# Smartology

# Q&A

# MARK BEMBRIDGE
## SMARTOLOGY

**Mark Bembridge**, **Founder at Smartology** has worked on the creation of semantic recognition platforms for at least 15 years. He has a wealth of AdTech experience that he brings to bear in his work at Smartology, helping them grow globally and continue to succeed.

**MEDIA 7: Can you please take us through your professional journey to establishing and making Smartology the grand success that it is today? MARK BEMBRIDGE:** Starting any new business is always a rollercoaster ride from the outset. And like climbing a mountain, it doesn't get easier as you expand…just steeper and riskier! I was lucky in that Smartology was the third business I have been involved in from early inception and experience counts. The most important lesson for evolving from a start-up to an early-stage business is to hire experienced and like-minded professionals in key roles at the right moments for the business, who can help support and grow critically important areas as you scale. While your product/solution remains key, if you don't have the right people around the table with the necessary skills and experience, you'll rarely fly. Smartology started out in 2010 using AI to personalize publisher content and after two years saw an opportunity with the rise of branded content within social media, to unify branded content in ad creatives alongside contextually relevant publisher editorial. This was a more commercially viable and scalable offering than working exclusively with publisher content. As we scaled our proposition across global premium publishers, our B2B brand client base increasingly grew internationally with the US becoming our largest market in 2018. We evolved our SmartMatch solution to run via programmatic advertising channels during 2019 and more recently this year via a B2B SaaS platform we have been able to scale at speed and add new clients in broader B2C verticals. But it's all ultimately thanks to the collective team and their hard work that have taken us to this exciting stage in the company's continued growth.

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**M7: Smartology initially worked with premium publishers like The Financial Times and The Independent to help them improve how they target editorial content on their websites. How did you increase free-to-paid conversion rates for these publishers?**
**MB:** Our work with the Independent and FT.com when we started almost a decade ago contributed to very

significant increases in traffic, average page views, and consumption of news content on their sites. By contextualizing news articles for example in 'Recommended Reads' alongside relevant articles on The Independent we increased traffic by 21% across their site as a whole. Our award-winning personalized news application for the Financial Times saw more users read personalized 'My News' within the app than consumed articles via the 'Home' page.

**M7: What is your approach to market research, both customer and competitor focused, in a data-driven advertising industry?**
**MB:** At Smartology we connect content and context, so we aren't interested in user data collected via cookies or demographic sources. In an audience data obsessed advertising industry, we are therefore unusual in that we focus on researching brands

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and scoring the quality of their branded content. Brands producing the best content will drive the highest engagement when contextualizing their content in the right time and place. Given we have always been market leaders in terms of our next generation deep learning approach to content and context, while we do spend time on competitor market research to keep our product

development ahead of the game, the main market research focus remains laser focused on branded content quality across our target customer base.

**M7: With SmartMatch, how do you ensure contextual targeting has a greater user engagement for your clients?**
**MB:** Step one is making sure you have reliable base technology. With continuing advances in deep learning, we've made several significant changes to our underlying tech to be able to derive greater accuracy across different verticals and languages since 2020. Context is often touted within a company's services but when looking under the hood, the technology is flimsy at best, relying on simple keyword matching or basic taxonomies which are limited in the granularity of inference and therefore accuracy of contextual targeting. When done properly context can drive tremendous impact. But contextual targeting also depends on client's producing quality branded content and so it is only viable as the right solution for a brand where they are seeking to promote their brand using thought leadership in editorial, video or audio formats. When next generation contextual technology is combined with quality branded content the final step is high impact engagement and we are always thrilled to hear brands, agencies and publishers reporting much higher

performance uplift than more traditional audience targeting techniques are able to achieve.

**M7: What marketing channels do you see as the most promising given your target customers?**
**MB:** At Smartology we like to practice what we preach so are about to launch campaigns on our own newly launched SmartMatch SaaS platform to promote our key benefits and values; privacy first contextual targeting, brand safety and suitability, transparent pricing and premium quality publisher partnerships. Alongside SmartMatch we will also use LinkedIn to supplement our external positioning.

**M7: In the post Covid-19 era, how has advertising and marketing changed? What is the immediate future for content marketing?**
**MB:** Harvard Business Review published a great piece recently titled '10 Truths About Marketing After the Pandemic' where they highlighted several very valuable points to consider on this topic. But the one that really stands out for me is that in the past brands have stood behind great products, but today brands need to stand behind great values. I don't see marketeers reverting to the old 'normal' and they will now be faced with a new set of rules, where factors like sustainability, trust, ethical sourcing, and social responsibility are increasingly important to

how consumers select their products and services. This is already being demonstrated by clients increasingly focusing their branded content around these key values.

**M7: How do you anticipate what people will want?**
**MB:** The inverse of this question is perhaps a better place to start. I anticipate that people will not want to continue to be bombarded by intrusive and invasive ad targeting based on third parties harvesting their user data through nefarious means. But I do anticipate that adding genuine value to someone's online journey

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by offering insight from a trusted brand in the moment that individual is interested in reading about that subject will build stronger bonds for that brand with their key audiences and ultimately drive awareness and tangible commercial results. And all without any user data exploitation whatsoever!

Smartology's advanced media B2B SaaS Platform, SmartMatch, solves many of the key challenges the industry is grappling with including privacy, brand protection, and transparency. It is a world leader in connecting branded content with contextual targeting to drive engagement uplift across native display campaigns.

The Channel Report is a digital media resource exclusively dedicated to social media marketing and channel information. The Report offers the best curated and cutting-edge digital marketing, SEO, PPC, email marketing, Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook marketing, Google Adwords, mobile marketing and SEM news, social media events, videos, blogs, and information on top social media marketing companies.

The Media 7 group is a network of media properties across 16 industries that provides marketers with multiple options to target markets, reach audiences, and develop accounts across 120 countries. Advertisers, agencies, and platforms rely on Media 7 for audience engagement at scale. Marketers from large enterprises to small and mid-sized companies use Media 7 for their advertising and marketing programs.