

COLUMNS

The challenges of crafting a mobile media strategy

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With so many communications channels at a marketer's disposal, developing a comprehensive mobile media strategy is no longer a sprint it is a marathon.

Successful marketers know that focusing on a few basic solutions will not suffice. The growth of communications technology makes it incumbent upon those of us who work in and define this space to create solutions that make a difference to our clients' business while enhancing consumer experiences.

The marketer that makes a few simple media buys will lose out to those who are experimenting with the new solution providers to redefine how we reach our customers and engage with them more profoundly.

Moving beyond the handset

The process of rethinking the media model began to shift with the advent of the Internet, but even that new medium ended up being dominated by obtrusive banners.

In fact, I can remember hearing planners talking about "short listing," or limiting their buys to just a few major publishers, before there even were "major publishers" online.

That said, we also started to see the smart marketers embed their brands in the digital content, making it look more like product placement than an ad buy. They realized that it is only advertising if the consumer does not want it.

If you can turn your brand into a utility, an entertainment source or valuable information provider, then you get invited to the party.

Fast forward to where we are today with mobile, social and digital outdoor experiences and you realize we are obliterating the tried-and-true media model.

In particular, mobility marketing has challenged the status quo and redefined how we engage with consumers more than any other medium before it.

For example, widespread consumer use of mobile devices gives us a substantial market to target and the functionality of mobile phones provide consumers with many new ways to interact with a brand.

So the onus is now on the marketer to make its brand relevant at the right time, in the right place, with the right content, for the right person. Let us call it the 4Rs.

Developing a mobile strategy that is effective and targeted is considerably more complex than the static media buys of the past.

Mobile marketing is not just the handset. We see the use of social and experiential as a way to connect to a consumer's mindset of mobility, as well.

And while many think of wireless or mobile marketing as being one channel or another i.e., SMS, mobile Web or applications the reality is that the handsets are the Swiss Army knife of marketing with multiple channels in each handset.

The range of solutions is extreme. It includes adding a few characters to the end of an SMS message that a publisher is sending out to a tablet PC "hearing" sounds in a television show and automatically generating relevant content.

The tools for marketers are coming out at an alarming pace.

Google, for example, is now introducing a number of new products, such as a voice recognition service that allows consumers to ask their mobile phones for input as confidently as they might ask another person.

Or consider Google Goggles, an image recognition technology that allows consumers to use the camera on their mobile phones to get information its technology associates specific information with anything that can be photographed.

While you cannot overlook mobile Web banner advertisements for their effectiveness in gaining consumer awareness, what they link to continues to evolve.

Today, marketers can drive consumers to an HTML5 experience that can provide just as robust an experience on a handset as the best Flash sites you might find online. The best part is that none of this requires a download or customization for every operating system.

Apple is also trying to redefine that mobile banner advertising experience with the iAd platform by allowing marketers to incorporate video, motion graphics and original interfaces into banner advertising and click-through experiences.

The iAd platform has been successful since its launch, with consumers spending on average several minutes interacting with the advertisements a miniature mobile experience in itself.

Most important, Apple is not resting on its laurels: the solution will continue to evolve as long as marketers push them to improve.

New networks, new opportunities

The social networks that have overtaken the Web and mobile also present new alternatives.

Take Facebook. Marketing via Facebook offers a unique set of benefits and a unique replacement for the banner click-through, or the "Like" function.

Targeting consumers via Facebook makes sense for marketers because the social network offers built-in audience expansion.

Once a consumer "likes" a product, that action is automatically pushed out to their like-minded friends, exponentially multiplying the potential reach of a brand's advertisement while also serving as a testimonial.

Location-based apps such as foursquare have brought the advent of the "check-in" so that consumers can tell their friends where they are at any given time, potentially encouraging real-time movement of consumers to congregate at a restaurant or concert.

These apps also allow consumers to share tips and recommendations about venues, including details about how they have come into contact with a company's location, product or service.

Of course, for every location-based benefit consumers enjoy from these platforms there are an entirely new set of tools available to marketers to speak to them with more relevance than ever before.

Experiential marketing has also proven that mobile marketing is just as much about the mindset as it is the handset.

Placing a sign in a store window is no longer a highly competitive advertising method. Marketers now know that consumers recall brands and products far better when they have the opportunity to engage with them in an authentic way.

In the wireless environments we have created, where consumers literally interact with the brand via digital touch points, we have seen their preference for that brand score double digits over experiences that do not include digital

channels.

Creating these experiences is extremely powerful, necessary, and an important part of a modern marketer's toolbox for influencing consumer behavior.

Though it has not really hit its stride yet, location-based messaging is also a solution worth watching and with which to experiment.

When a consumer opts in for a service, a brand can identify exactly where that person is and push out an SMS message at the ideal moment using apps, cell towers and location-specific codes.

Using SMS is such a simple, ubiquitous channel that this could end up being a major player in the space.

Relevancy and authenticity are critical

From the marketers' perspective, the importance of creating positive experiences has become even more important at the customer-service level as consumers share their opinions more publicly than ever. And because advertising can also be hyper-local, this concern is increasingly becoming location-specific.

Marketers must take into consideration how to customize brand messaging that will speak to someone near a lake in Omaha, NE, versus someone on a corner in downtown Orlando, FL.

The new challenge for marketers is to accomplish all of these, while navigating multiple channels and constantly evolving technology.

Content must be customized rather than remaining the same across the board.

For example, the exact copy from a print ad would not necessarily translate well to social media or mobile apps that are more conducive to short, informal messaging.

To be truly effective, brand managers must consider how they can authentically insert their brand in these kinds of experiences.

In practical terms, consumers will not necessarily take notice if a brand has a sign up in the proverbial digital landscape.

So what creates interest and engagement for consumers? What makes consumers take notice and remember a brand in the long-term?

In terms of mobile content, consumers want to be entertained, informed and educated. They crave information that is useful, accessible, easy to navigate and contextually relevant.

WHAT DOES ALL this add up to?

A world where advertising is not about the quick and easy 30-second spot.

Media today is an activation, not a buy. Sure you have to reach big markets, but now you can get that kind of scale in media solutions that are still evolving.

Instead of complaining about not being able to get the exact same reports for every channel in your media mix, consider redefining the metrics.

As marketers, we have not begun to understand everything that is going to be available to us, but the marketers who are in it for the long haul will most certainly beat the sprinters in this race.

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