



The importance of understanding content vs. conversion

As a channel that has been premised on conversion, it has been the key unique selling point of the affiliate channel since its inception. Not only has this helped with the exponential growth of the channel, it has always appealed to those advertisers who want to have both control over spend but visibility on performance. However, while this has always been our strength, has it now become our Achilles heel?

Focusing on rewarding purely for the conversion for two decades has resulted in us ignoring the additional value that can be associated with the channel. While the conversion is the metric we have always been targeted against, it ignores the significant influence affiliates can have over the purchasing decision earlier in the customer journey.

Consider the sheer volume of additional engagement affiliates can offer without reward. For example, across the channel we can drive millions of impressions or clicks but if this does not result in conversion, the activity is deemed not worthy of payment. Imagine Google not being paid for clicks, or display advertising not receiving payment for impressions served. It is unthinkable. However, without rewarding for additional activity that sits around the conversion it is exactly what is happening across the affiliate channel.

With the payment metric rewarding the last click, it is no surprise to see business models congregating around the conversion. With advertisers looking to reduce their reliance on incentivised traffic sources there is a need to change the outlook and have flexibility in payment models to attract more content based affiliates.

It is important to note that certain affiliates have become multi-million pound brands in their own right, employing teams of account managers and support staff. This makes it increasingly difficult for single employee affiliates and those who are potentially building content in their spare time, to compete on an equal footing with such colossal enterprises.

This is not a criticism, more a testament to the industry's ability to nurture such successful businesses. However, it does make it increasingly evident that small affiliate enterprises need a strong level of support and assistance to receive the reward that is truly reflective of their value.

Could this be the year where we finally see a separation of content from conversion, allowing those affiliates that drive early funnel influence to be fairly rewarded for the role they play in attracting interest and shaping a purchasing decision? Ultimately their activity is often designed to perform a different function to the conversion centric voucher or cash reward sites, therefore to assume a uniform commercial model can appropriately reward all elements of an affiliate programme, logic dictates, can make little sense.

By offering flexible commission structures and rewards based influence, more content sites will be encouraged to enter the channel. This is something that advertisers have been demanding for years and is now very much in their control.