



# NATIVE ADVERTISING

10 Best Practices Every  
Marketer Should Know and Use

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Image source: <http://www.mobyaaffiliates.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/image-app-card-screenshots-5.png>

Consumers have grown accustomed to ignoring pushy display ads when they're browsing online. However, while [traditional methods are losing ground in the internet advertising space](#), native advertising has begun to find its way in. This "rebirth" in advertising online holds great potential for B2B companies to gain momentum with their audiences. So what does it entail?

Native advertising consists of branded messages placed so well [that people see them as part of the regular content](#) they are consuming. Instead of disrupting the viewer's experience on a platform, native ad placements blend into and can even enhance the platform's organic content. Native ads still carry purposeful information that the brand wants to communicate, but it's delivered in a more unusual way.

And this is what makes it especially useful for B2B businesses. In the B2B sphere, purchasing decisions are rarely made spontaneously. Potential customers usually undergo a long buying cycle. So, by presenting them with native ads in the right spot and at the right time, you'll gain the familiarity and trustworthiness that you'll need to close the deal.



Image source: <http://visual.ly/native-advertising-its-organic-its-fresh-its-handcrafted>

Research shows that native ads are viewed 53 percent more than traditional ones and generate an 82 percent brand lift. It’s no wonder, then, that 34 percent of B2B marketers are already riding the native ads bandwagon.

But while native advertising can really benefit your B2B company’s branding and sales success, it should be executed with care. Here are 10 tips to consider as you develop your native advertising plan of action.

## #1. Create a Strategy Aligned with Your Company’s Goals

A caveat: Your native ad efforts will only deliver impressive results if you set proper goals. Take time to align your ad ideas with your overall inbound marketing strategy, from type of content and language used, to the platform and timing.

Every piece of information you’ve gathered about your target customers should be used here. Demographics, and your target audience’s primary pain points, are especially important.

This data should also help you select the most appropriate platforms for your ads. When choosing a native ads platform, [Sharethrough’s Native Adscape](#) infographic can be of great help, as well as the Webby Awards’ “Best Use of Native Advertising” Category. But for many, LinkedIn Sponsored Updates are a top choice, while the best publishers for other brands include Business Insider, Forbes, and Quartz.

## #2. Try Advertorials and Sponsored Content

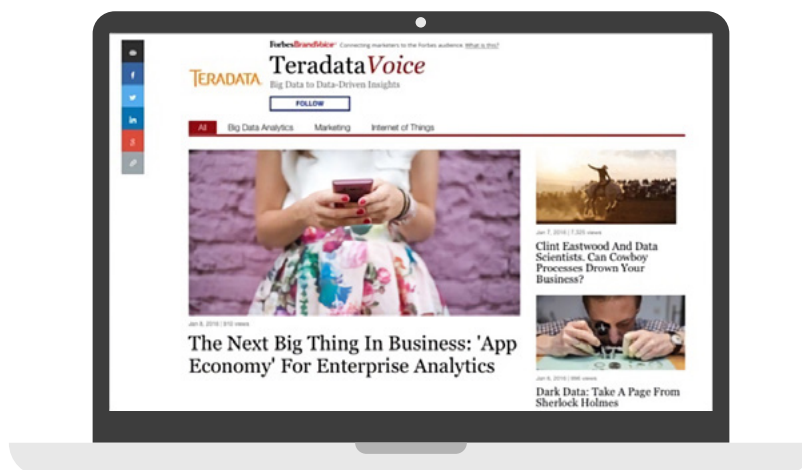


Image source: <http://b2bprblog.marxcommunications.com/b2bpr/what-is-native-advertising-discover-how-to-unleash-its-b2b-marketing-power>

Let's delve into a few different native advertising practices, starting with advertorials and sponsored content. In simpler terms, this marks your branded content as "sponsored," but places it alongside the original publisher's content. It is often displayed in the same format and design to the organic content.

Oftentimes, the media platform and the sponsoring company work in close collaboration to create advertorials. In some cases, the advertorial is launched directly by the brand. Either way, the goal is to avoid any interruption in the viewer's experience, while informing them and raising awareness about your brand.

A key point to remember when preparing your advertorial or sponsored content materials is to make them fit with their organic media environment. Your content should be relevant to the platform and provide real value to the audience. It's especially important to keep the branding tone down and focus on serving the reader. This will mean the difference between a disruptive ad and a skillfully-executed native ad.

## #3. Experiment with Promoted Tweets

Another intuitive platform for native advertising is Twitter: the social network where people are more likely to follow unfamiliar people and companies. Try using Twitter native ads to promote an event or product launch, or simply to boost brand awareness.

However, Twitter poses a unique challenge with its 140-character limit. Any promotions on this channel, therefore, need to be short and engaging.

Twitter's ad algorithm is what makes it an attractive platform for native ads. The algorithm assesses factors such as who people follow and their re-tweet history in order to determine which Promoted Tweets to display to them. This allows for precise targeting, meaning that your message is likely to be served to people who would connect with it.

## #4. Launch LinkedIn Sponsored Updates

The screenshot shows the LinkedIn Goals configuration page for a profile named 'www.cleverzbo.com'. The 'Goals (set 1): Goal 2' section is active. Under 'General Information', the 'Goal Name' field is empty, and the 'Active' radio button is selected. Under 'Goal Type', 'URL Destination' is selected. In the 'Goal Details' section, the 'Goal URL' field is highlighted with a blue dashed arrow. Below it, the 'Match Type' is set to 'Exact Match', and the 'Case Sensitive' checkbox is unchecked. The 'Goal Value' field is optional and empty. At the bottom, there is a 'Goal Funnel' section with a 'Use funnel' checkbox.

Since LinkedIn is the most popular social network for B2B professionals, it's a logical choice for native advertising. Businesses employ LinkedIn Sponsored Updates to both increase brand awareness and promote content assets such as articles, videos, infographics, events, or other campaigns. Your branded message would appear directly in users' feeds, sandwiched between the regular updates they are reading.

Initial tests in 2013, when LinkedIn first launched the native ad option, revealed that [sponsored messages achieve solid results](#) in terms of impressions and new followers. Expanding your audience on LinkedIn's professional network is a smart move, as it allows you to easily reach a target group that's highly relevant to your business goals.

Image source: <https://blog.kissmetrics.com/guide-to-linkedin-ads/>

To [create a powerful LinkedIn ad](#), be sure to include a brief, catchy headline, succinct copy, and a strong call-to-action to suggest to readers what their next step should be. As with other native ads, high-quality visuals—or even video—can make the content even more successful.

## #5. Explore Promoted Updates on Other Social Networks

Let's not forget that [many other social media channels offer native advertising](#), including Pinterest, YouTube, Reddit, and Tumblr. Each of these networks can also offer different kinds of audiences that might better suit your marketing goals.

Another useful platform is Foursquare, which uses geolocation technology to display targeted messages from companies in the vicinity of the user. Foursquare is great for local searches, so is especially handy for small or local businesses.

If you're going for a more innovative strategy, try [YouTube's new native ads](#), which allow for a seamless shopping experience right from a video. Thanks to YouTube's recent algorithm update, "product-centric" videos—like tutorials and reviews—are embedded with links to the products featured. These ads are thus an effortless opportunity for lead generation.

## #6. Invest in Sponsored Listings in Searches



Image source: <http://socialmediab2b.com/2016/02/b2b-native-advertising/>

An alternative to advertorials and social media native ads is to create sponsored listings on aggregator websites and search platforms. In buying a sponsored listing, your brand will appear in your viewer's search results. This means that, since your ad is displayed when a viewer uses search terms relevant to your product or service, the viewer might actually find your ad helpful. This can also be a useful way to position your brand on important industry websites.

One of the most popular platforms for sponsored listings is [Google text ads](#). These ads consist of a short, promotional piece of text and a link leading to a landing page on your company's website. When someone searches for the products and services you provide, they may be served your ad above organic results in their search, as well as in various other places across the Google display network.

## #7. Pursue Interactive Content

Brands are progressively experimenting with more engaging content forms, and one type that has gained a lot of traction is [interactive content](#).

A great example of interactive content used for native advertising is [General Electric promoting its participation in the 2013 Paris Air Show](#). The industrial giant partnered with BuzzFeed to create a series of sponsored content about aviation. Additionally, they collaborated to create a game called "Flight Mode," in which users could choose an article to read on BuzzFeed by flying a plane over it with their arrow keys.

If that was enough to inspire you, one way to use interactive content in your native advertising efforts is to [embed ads in video content](#). There are two main choices for this available: instream and outstream.

Instream ads are placed before, during, and after the video stream and are already being used on well-known platforms like YouTube.

But some marketers have also begun to play with the outstream option, in which video ads are placed among other types of content, such as text or imagery, instead of within another video.

## #8. Adapt All Content for Mobile

Even in the B2B marketing sphere, mobile advertising has been on the rise for the last few years. Mobile is extremely important for native ads. Conversion rates are much higher on mobile, so not optimizing your content for mobile means missing out on a goldmine.

One of the trickiest challenges with native advertising on mobile is the size of the screen. Due to the relatively small size of phone screens, it's much easier to perceive a mobile ad as intrusive and disregard it. This makes it even more imperative to create best-of-the-best branded content for mobile, and take extra care to provide value for viewers. Interactive content and other inventive formats are optimal, as are videos and other forms of entertaining, visual content.

A useful tip to remember when optimizing your content for mobile is to make your native ads easily shareable. Before you launch your campaign, make sure you test these ads thoroughly. Then, once in action, track results and gather data that can inform your next mobile campaign.

## #9. Learn to Speak the Native Language

The screenshot shows a GE-sponsored advertisement on The Economist website. The ad is titled "Look ahead" and is powered by GE. It features a video titled "Video: Executing Innovation" and a poll asking "Would you upload your mind to a machine if it meant you could live forever?". The ad also includes a search bar and a "TOPICS" button.

Image source: <http://b2b-marketing-mentor.softwareadvice.com/files/2013/08/GE-sponsored-post-The-Economist.png>

If you want your branded messages to be seen as organic, you need to use the “native tongue” of your chosen platform. This is the only way to make your ad truly native, and not disruptive or disconnected.

Every channel [has its own voice](#), which your brand should integrate with. Choose your tone of voice, content, and visuals wisely. These adjustments allow you to tell compelling stories in a wide variety of contexts. Again, take General Electric’s approach to native ads. They are playful and fun when published on BuzzFeed, but take on a much more sophisticated persona on The Economist.

The key is not to make your brand the centerpiece of your messages, in order to blend your native ads with the channel’s organic content effectively. You certainly want to communicate your company’s name and perhaps a few values, but focusing too much on these will defeat the point of native ads. Your brand should have presence, but should not be pushy.

## #10. Embrace Transparency to Win Trust

When it comes to advertising, nobody likes to be tricked into believing something. [The only way to gain the trust of today’s consumers is through transparency](#)—so make sure you always include a disclaimer on sponsored content. Thankfully, platforms usually already indicate with an icon or a small note that certain content is paid. Sometimes they even have a [special page dedicated to the partnership](#) between the sponsoring company and the media.

To ensure both transparency and good placement of your ads, choose platforms where native ads appear naturally. Twitter and LinkedIn, as mentioned before, are superior among social media channels for making ads noninvasive, as are Forbes and BuzzFeed in terms of advertorial content.

Top-quality native advertising can push your branding efforts and B2B lead generation to a whole new level. But to get the most out of your investment in native ads, it’s important to research and carefully select the channels you are going to use. Whether you opt for advertorials on online media, or sponsored updates on social media outlets, craft your branded content with care—and keep these 10 tips in mind to guide you in your efforts.



### Alexander Kesler Bio:

Alexander is a visionary B2B digital marketer with over 15 years of experience. Focusing on solutions for B2B demand generation, digital marketing, ABM, Intent and AI driven lead generation, among others, Alexander embraces innovation and turns concepts and methodologies into products and marketing programs that drive ROI.

As Founder and President of INFUSEmedia, a data-driven B2B Demand Generation Network, Alexander leads a global team that executes campaigns across all industries and company sizes. He leverages his market knowledge and industry expertise to help his team deploy a suite of innovative programs and campaigns that deliver revenue growth for over 400 clients of INFUSEmedia.

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