

Personalisation: don't be the lazy uncle of advertising

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Whilst searching for a Secret Santa present for a colleague, I noticed that there's a nice parallel between really effective personalised / targeted **advertising** and buying somebody a great Christmas gift. In order to get it right you need to know the person in question pretty well; you need to know their interests, hobbies, tastes; and you need to combine these factors with knowledge of what they've already got.

Take the present I got my Dad last year.

A couple of years back we gifted / offloaded our family cat to my parents as he'd been shot with an air rifle by a weirdo neighbour (yes, seriously – what an arsehole), so we thought he'd be better off living in the country with my folks. It turns out that said cat (Soze) is a bit of a ruthless hunter and took to life in the country rather well, delivering mice, shrews, rats, baby rabbits and on a few occasions partridges to my parents' kitchen on a fairly regular basis. However, despite his bloodthirsty nature my Dad was quite taken with Soze and I'd receive many a picture of how he was fairing in the country, most of which were somewhat gory snaps of his latest kill and the resulting mess. So as a gift to my old man last Xmas, I created a personalised calendar featuring 12 images of Soze's kills from the equivalent months the previous year. It went down a treat; it was ridiculous, but tickled his sense of humour and I'd like to believe, was his favourite present that year.

The point is that it's hard to get right, but if you do it's worth the effort.

The problem with presents is it's not always that easy, and if you get it wrong you're in danger of slipping into the lazy uncle bracket – you know the one, where you casually mention one year that you're interested in fishing and then for the rest of your life get gifted fishing books, DVDs, hooks, nets, spinners.... I hate fishing.

Sending someone a targeted or personalised advert is like sending someone a gift. It stops being a generic message and it starts to say 'I know something about you, I know what you're interested in / I know what you want'. Coming from a 3rd party, from someone you don't know, this is a risky area to navigate and without first party, high quality data on who you're speaking to, its odds-on that more often than not you're going to get it wrong.

The bottom line, if you get it right, the results can be impressive. Get it wrong and you'll become the **advertising** equivalent of a lazy uncle, chasing people around the internet with fishing gear.

And remember, although they say it's the thought that counts, everyone knows really, it's all about the gift.

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