre-order now’ to ‘buy now’.

Rising traffic

High click-through rates for Lavigne and Ronson meant the search campaign was a major success. During April, overall traffic on the Columbia website was five times higher than normal. Taking into account the impact of one other online campaign running in April, the Lavigne and Ronson advertising was responsible for two-thirds of this additional traffic.

During the campaign in April the number of unique users to the site increased 400%. There was also impressive traffic retention, the site now maintains twice as many unique users as before the campaign started. “We hoped we would retain some of the additional traffic, and the results show exactly that,” says Ayers. “Return on investment for the pay-per-click ads across Google’s content network was excellent.”

Sony BMG (Columbia) Website Unique Users





Interactive ads

Sony created one click-to-play video ad for Lavinie, and three for Ronson, featuring Lily Allen, Robbie Williams and Amy Winehouse respectively. Google's account team placed them using two methods: on specific channels and, for Ronson, in response to users' Google search terms. The number of times an ad appeared on any given page was determined by Google's auction system, which places ads by comparing the maximum 'bid' set by each advertiser.

The Google account team chose the most appropriate channels to distribute the click-to-play ads across. For Ronson, this included a range of locations to reflect the characteristics of each collaborator. For example, the ads featuring Lily Allen and Amy Winehouse were displayed on the shopping channel because of their association with fashion.

The team monitored the click-to-play rate for each location. It then optimised the campaign by focusing on the channels with the highest play rates. "It's a real bonus that Google adjusts the campaigns to favour the strategies with the best returns," says Ayers.

The Lavinie video alone generated almost 75,000 views. Because users had to click on the ad to watch the video, each view reflects an active interest in the singer.

Albums top the charts

Lavinie's album entered the charts at number one on the week of release, and Ronson's at number two. "There's no doubt that our online campaigns contributed to this success," Ayers says. "Not least because they were almost 100 per cent targeted towards existing and potential fans."

Insights into performance

By logging into his online account, Ayers could gauge the performance of the ads at any time, as well as receiving thorough end-of-campaign results from Google. These showed a clear interaction between the online campaign and offline equivalents, convincing Ayers of the benefits of an integrated approach: "Now we are looking at co-ordinating our online ads with offline media. By making these channels work together, we can build on the success of this campaign."

