

Does anyone still pay attention to ads and commercials?

Part three: Another solution—don't change too little too late.



Last week's article was "Don't change too much too soon." This week we're considering the other side of the equation. Because, although abandoning effective techniques prematurely is a mistake, so is failing to adopt techniques that work within the new marketing paradigm.

Sticking with the tried-and-true doesn't mean sticking your head in the sand and ignoring change. Keep what works as long as it works. But constantly explore new options that might someday work better.

Adopting new tactics should be like voting in Chicago: do it early and often. Do lots of small-scale experiments and ramp up the ones that work. That way you're way ahead of the game, even if only a small fraction of the efforts deliver bottom-line benefits.

Some things that are pretty sure to produce results:

Leverage synergies. No, seriously. Leverage synergies. Sounds like a really, really tired business cliché, but it can be a very effective tactic.

In a previous article, "How many times do I have to tell you?", we referenced the observation Rex Biggs and Gary Stuart make in *What Sticks*: three messages in different media are measurably more effective than three messages in the same medium.

A recent study by market research firm Advertising Perceptions reinforced that observation. The study found significant increases in purchase intent among people who received marketing communications messages in multiple media. Some examples:

- People who saw messages for beer on TV and online were 27% more likely to buy the brand than those who saw a message on TV only.
- People who saw messages for beer in magazine and online were 20% more likely to buy the brand than those who saw the message online only.
- In apparel, TV plus on-line generated 22% more purchase intent than TV only.
- In consumer electronics the TV/online combination produced 21% more purchase intent than TV only.

Some brands were especially affected by multi-media synergy:

- Abercrombie & Fitch generated 65% higher

purchase intent with a magazine and online combination versus online alone.

- Heineken purchase intent with online and magazine was 39% higher than with magazine alone.

Synergy really works. But some marketers miss one of the simplest possible ways of harnessing it. We can't imagine why, but they don't put their URLs into magazine ads.

New research from VISTA Print Effectiveness Rating Service analyzed 833 ads in different magazines. The result:

- Including the URL in ads in travel magazines increased web site visits 186%
- In home magazines the increase was 103%
- In women's service magazines the increase was 98%
- In fashion magazines the increase was 52%
- In men's magazines the increase was 38%
- In financial magazines the increase was 22%

Failure to include the URL in magazine ads is simply amazing. That omission is a mistake that wastes part or all of the attention the ad has captured for the brand. And the repercussions go far beyond wasted attention:

- The increase in purchase intent the Advertising Perceptions study noted when a magazine ad is reinforced by a website visit is diminished because failure to include the URL decreases site visits.
- Most marketers pay from 50¢ to \$2.00 or more every time a prospect clicks on a sponsored search listing or embedded ad to go to the brand's web site. Directing those same prospects to a web site from a magazine ad doesn't cost an extra penny.

- People who go to a brand's website are the ones most interested in the product or service, and the ones most likely to be in the purchase-decision funnel.

Horrible business-speak cliché or not, synergy works. In today's multi-platform, converged-media environment, marketers need to have every platform they can get working for them. And working together.

Ramp up search. We did a random search of brands of butter, laundry detergent and toilet tissue. They all have nicely-done, well-optimized web sites. They've also bought brand-name and product-category paid-search keywords. And these aren't exactly high-involvement product categories.

Any product or service which is a considered purchase, a significant expenditure or has some emotional involvement on the part of the decision makers and/or influencers needs great search. The Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey found that people use online information at the initial stages of purchase decisions across a wide spectrum of product categories:

- 56% of music purchasers use the internet for information.
- 39% of cell phone purchasers got information online.
- 49% of real estate purchasers did online research.

That's a pretty broad spectrum, from a 99¢ music download to a six- or seven-figure home purchase. And even though only a minority (ranging from 12.5% to 25%) of respondents who researched products online reported that online information had a major impact on their purchase decision, it was still a significant part of the purchase-decision process.

Ramping up search is more than better search engine optimization and more keywords. Those

are now basic survival skills. Some things marketers should be doing now – or should start doing immediately include:

- Guerilla online marketing. Build a micro site incorporating a competitor's name. Not out-and-out piracy, but one in which the advertiser brand and the competitor brand are mentioned together frequently. Like a Chevrolet site offering a Ford vs. Chevy comparison. Naturally it would be necessary to buy search for the site, too.
- Geo-targeted paid search for regional or local brands. BrainPosse's sibling healthcare agency recently participated in development of a campaign for highly specialized cancer treatment. We completely eliminated conventional paid media. The effort – and some of the expense – that would have gone into a media campaign went into a comprehensive website and geo-targeted paid search.

Geo-targeted paid search was chosen over SEO because there was no likelihood that a regional cancer center could ever get the hits and links to come to the top with the big four search engine algorithms.

Optimizing for people who entered the disease and a geographic term would have missed all the potential patients looking for the best care, wherever it happens to be located. Folks may search "hamburgers Cincinnati," when they're hungry in the Queen City. But they just search "multiple myeloma" or "autologous stem cell transplant therapy" when they're looking for treatment for a serious disease.

- Try a search for a branding campaign. Search is based on a retail, cost-per-click business model. So if you opt for an embedded ad rather than a listing all the people who see your ad but don't click on it are free. You deliver a branding message to them at no media cost.

Search is a medium that guarantees the audience's attention. It is already critically important, and it's just going to become more and more essential in the future.

Try new media concepts that help you gain attention. It's no wonder TV commercials have difficulty capturing viewers' attention. There are so many of them that folks just wander off during commercial clusters. The audience knows there's time to check e-mail, grab a snack and, probably, build a perfect scale model of the Eifel Tower with toothpicks before the program resumes. Not exactly an environment conducive to grabbing viewers. Many of them aren't even in the room. But some networks give advertisers a better chance to get the audience's attention:

- Fox is launching two new shows with half the usual number of commercials. "Fringe" will premier in August and "Dollhouse" in January. A Fox spokesperson said that the driving force behind the change is the new minute-by-minute Nielsen ratings that let advertisers pay for the viewers watching their commercials, not the total audience of the show (see our earlier article, *The Nielsen Nova*, on the probable impact of minute-by-minute ratings). Spots on the shows will cost more, naturally. But paying more to actually reach an audience beats paying for an audience that has left the room.
- TBS has launched "Commuter Confidential," a two-minute commercial within a show within a commercial cluster in which four women talk about their lives, loves, Match.com and Revlon products. These commercials-as-shows run during "Sex and the City," a perfect fit for the micro-series in which four BFFs share intimate secrets, inner yearnings and their preferences in eyeliner.
- Online television replaces 22 minutes of content interrupted with 8 minutes of commercial time with 22 minutes of content interrupted by one minute of commercial time

split into four or five 10-15 second messages. One sponsor, a simple message and no time to go to the bathroom or kitchen. Ideally the messages should be crafted for the medium, not repurposed material from existing spots, but even cut down :30s work if they're edited into a sequence that tells a story in which all the breaks work together. So far this only works for national coverage, but as networks realize the strength of geo-targeting, look for it on Hulu in a market near you.

- And, of course, it's impossible to tune out CW's cwickies. They only last two seconds, so they're over before the audience is out of their sofas. Can't get much of a message into two seconds, but a long time ago (so long ago we don't have the source), some interesting research showed that absent a USP or position in a consumer's mind in a product category, simple name familiarity could drive purchase.

When people are engaged in a conversation about your brand, they're paying attention. Join in. It's becoming clear that social media may never be an effective advertising medium. The massive ad growth spurt that Facebook and its ilk enjoyed when marketers wanted to get on board with the next big thing has dampened considerably. Mainly because no one notices the ads.

But that doesn't mean social media can't be a valuable marketing communications tool. Only that marketers aren't in charge of the message.

Handled properly, social media encourages customers to be positive spokespeople for a brand (it's also a wonderful attitudinal research tool). Company spokespeople can join the conversation, but shouldn't try to lead it. And they should never

masquerade as users. They're sure to be outed, and the loss of credibility can be damaging.

So marketers can facilitate profile pages and blogs about their brands and encourage viral messaging by leak-launching innovations on social sites of people who care enough about the brand to blog about it. (See our earlier article, "They're just not that into you.")

Conversations that don't go viral – the vast majority – may only reach a few hundred people. But those few hundred are almost certainly "influencers" in the product category, whose opinions expand geometrically throughout the marketplace. And if a posting does go viral, millions may get the message.

People still pay attention. Just not the way they used to. Marketing communications messages still capture people's attention. But the rules of the game are in flux. Some tried-and-true formulas still work. Some new ones work, too. It's important to stick with the proven as long as it works, and to begin to apply the new principles as they evolve.

To find out more about the effective new – and old – ways to attract attention to your message, call BrainPosse at (865) 330-0033 visit our website.

BrainPosse: Innovative, agile, experienced advertising, public relations, and marketing communications professionals who get into the right heads and make the psycho-mental-emotional connections that build your brands, your business, and your bottom line.

