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Online marketing is the future

Yesterday by Jimmy Maymann

Jimmy Maymann, chairman at GoViral, considers the exciting opportunities for online marketing - "Get it right and the rewards will be brilliant. If you get it wrong, at least you will know about it soon enough" ...



GoViral recently concluded a project that brought home just how revolutionary the past decade has been for the marketing industry. Our aim was to identify the most significant online campaign over the last 10 years. To do this, we began by creating a shortlist of 40 campaigns, which were nominated both by myself and by other industry peers including Martin Baillie from Glue, Jason Goodman from Albion, Hugo Drayton from InSkin Media, journalist Gareth Jones and Ajaz Ahmed from AKQA.

The list contained some truly memorable and game changing campaigns, which we felt had left a significant impact on the entire marketing industry. The shortlist was then put to a public vote in which over 1,000 people participated. The eventual winner was Mentos experiments with Diet Coke by Eepybird.com.

The fact that the winning campaign was at no point actually planned by The Coca Cola Company or Mentos, but simply started life as an experiment by Eepybird with a video showing two men dropping Mentos into a bottle of Diet Coke, encapsulates perhaps the most significant change to affect our industry. Individual consumers now have the power to take a brand's marketing strategy and completely rewrite it.

The Mentos/Diet Coke experiments generated massive PR coverage and thousands of consumers contributed their own eruption videos. These have been seen as many as 60 million times. Rumours about the dangers of drinking Diet Coke and eating Mentos at the same time also did the rounds. On the other hand, can anyone honestly remember Diet Coke's or Mentos' 'official' marketing from 2006?

Those brands that understood this new reality and embraced it have gone on to achieve similar success. Of course there is a lot more planning these days and with the internet so crowded the need for bought media to get the ball rolling had become even more important. But the truth remains that brands who earn the trust and engagement of consumers will see the reach and effectiveness of campaigns multiplied again and again. Dove 'Evolution', which came second in our poll, is a brilliant example of this.

So what does the future hold for online marketing?

Looking ahead to 2010 and beyond, I have to agree with the conclusions of the Marketing Media & Ecosystem 2010 study, which lists fragmentation, new technologies, convergence of media and technology, personalisation and consumer power, as the most influential driving forces in 2010.

Within this landscape, the power of online video will also continue to grow. We have already seen YouTube reach the 1 billion views per day milestone, which means the world is watching a total of three and a half billion minutes of YouTube videos per day. Based on current trends, Microsoft is estimating that internet video consumption will outstrip traditional TV viewing in June 2010, averaging 14.2 hours per week against 11.5 hours for TV.

The combined forces of fragmentation, convergence, overall growth in online video consumption, coupled with impact of services like twitter and real time search, will simply erode marketers ability to control messages to another level.

The shift in power away from brands and towards consumers will continue to grow and marketers will increasingly become facilitators in ongoing near real time conversations with and between customers.

We also know from several recent surveys that many companies plan to increase their digital advertising budgets in comparison to traditional advertising budgets. Social media advertising spending in particular will increase, while banners will continue their decline.

The overall outlook for online marketing, therefore, is one full of exciting opportunities for growth. Brands seem willing to devote more resources but the stakes get higher with each passing month. The distribution strategy of marketing messages has always been a complex process and one which is almost, if not as important, as the creative execution. But in this world of consumer power and with a vast amount of content to compete with, the timing, context and relevance of distribution will be the thing you have to get right every time.

In practice this means that expert know-how on both distribution and tracking of branded content will become an indispensable component of every online campaign. Reaching the right audience at the right time will also require a mix of both bought and free media, with a particular focus on bought media at the outset of any campaign. Content very rarely becomes popular just because it's good and whether it's generated by an agency or by consumers, achieving awareness among communities that can then spread your message exponentially needs paid media support.

Brands that want to be present where their customers are can no longer regard digital and interactive media as niche capabilities. In fact it is clear that most now understand this and are looking to invest more and more of their marketing spend in these media. For marketers and their agencies the challenge will be to make sure they engage relevant communities with the right content at an appropriate time and be flexible enough to adapt their messaging to fit in with the agenda set by customers. Get it right and the rewards will be brilliant. If you get it wrong, at least you will know about it soon enough.

