

CPG giant Unilever announces no more Facebook, Twitter ads through 2020

Yesterday Verizon announced it was joining the “Stop Hate for Profit” Facebook ads boycott. Today Unilever said it will stop all advertising on Facebook and Twitter through the end of the year.

The company issued a statement explaining its decision, first reported by the Wall Street Journal. “Given our Responsibility Framework and the polarized atmosphere in the U.S., we have decided that starting now through at least the end of the year, we will not run brand advertising in social media newsfeed platforms Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in the U.S. Continuing to advertise on these platforms at this time would not add value to people and society.” It added that it would maintain 2020 ad-spending levels, but shift budget “to other media.”

A roster of household brands. Unilever owns CPG brands such as Dove, Lipton, Vaseline, Q-Tip, Noxzema and Ben & Jerry’s ice cream, among numerous others. The company spent over \$8 billion on brand advertising globally last year. Ben & Jerry’s had earlier decided to join the boycott. That move may have prompted the parent corporation to take this stand.

Verizon’s statement yesterday marked a new level of visibility for the Stop Hate campaign, which includes Patagonia, North Face, REI, Eddie Bauer, Magnolia Pictures and several others in addition to Verizon and Unilever. This takes it to another level entirely and will certainly motivate other brands to join the boycott. We should see similar announcements over the next few days.

Wanted: platforms that make ‘a positive contribution.’ This is not the first time Unilever has taken a stand against a “toxic” online environment. Two years ago it threatened to stop spending on Google and Facebook. At the time, Unilever CMO Keith Weed said, “Unilever, as a trusted advertiser, do[es] not want to advertise on platforms which do not make a positive contribution to society.”

It’s possible that other major CPG brands such as Proctor & Gamble will follow Unilever’s lead, although that remains to be seen. Certainly this move puts pressure on others to take a public position on the issue. To the extent that Stop Hate gathers even more momentum and publicity, remaining on the platform in July could imply to consumers that brands are tolerant of racism or hate speech – a position no brand wants to be associated with.

Why we care. The boycott will probably not have a financial impact on Facebook, although if others follow Unilever’s lead and pull ads for the rest of the year it could. But it’s the platform’s reputation with marketers and the public that’s at stake.

Facebook, in an effort to preempt further Stop Hate momentum, has been talking to advertisers and civil rights groups. But behind the scenes conversations are no longer going to be sufficient, the company will be compelled to make a public statement about changes in policing hate speech, racism and disinformation on the platform.

About The Author



Greg Sterling is a Contributing Editor to Search Engine Land, a member of the programming team for SMX events and the VP, Market Insights at Uberall.

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