**Going Native: What Is Native Advertising and Why Is It So Effective?**

You've probably heard a lot of buzz about native advertising lately, but what exactly is it? Native advertising is a form of paid online advertising that closely mimics the look, feel and format of the surrounding content on the web page, making it virtually indistinguishable from the regular page content.

Practically all of the largest social media companies in the world (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram) use native advertising, and many of the top publishing names in the digital space (e.g., The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, USA Today, etc.) have adopted this unique form of integrated advertising as well. So how and why is native advertising so effective?

**Native Advertising: The Cure for "Ad Blindness"**

Even without any background in marketing, it’s easy to see how native advertising can be a powerful and highly effective format for businesses to use to get their potential prospects' attention. In today's world of nearly non-stop media, most of us are accustomed to seeing advertisements everywhere we look. This can create "ad blindness," a problem that’s plagued marketers for years.

Native advertising enables businesses to essentially integrate their marketing messages with the surrounding content so that they’ll appear less jarring or intrusive, reducing the risk of turning viewers off before getting a chance to reach them.

**Benefits of Native Advertising**

Research suggests that native ads are actually viewed for the same amount of time on average as regular editorial content. This gives native ads the unique ability to be shared by users, which is virtually unheard of for banner or display ads.

Because native ads virtually mimic the content that surrounds them, they are essentially just as shareable as the non-paid content elements that appear on the same page; this can open up opportunity for ads to go viral. The increased audience engagement and higher shareability that native ads can afford make them a perfect fit for advertising campaigns that require a more interactive yet non-disruptive approach.

**Examples of Native Advertising**

\* Google's Search Engine Results Pages - This is perhaps one of the most easily recognizable forms of native advertising. Google places three or four paid ads at the very top of their search engine results pages that look exactly like the organic listings directly below them. Practically everything looks the same (e.g., text size and font, link color, etc.), with the only real difference being a small label entitled "Ad" that lets users know it's a paid AdWords ad.

\* Twitter's Promoted Tweets - These ads look just like any other tweet you might spot while scrolling through your Twitter feed, but if you look closely, you'll see a small line of text near the bottom of the tweet that reads "Promoted by [Company Name]". This lets you know that it’s a native advertisement.

\* News Feed Ads - These are some of the hardest types of native ads to recognize because they blend in so well with their surroundings. You’ll often find these types of ads on news-based sites such as BuzzFeed, Mashable, Gizmodo, The Daily Mail, Huffington Post, and so forth. Native news feed ads will typically take up an entire sidebar or footer of a web page, and will feature a handful of ads with eye-grabbing images and news-style headlines that can easily be mistaken for any other news story being promoted on the page. Usually, the block or page element that contains these native ads will be marked as "Sponsored" or "Presented by [Company Name]" to somewhat distinguish them from the surrounding content.

\* Advertorial Ads - This form of native advertising has actually been around for quite a while. What sets advertorial ads apart is that they’re designed to look like an entire piece of editorial content, instead of just appearing as a small ad in the sidebar or header/footer of a web page. Native advertorial ads commonly appear in both offline and online publications.

**Ethical Considerations: Is Native Advertising Shady or Legit?**

There are some people who believe native advertising is a somewhat underhanded or deceptive technique, because many users may not notice that the content is labeled "Sponsored" or "Promoted" before they click on it. Proponents of native advertising assert that most ads are clearly labeled, and it's just a matter of "reading the fine print."

The best practice for native advertising lies in providing related, quality content that someone who clicks through or reads – no matter if they’re duped or if they clicked willingly – will appreciate and take an interest in. “Click bait” headlines and other techniques that are solely aimed at getting clicks will not give your business anything except a reputation for being shady and untrustworthy. You’ll find that when used well, native advertising can help boost not only your brand exposure, but also its integrity.