Microsoft launches new audience network, ‘Audience Ads’ at Bing Partner Summit

This morning at the Bing Partner Summit, at Microsoft headquarters, the company announced a new display network, the Microsoft Audience Network (MSAN). Though the company has had the “Bing Audience Network,” the new offering brings together a number of elements that weren’t previously available: Bing search-intent signals, Microsoft’s AI capabilities and the Microsoft audience graph.

AOL has to date been the exclusive seller of Microsoft display advertising. And to run display ads, including on Microsoft properties, marketers had to make a separate buy with AOL. (I've asked Microsoft whether this announcement ends the AOL partnership but have yet to hear back.)

Now, Bing search advertisers will be able to extend their campaigns through what Microsoft is calling "Audience Ads" across various Microsoft and third-party properties. There are two options for marketers:

- **Audience Ads search-extensions**. Currently launching for the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, with other markets to follow. This is a basic approach that pushes the Bing campaign out to the broader MSAN.
- **Audience Ads campaigns.** These include dedicated/optimized creative and separate reporting. This is US only for now, with a global rollout planned for later in the year.

The immediate question is: What makes MSAN and Audience Ads different, compared with Google or Facebook? Google can extend search query data into display campaigns. Google also offers audience targeting. Both Google and Facebook have AI and machine-learning assets.

Steve Sirich, general manager of search advertising at Microsoft, cited several factors: brand safety, the Microsoft graph and the quality of the MSAN. He also argued that the audience graph includes millions of people "you can't reach on Google or Facebook."

Microsoft says, for example, that there are 63 million search users that Google can't reach in the MSAN. Bing reportedly sees over 20 billion monthly searches around the world and has more than 500,000 active Bing advertisers.

The Microsoft audience graph consists of 120 million Office365 subscribers, 1.5 billion Windows users and 500 million

LinkedIn users. LinkedIn professional data is a unique element in the mix. There's also data from Outlook and Skype users.

The company hasn't yet disclosed any third parties participating in the network publicly. However, display ads will appear on Microsoft properties such as MSN, Outlook.com and the Edge browser.

As indicated, Sirich told me that the Microsoft Audience Network will initially be available in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. He added that it's privacy- and GDPR-compliant for the UK market.

Sirich explained that while there are extensive audience targeting capabilities, there's "no sensitive targeting" (e.g., politics, religion). As mentioned, Microsoft has also taken special care to protect brand safety. He added that this is being "managed carefully and closely."

Beta advertisers that have been testing Audience Ads include Kohl's, Lending Tree and HomeAdvisor.

About The Author

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