

JACK MYERS Media Business Report™

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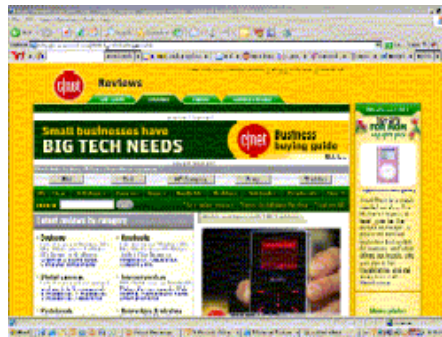
CNET Advocates Starch Studies for Online Creative

BY: Jack Myers

CNET Networks, which was mentioned on CNBC last week (along with iVillage) as one of the Internet sector's most attractive stocks, has invested with Los Angeles-based ad agency Ignited Minds to introduce traditional print-based Starch Research techniques to online advertising. Starch, a division of NOP World, has for years been a leading supplier of syndicated and custom research to the print industry and Starch data is considered a standard for advertising creative evaluation by creative agencies and magazine publishers.

"It's time to stop talking about why advertisers should use the Internet and talk more about *how* to use the Internet," commented Joe Gillespie, chief marketing officer of CNET in an interview with *Jack Myers Report*. "Interactive media kingpins are fed up with creative that is repurposed for the Internet but," he quickly adds, "this is not about pushing responsibility onto agency creative directors. Media need to take responsibility for informing creative strategies. The Starch relationship is about defining best practices and getting it right. Starch is prepared and we're prepared to scale this study for our advertisers and for other online publishers. The more extensive the research, the more best practices information available across sites to advertisers and agencies. This research represents an industry-wide initiative; we believe it works for everybody," says Gillespie pointing out the study has received a "warm and strong endorsement" from both the IAB and OPA.

Activision, Lucas Arts, Warner Brothers, Sony, HP and Nokia participated in the first wave of the Starch study, which evolved from an ongoing relationship between the Ignited Minds ad agency and CNET's Gamespot.com site. Initial results were released at last week's AD:TECH Conference in San Francisco and are available through CNET by contacting Leslie.dotson@cnet.com.



"It's logical that creative plays an important role, so why aren't we paying more attention to it," asks Gillespie. "We need to demonstrate to our marketing partners what works and what doesn't to be sure they keep spending." Gillespie, who had 15 years in the magazine industry before moving to TechTV as a co-founder and to CNET last July, believes "both advertisers and content providers have a vested interest in making sure ads work. It's harmful to the user experience if ads are not appealing."

"We know creative plays a huge role in generating response," added CNET VP Marketing Mickey Wilson, "but all the research like Dynamic Logic is campaign specific and not specific to

individual ads." She says the Starch study offers insights on the important relationship between visual images, headlines and body copy. "There are unique aspects of video, animation and flash that also need to be understood," she adds. "People are so busy and task oriented, the message can't be delayed. Flash may take too long." Gillespie adds, "we came to the realization that Starch has provided print creatives with years of learning and there are best practices for TV commercials that no one ignores. Advertisers don't consider producing 30-second spots without research. Online advertising requires its own set of best creative practices."

Wilson adds, "In the online experience users can self-select how deep or not deep they want to go with advertising. Online marries the impact of print with the motion and emotion of TV. Creative styles can co-exist and new insights are required to define the best mix for different objectives. Unlike TV and print, you don't have to choose whether an ad is emotional or rational and direct response-like. Messages can evoke emotions *and* be rational in their creative approach."

CNET's executives will be meeting with leading agencies and marketing partners to present the new Starch data and actionable insights. "Creative executives are getting more involved," Wilson reports. "They 'get it.' They understand this body of work can help drive a new dialogue between media and creative executives."