

COLUMNS

## Why be mobile-first when you can be mobile-always?

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By [Vanessa Horwell](#)

Perhaps in a country that puts a premium on "being first" home to the world's first electric chair execution (Go USA!); the launch of Albert II, the first monkey in space; and the first obesity drug approved for dogs (yes, that is correct) the language coming out of a recent MMA Forum was inevitable.

More times than I can recall, "mobile first" as it related to marketing campaigns and dollar spend was the mantra of the moment.

First things first

Crid Yu, vice president and managing director at ad network InMobi, put it like this: "Mobile has the potential to touch a user at every aspect of life," he said in a recent ClickZ article.

"Mobile is everywhere, we use it in bed," Mr. Yu said.

I am guilty as charged.

But does admitting that negate the fact that before I snuggle up to my shiny Galaxy SIII at night, I have listened to some good old-fashioned "terrestrial radio" in the car on the way home, pecked away at my laptop's keyboard, indulged in some shoe porn on my tablet and, oh yes, caught up on some television.

Can you see where I am heading?

While I cannot overstate mobile's growing importance, influence, and indeed its multichannel "glue-like" properties, connecting one marketing channel to another in overlapping and complementary ways, trumpeting "mobile first" can also imply that all other mature marketing channels are less important, lower in the marketing pecking order.

Email, print, online and broadcast all remain vital marketing tools independent of mobile, as much as they benefit from it and not because any one of those channels are thought of as "first," "second" or "third" priority. They each serve different roles.

So instead of mobile first, why not shift the thinking to mobile always?

It may not be as sound bite-ready as "mobile first" but, as evidenced above, sometimes being first is not all it is cracked up to be.

Albert the space monkey survived the rocket launch, but he died on impact.

It happens all too often.

Boob tube parallels: What TV and radio ad skirmishes can teach us

The last time marketers found themselves in a quandary of similar magnitude with one communications channel reaching "first place" dominance was likely during the Golden Age of Television, circa 1950-1960, as radio struggled to remain relevant.

In just a few years, TV ad spending surged tenfold, growing to \$128 million from \$12 million and hitting \$1 billion by 1955. With competition like that, it would take decades before radio and television advertising would evolve a more symbiotic relationship.

But, as if underscoring the buried hatchet, the Radio Advertising Bureau announced that radio advertising sales grew 1 percent in 2011 from 2010. And what was the second largest area of radio advertising? TV spending \$1.4 billion, an increase of 6 percent from the previous year. TV and radio found they needed each other.

Can we not all just get along and play equally?

Back to mobile, leave it to Google to get this right.

On Feb. 6, the company released "Enhanced Campaigns," a marketing tool that helps advertisers tailor their campaigns to multiple devices all from a single access point. That means advertising context, e.g., location and time of day, is as important as the devices to which the ads are being served.

Previously, advertisers would have had to develop siloed campaigns for each marketing medium. The subtext of Google's announcement is clear: mobile is not first it is part of the medley of marketing channels and it should be treated as such.

Finally.

Of course, considering its newness, "Enhanced Campaigns" is bound to have detractors who say that the new initiative simplifies the ad campaign process so much that larger, more sophisticated brands would lose some of their device-specific marketing capabilities.

Paul DeJarnatt, vice president and group director at advertising company Starcom USA, concluded in a recent Tech Crunch article that Google, not advertisers, had the most to gain.

But is that cynicism justified?

I would argue that it is not. It is not easy breaking down America's "first is best" cultural and political philosophy. It is pervasive to be sure.

Whether our national conversation is about the "war on something" or the "race for or against this," both expressions denote aggression, competitiveness and the rewards associated with dominance.

Dan Ariely, a professor of behavioral economics at Duke University, describes the "first is best" phenomenon as being less about a cost-benefit analysis than it is about ego and status.

FOR BRANDS, a mobile-always approach ensures that mobile is embedded across all marketing channels for their mutual benefit. In doing so, all channels can be winners.

The result is happier, more engaged consumers and marketers who have finally learned that, as in the childhood rhyme, first can sometimes "be the worst."

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