How would you describe your role at xAd?

Monica Ho: My role at xAd is to evangelize the location opportunity in mobile through first-to-market research and insights on behalf of all the work that goes on at xAd. As a result, we publish research studies and reports at least once a quarter and are very active in the industry through our association partnerships.

We're a 70-person company, and the marketing team has three people. We support different types of businesses and agencies that have various needs, and eMarketer gives us access to so much in one resource.

“Being able to use eMarketer’s tools and get those nuggets of data very quickly is essential.”

The marketing team does everything from managing our corporate branding and social media to PR, event planning, promotion, custom research and sales support. We basically wear a lot of different hats at xAd. As a startup, we have a very lean team and rely heavily on tools like eMarketer to make our teams more efficient. We do our own research, but a lot of times we put together strategies that need data to support our position. Being able to use eMarketer’s tools and get those nuggets of data very quickly is essential.

What are some of the biggest issues facing your clients?

Ho: There are three big challenges we keep hearing about. One is doing less with more. Another is trying to make sense of the mobile-location opportunity amid industry and marketer confusion. The third pertains to privacy.

Our advertisers have limited budgets, so they’re obviously trying to get more sales, more leads and more awareness on a set budget. They’ve got a lot of channels to consider, and now they’ve got mobile to worry about.
Our job at xAd is to give marketers strategies that help solve their problems, along with data to support those strategies. Mobile has a truly unique proposition compared with other media. It can extend what they’re already doing in traditional or digital and allows them to target on-the-go consumers.

However, because the mobile space is evolving so fast, it’s easy for advertisers to get confused about what is actually possible today. We do a lot in terms of thought leadership, speaking and webinars to help marketers and agencies sift through the noise. As a result, we try to start each relationship off with realistic expectations regarding mobile’s performance and its role in the overall marketing strategy. We want marketers to feel good about where the industry is going and their media buying decisions.

“We want marketers to feel good about where the industry is going and their media buying decisions.”

With mobile, privacy is a major topic. This is one area that is preventing more ad dollars from flowing into the channel. There is growing marketer concern about consumer privacy when using ad targeting at the location level. As a result, we work hard to provide clear guidance on what is or is not acceptable.

In fact, xAd was most recently involved in an educational webinar series with the MMA and Digital Advertising Alliance, informing marketers about the new mobile guidelines launched in Q3 2013. We are one of the only location-based ad networks to become privacy certified through TRUSTe, an online privacy management services provider.

What are the big areas of growth?

Ho: Right now, it’s definitely international. We’ve got a burgeoning US market that is growing really quickly. We’ve got to scale our organization to keep pace with that. At the same time, we’re also expanding into underserved international markets. Global expansion is huge on our list for next year.

Measurement and metrics are also big. Marketers are now starting to spend some significant dollars in mobile. The space is moving fast, and marketers are being pushed to spend more and more in a medium that is still growing. We’re trying to find better ways to measure mobile media, which will be a big topic in 2014. We recently launched a metric we refer to as “store visitation rate,” or SVR. This is a new mobile performance metric that essentially measures in-store traffic generated as a result of a location and targeted mobile ad campaigns.

Why did you choose to invest in eMarketer?

Ho: eMarketer is very different from other research providers. You aggregate a lot of publicly available content, which allows us to quickly search for data. If we need a chart for a presentation, I can quickly pull it into Excel and place it into our own chart format. Little things like that have made the information very digestible for my team.

We are also avid users of your mobile reports, which our sales teams use to stay abreast of what’s going on in the industry and to provide new datapoints and insights for their clients. Even your newsletter gives us touchpoints to reach out to some of our agency contacts.

Has an eMarketer chart or information ever helped complete the picture?

Ho: Absolutely. This year we expanded into two international markets, and we’re going into others next year. We had an internal meeting with the executive team to discuss our strategy for expansion. My product marketer put the presentation together with some top-line data, but we wanted it to be more visual. We pulled in an Excel chart from eMarketer, used our colors and branding, and popped it in 30 minutes before the presentation. It was super helpful.

What markets are you looking to expand into?

Ho: In 2013, we made our first foray into international markets in the UK and India. For 2014, we’re looking at markets that are already investing heavily in mobile advertising—Japan, Germany and Australia, to name a few.

We’ve used a lot of eMarketer data to determine our strategy for going into these markets. Obviously we want to make sure we’re getting the biggest bang for our buck when developing technology and partnerships in other countries. By illustrating where the ad dollars are flowing, it was a very easy sell internally as to which countries we should focus on.
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Do you use eMarketer data when making external presentations as well?
Ho: Yes, we do. We use it a lot to validate some of the things we recommend. We use it in presentations to agencies and directly to marketers. We also do a lot of our own research and use your data to validate some of our own findings.

Is eMarketer important because we use multiple sources?
Ho: Yes, that approach validates our insights. Looking at multiple studies with the same conclusion helps point a lot of our agencies and marketers in the right direction. By going into eMarketer’s database, we see if other research has been done and whether anybody is talking about it. That’s really important, too.

Has eMarketer data or content helped solve a problem?
Ho: I think it always saves us time. One of the challenges we have is supporting plans that agencies recommend to marketers. Typically, if they’re coming to us, it’s because they haven’t been able to find something they need within the next hour. It’s, “Hey, I’m walking into a meeting. Do you know if there’s a source for something that will tell me X?” We get a lot of urgent requests.

Before we had eMarketer, we did a ton of searching on Google, which was too labor-intensive and time-consuming—and we would definitely miss deadlines. Access to eMarketer allows us to be a better support department. Whether it’s a marketer or an agency—from a datapoint someone needs walking into a meeting, a planner’s presentation to answer a marketer’s question, or even a data source they couldn’t track down—they come to us because they want strategies supported by data, and we help them turn it around pretty quickly. And the data primarily comes from eMarketer because, again, we can look at multiple data sources to ensure we can support any of our marketing strategies.

What types of questions do agencies ask you?
Ho: They might get a question from their client like, “Why would you go this way vs. that way?” or “Tell me why this has more concentration vs. that?” So they might ask us, “Do you have any data to support the need to focus more on this content” or “Why use an app vs. the browser?” or whatever their specific situation is. We’re able to quickly do a search in eMarketer, and nine times out of 10, we can get the answer through that one search.

”eMarketer is great for small companies because we get a very searchable database to help support strategies and positioning.”

Why is eMarketer an ideal tool for a smaller company like yours?
Ho: eMarketer is great for small companies because we get a very searchable database to help support strategies and positioning, and we can find information about anything in the digital space. It’s efficient. A company might have an intern spend 8 hours pulling together resources that could be found in 30 minutes using eMarketer. In addition, you write on such diverse topics, and it gives us an opportunity to discuss that content with clients and prospects.

Marketers and small businesses need to be a lot smarter about the different ways they can leverage eMarketer.

Why is eMarketer a “need to have” for small businesses?
Ho: Being in digital advertising, you’ve got to have your finger on the pulse of trends all the time. You might get questions from a planner. You might get questions from a supervisor about strategy. You might get questions directly from a marketer trying to support mobile advertising internally. The questions come from all different levels and types of industries. eMarketer puts all the information in my hands so I can get the answers for people pretty quickly.

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