

The digital future of brands – 10 steps to getting it right!

From a seminar hosted by Blue Skies Marketing Recruitment and presented by Martin Bailie, Planning Director, glue on 20th March 2007

“Brands only have a role if they add something to the conversation.”

- 1 Content** – The Internet should be viewed as a group of people having a conversation. When these people find digital content they share it, interact with it and add to it. This creates a community and develops the brand for the better good. Content should interact with its audience and create a tone and message that generates collaboration between audiences – “Markets are Conversations.”
- 2 Create a story (copywriters be aware)** – “Ordinary people tell the most powerful stories about brands.” Brands need to interact and hold conversations rather than dictate to consumers. Online marketing has meant that consumers are now more reactive to content, resulting in a market that dictates to brands rather than the other way round. It’s human nature for people to tell a story, so content should be geared to starting this storytelling process. “If you talked to people the way advertising talked to people, they’d punch you in the face.” Source: gapingvoid.com.
- 3 Create a community** – “The combined intelligence of a crowd is far beyond your own.” Involve your community in the brand and messaging development. A multi-dimensional marketing strategy will get people believing in your brand and spreading the word rather than being driven by a corporate machine. Place stories and word of mouth (W.O.M) at the core and create interesting topics to talk about, positioning brands as peers, rather than objective observers. “Seventy per cent of all adults are more likely to buy a product if it’s recommended by friends or family.” Source: nVision, May 2005.
- 4 Open Source** – The future of creativity and development lies in open sourcing. Brands need to invite consumers to build a relationship and affiliation with their company and assist in the development of the brand and its products or services. Building ideas and brands based on what consumers are after comes from remaining close to them and listening to what they really want and not what you think they do.

Successful examples include:

Lego used a group of children to develop their own perfect Lego product models. The kids with the most innovative ideas were given a share in the resulting product.

Linux was created as the free software alternative to Microsoft. Developers built on software from a variety of sources to create Microsoft’s biggest competitor and have subsequently built an entire community around the product.

- 5 Use brand guiders, rather than creative/development teams** – Bakers Warburtons and Hovis have developed a guidance committee of 500 innovators. This committee makes suggestions on what the market wants i.e. crustless bread ideal for kids and makes mum’s life easier. This innovation has further created blogs debating the very subject of crustless bread! By using this tool brands can gain a greater understanding as to what drives consumers to buy into particular brands.
- 6 Innovation** – Don’t be afraid to try new things. A good brand isn’t one that stays still. Brands need to embrace the digital age and continue to innovate and research new ways of reaching its target market.
- 7 Far, far away and beyond** – Think above and beyond the internet but ignore it at your peril! It’s TV and internet, print and internet, radio and internet. Who knows what tomorrow will hold in the world of communication but as we stand today the web is the most powerful marketing tool and reinforces a brand’s strongest advocate – W.O.M!
- 8 Shake up the creative department?** – Brands that truly use the open source model to develop campaigns and products are able to optimise their creative departments by understanding the target audience’s views and creativeness. Brand helpers will produce many creative concepts and ways to add to existing or entry level products. Out of a mountain of ideas one per cent of brilliance will always rise to the top.
- 9 Create a ‘collaborative’ future** – Involve all internal and external influencers using various tools to drive messages and create a buzz in the market. Engage staff through training, newsletters, discussion groups etc. Digital media such as blogs and viral mailers can be used to build a loyal following and community to generate unconscious brand sharing. The brand should be an exclusive club that people want to belong to.
- 10 RIP Campaigns** – “If companies take a prolific approach to marketing they will find brilliance.” Turner prize winner Grayson Perry smashes more pots than he keeps – however the ones that last are pure brilliance. Brands need to take this approach to marketing and move fast to stay ahead. Long winded campaigns running over extended periods of time run the risk of becoming tired and mediocre.

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