

What “Performance” Really Means

By Jeff Adelson-Yan

Today I participated in an on camera interview. The topic was “performance”. It’s a word that I use practically everyday, and yet when asked what it meant to me, I had to stop and think about it. Let’s face it, performance is one of those words that is really overused in our industry and when a word is overused, it often loses its true meaning.

To better understand this word and the meaning it conveys, let’s take a step back and look at it in the context of everyday life. I think “performance” is often easiest to see in the situations we are most accustomed to seeing it, like a sporting event, or through the achievements of great people. In my opinion, performance is often approached with too narrow of a view - it is defined in absolute terms; like success and failure, but the magnitude of performance is so much greater and more complex than that.

A great example is Michael Jordan. No doubt, he is one of the greatest athletes of any generation, who in his professional career lost more than 300 games and missed more than two dozen game-winning shots. Yet in the game of basketball, he embodies performance. In this situation, performance can be defined as the culmination of all events big and small, successes and failures that give life character and meaning.

In advertising, performance has gone from nearly absent to omnipresent. The culprit for this is the Internet. The Internet has really made advertising more measurable. It’s added accountability to an industry that has been lacking it in other forms of advertising such as TV, print and radio. What amazes me the most is the speed with which everything happens online. Consider the dip in the stock market last week. Before the Internet, you would simply have to wait to pick up a newspaper at the end of the day to see how stocks and mutual funds fared. Today, there is a wealth of real-time information online. For instance on Yahoo! Finance, you can get up to the minute stock quotes, read the headlines from various news sources surrounding a particular stock or fund, look at detailed graphs and charts, read a company profile, read the message boards, read a blog, get analyst opinions, you can even find out how “insiders” are trading the stock at any given moment. The list goes on and on, but the point I’m trying to make is that the Internet has materially changed the way people consume content, and as such, the way we can now market to these people has also changed. “Performance” has become real-time.

The beauty of this fact is that everyone can benefit from this instant feedback. The advice I always give to advertisers, is test everything online first. It doesn't matter if you are going to run a television commercial, print campaign or series of radio spots; test it all online first. Does your message resonate with the audience you are looking to reach? Does your creative illicit the actions you are looking for? If the answer is no, then refine and test again online. The knowledge gained from poor performing tests is powerful and should be used accordingly. Before you spend a dollar filming that :30 second TV spot, before you send your advertising collateral to the printers, test it online. It's cost-effective and the feedback is instantaneous. The Internet, as a sounding board, truly gives you valuable and instant learning. Now that is performance