

# How to Fuel Ad Sales with Your Tech Stack

## INTRODUCTION

Ad sales aren't what they used to be. Ask any traditional publisher. In the newspaper industry alone, advertising revenue dropped 13% in just one year, from \$16.5 billion in 2017 to \$14.3 billion in 2018.<sup>1</sup> For newspapers and magazines collectively, an 18% drop in traditional ad spend was anticipated in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the process of selling ads and managing those sales, has grown more complex. Publishers often employ different staffs for print and digital advertising. These reps sell ads that are viewed on everything from print pages to laptop screens, from tablets to smartphones and other connected devices. Siloed, disconnected systems inhibit collaboration and productivity among teams, as well as hinder efforts to match the right advertiser with the right product.

None of this means that ad sales have grown unprofitable. In fact, eMarketer estimated total ad spend in the United States increased roughly 19% in 2019, to more than \$129 billion.<sup>3</sup> But most of this increase comes from digital ad sales, and many traditional publishers remain technologically ill-equipped to capture much of that market. In 2019, eMarketer projected digital ad sales for traditional publishers to increase by just slightly more than 2%. Conversely, tech giants Amazon, Facebook and Google secured the lion's share of digital ad spend – nearly 70%.<sup>4</sup> That's not to say brands don't want to invest in digital ad sales with traditional media – smart advertisers know the value of publishers' established, engaged audiences.

Total US  
ad spend  
increased  
**19%**  
in 2019

In order to meet the expectations of advertisers in this digital-first age, news organizations must fine-tune their underlying sales engines – especially as they expand their product portfolios to include events, social media, branded content and more cross-channel offerings. This paper will examine how publishers and media can leverage end-to-end solutions to excel in the modern marketplace.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, [State of the News Media: Newspaper Fact Sheet](#), 2019

<sup>2</sup> eMarketer, [US Digital Ad Spending Will Surpass Traditional in 2019](#), 2019

<sup>3</sup> eMarketer, [Digital Ad Revenue Gains Remain Elusive for Magazines and Newspapers](#), 2019

<sup>4</sup> Marketing Land, [Almost 70% of digital ad spending going to Google, Facebook, Amazon, says analyst firm](#), 2019

## RE-ARCHITECT YOUR AD BUSINESS

Today's publishers need to simultaneously increase ad revenue and improve the efficiency of ad operations. Traditional datacenters – expensive to run, difficult to upgrade, impossible to scale – are a major roadblock. Siloed, disparate systems hamstring sales and exacerbate operational inefficiencies. To transform their advertising businesses, organizations must integrate data and revamp their technological architecture.

Modern, cloud-based platforms unite previously scattered information on each advertiser into a single customer view, helping the publisher better understand the advertiser's needs and improve customer journeys. These end-to-end solutions give sales reps the data, tools and flexibility they need to sell a publisher's evolving mix of products – including print, digital and hybrid, multi-touch advertising packages. They also ease and improve the reporting process, providing publishers with metrics to gauge sales performance and campaign success.

Digital ad sales tools can improve operational efficiency by streamlining separate workflows onto a single platform, and by automating formerly manual processes like billing and order management. Since these platforms are cloud-based and are typically offered as a pay-as-you-go subscription, they help future-proof businesses, enabling publishers to easily scale operations as demands require.



## TRANSFORM THE SALES CYCLE

The capabilities of an integrated ad platform do nothing short of reinvent the sales cycle for the digital age. Perhaps the most important of these capabilities is the establishment of a 360-degree customer view.

Without an integrated system, information on a single advertiser may be distributed across several platforms – with digital campaigns in one database, traditional ads on a second and event advertising on a third. These various systems have no way of communicating with each other, leaving the publisher with only a fragmented view of each advertiser.

## Use Real-Time Metrics to Change Course

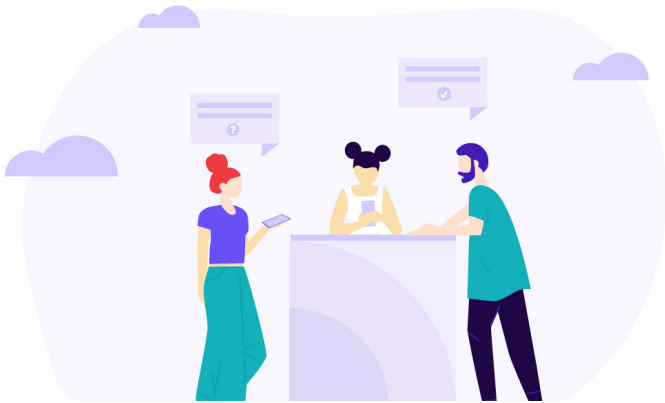
Analytics associated with digital ad sales tools enable advertisers to learn in near-real time if their advertising strategies are running according to plan, or if change may be needed. Imagine a digital ad is slated to run for a month and is projected to receive 1 million interactions during that time. If by day 10 the ad has received only 30,000 interactions, something isn't working. In order to achieve the desired play, the advertiser may choose to rewrite the ad – retooling it to target a broader audience, perhaps. This ability to change course mid-campaign would be impossible without real-time metrics.

"If you're only seeing one slice of the pie, you can't fully understand how the advertiser is spending its money," says Donna Beasley, advertising products business director for Naviga, a provider of content engagement solutions for the global publishing industry. "Publishers may look at the advertiser's budget for print advertising and think its advertising budget is decreasing. But that may not be the case. The advertiser may be reducing spend on print advertising, but actually increasing overall spending through digital advertising, advertising in e-newsletters, and advertising in other products. Having a complete customer view enables you to start tracking how that customer is spending. Then you can make sure that you're providing the products and opportunities the advertiser wants to invest in."

**"Having a complete customer view enables you to start tracking how that customer is spending. Then you can make sure that you're providing the products and opportunities the advertiser wants to invest in."**

Beasley maintains that having the full picture of each advertiser enables sales by improving the customer journey: from helping publishers to target the right advertiser with the right product through to ad placement and automated e-billing and e-payment options.

"Digital engagement platforms have taken CRM from a transaction processing system to true customer relationship management," Beasley says. "You can look at an advertiser and see its whole history. You can see if its spending is on the increase or decrease. You can see if an advertiser is just getting started with your company and needs a 'high touch' relationship – receiving nurture at every step of the way. Or you can see if a company that's been with you for the last five years has just hired a new finance person – someone in charge of approving ad spend. When you see that information, you may decide you need to go have lunch with that guy."



“Digital engagement platforms have taken CRM from a transaction processing system to true customer relationship management.”

Modern systems also help advertisers invest in new ways to buy ads. Specifically, these platforms help advertisers to break into new markets, and enable them to invest in audience-buy rather than media-buy, approaches to ad placement.

Digital-native channels including social media, webinars, podcasts and online videos may be new territory for some advertisers. With an integrated platform, publishers can offer the right mix of formats and placement opportunities to clients. These systems are easy enough to administer and work with so publishers can quickly address new market opportunities. If you see an opportunity for one of your advertisers to buy a spot in a podcast, or in a webinar, these platforms provide a way for you to quickly respond to these opportunities. With legacy systems, it's much harder to do that.

And audience-buy capabilities enable advertisers to more closely align their ads with a receptive audience. Traditionally, publishers have presented advertisers with a list of their publications and websites, and have asked their clients where they wanted to place ads. Audience-buy capabilities upend this process. Imagine the owner of an automobile dealership that specializes in high-end sports cars. He wants to reach high-income men ages 18-35 and buy advertising only in periodicals, on websites or adjacent to articles drawing that demographic. Analytics available on streamlined digital platforms help advertisers make those buys.

According to Beasley, this isn't a new concept. She notes that seasoned sales reps have always been able to provide potential advertisers with this type of targeted insight. Now, though, "The newest rep can sell at the same level of expertise as an established professional, leading to better-placed ads and revenue gains," she says.



**“The newest rep can sell at the same level of expertise as an established professional, leading to better-placed ads and revenue gains.”**

Thanks to the reporting capabilities of modern ad platforms, publishing companies can better track progress and prove the efficacy of their advertising efforts. In the past, most publishers had a very limited ability to develop granular metrics, and gathering data from multiple platforms made it difficult to paint a complete campaign story.

"Traditionally, extracting the story has been such a challenge," says James Arnold, chief digital officer for Rooster Strategic Solutions, a consulting and marketing agency. "Proving the effectiveness of advertising — did you succeed or fail? — has taken publishers weeks or months, if they could do it at all. Then, by the time you could communicate it out...well, that takes even more weeks or months. And by that time, the information was meaningless."

An integrated system's reporting capabilities provide speedy access to metrics that now help publishers provide near real-time information to their advertisers, proving the power of their audiences and campaign strategies — or alerting publishers that they need to tweak their campaigns to achieve advertisers' goals.

"Before, you had different specialized subsystems for print advertising vs. web advertising, for newsletters, for social media. And they're all generating their own metrics in their own time frames," Beasley says. "So if an advertiser said to you, 'I spent \$59,000 with you last month. Where did it all go?,' you couldn't easily tell him that story without pulling together a lot of spreadsheets."

Now, publishers should have the ability to provide advertisers with information on advertising spend by type, month-to-month totals, which audience they're reaching. This allows them to slice the story however the advertiser wants to see it.

## Getting Started

Thinking about implementing a digital engagement platform for ad sales and operations? Arnold suggests publishers start by taking a comprehensive look at their tech stack. Examine its capabilities in alignment with what you're doing today, and what you hope to do in the future. Determine how your existing system supports or stymies advertising operations. Develop a specific list of goals for future technology, aligning it with your overall advertising strategy. When working with an outside partner, discuss not just what technology the company offers, but how the technology can help you meet those goals.

## STREAMLINE ADVERTISING OPERATIONS

Transforming the sales cycle is one way publishers can survive an evolving market. Improving the efficiency of advertising operations by connecting systems and automating processes is another. Again, modern tools purpose-built for ad sales can help.

"Right now, too many publishers are faced with a host of disparate systems and tools, none of which are capable of communicating with each other," Arnold says. "Because marketing technology has yet to go through its convergence, so many tools – new tools, old tools – are not coordinated enough to help accomplish all these advertising tasks in a more efficient way."

So you have accounting, insertion orders, inventory control, ad delivery, social media, finance, CMS. None of these systems work together. At the end of the month, if you want to know if a bill went out to an advertiser, it might take contacting three people and an e-mail chain just to get that answer. With a digital engagement platform, you can just log into a centralized dashboard to get this information.

This automation becomes increasingly important as publishers face ever-tightening budgets. Some turn to technology with an eye toward reducing employee headcount, redirecting funds formerly spent on salaries to other parts of the company. Others use these platforms to replace personnel who have already been let go.



**“[Publishers] need a platform that covers everything from lead generation to cash collection, with increased efficiency and a reduction in errors.”**

"We have seen a tremendous decline in staffing among our publishers," says Beasley. "They have all had to reduce head count. So now they need technology to take up the slack. They need automated workflows, automated approval of advertising copy, automated credit checks, audit tracking, inventory control. They need a platform that covers everything from lead generation to cash collection, with increased efficiency and a reduction in errors."



When investing in technologies to improve advertising sales and achieve efficiencies, publishers should look for digital platforms, along with associated software and services, that provide a broad array of capabilities. These should include:

✓ **CRM for ad sales**

CRM software should provide publishers with an easier, more automated way to track opportunities, fill pipelines and improve customer communications. It should enable sales reps to view past and upcoming orders, create proposals and combine orders for print, digital and exhibition products.

✓ **Order management and billing systems**

Order management and billing systems should help advertising departments handle any type of advertising – display ads, classified ads, digital ads, sponsorships, custom content and more – and combine information about them onto a single system.

✓ **Production workflow**

Production workflow systems should enable publishers to set up and manage multiple production queues for print, digital and other types of advertising products.

✓ **Advertisers portal**

The best platforms offer online portals advertisers can use to access their orders, invoices, ad materials, proposals and contracts. These portals should enable advertisers to submit or change content for upcoming orders, contact their sales reps, pay invoices, and book and pre-pay for new orders.

✓ **Digital ad management**

Digital ad management capabilities should enable publishers and advertisers to target ad placement by website, network, section, position, region, time of day, day of the week and by other custom values.

✓ **Ad server integration**

Digital engagement platforms should integrate with publishers' ad servers to improve inventory management, automatically share orders between systems and return real-time performance information.

✓ **Financials, credit and collections**

Look for products that help publishers smoothly handle a broad array of financial tasks – including accounts receivable, accounts payable, general ledger items and more – while automating invoicing and payment approval processes. These should integrate with popular accounting systems and enable publishers to quickly import existing accounts from spreadsheets. Software should enable publishers to organize accounts by age and to automate collections.

✓ **Reporting and analysis**

Invest in digital platforms that offer software to easily and quickly produce pipeline reports, year-on-year comparisons, sales performance, pacing reports, rankings, customer analyses and product analyses.

## FINAL THOUGHT

Print ad sales have plummeted, hurting traditional publishers and media. However, by revamping ad sales strategies and taking advantage of modern technologies, publishers can streamline their sales operations and thrive in the digital age.

