Can you do advertising by algorithm?

You've seen advertising by algorithm every single time you go on Facebook. If you've done an online search for anything (books, movies, clothing, etc.), you will now see a banner ad for that thing or brand. If you've discussed anything with a recognizable name (politician, specific book or movie or brand) on your timeline, chances are you will see a sponsored post about that thing on your timeline. Those posts are automatically generated by algorithms.

Like this one that appeared last week on my Facebook timeline:

Ben Carson sponsored ad in my Facebook timeline

I had definitely mentioned Ben Carson in my status updates. *In a negative way.* I had shared several articles about his horrible "gun control caused the Holocaust" comments. I couldn't believe that anyone, much less a person running for president, would be so stupid and so offensive.

And then the sponsored ad popped up. Obviously the algorithm "if that then this" recipe says something like "if a person mentions Ben Carson more than once in status updates, then show the support Ben Carson ad."

But I am the exactly wrong target. I don't like Ben Carson and what I have been saying about him is not supportive. This sponsored post is a #fail as they say on Twitter, and a waste of the campaign's money.

Don't let algorithms fail you!

Automatic advertising has its pitfalls. But is the problem the algorithm or the person that makes the recipe for the algorithm? I suspect it's a bit of both.

<u>There are at least three steps to successful advertising by algorithm:</u>

1. You have to understand how algorithms work

Advertising algorithms don't do nuance. They can't judge emotions—negative or positive. *They can only scan for keywords and then follow recipes.*

Plus, each search engine or social network has its own rules. Apparently for Facebook algorithms, budgets have a lot to do with how and when your sponsored content shows up. Read "The Importance of Understanding Facebook Algorithms, Part 1."

2. You have to provide strategic guidance

Before you launch any advertising, including online advertising, you must have a strategy in place. You need to define your target audience and be as detailed as possible. You need to define your objectives. You must understand what you want to accomplish.

3. You have to measure

And with online advertising, especially when you are relying on computer-generated algorithms, you have to measure. You want to understand your outcomes. How did your ads do? What kinds of people clicked and did they take any other actions? (It's always about the metrics.)

What would you add? Do you have resources to share about algorithms? What's been your experience with algorithms in advertising? Successful or not so much? Please let me know. And if you want to discuss your advertising or communications strategy, get in touch!