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Marketing Messages

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The web grows up

Web 1.0 could be summed up as 'brochures online.' Businesses raced to put online what they had in print. Early sites featured homemade design and cookie cutter graphics. Thankfully we moved on quickly from there and handed the process over to designers. Dinosaur alert if you still belong to this first category.

Web 2.0 emerged a number of years ago. This phases featured two-way exchanges and interactivity on websites, blogs, and social media. Content was refreshed, new material added and conversations were engaged. Viral became king, and the consumer had a voice. We have now entered the early stages of Web 3.0. This phase was signaled by shifts in three pivotal areas: measuring, monitoring and monetization.

1. Measuring the right thing: Remember when measuring the web was all about impressions and hits? While these are still important, measuring THE RIGHT THING is more important. 450 million views of the Subservient Chicken video for Burger King generated lots of online viral buzz. However a year later sales were actually down, sending their stock price sliding 20%. The average viewer spent 6 minutes, which is a huge time for engagement. But were they measuring the right thing? As we emerge into Web 3.0, we will measure more than just viral views, time of engagement and social media mentions. We will want to know how it delivers sales.

2. Monitoring is key: New systems are emerging to monitor social media mentions, the digital crumb trail of consumers, where, when and how engagement occurred and on what platform. However in the end, the only monitor that will matter is the objective of the advertiser and the ability of the campaign to deliver. In the hard fought cola wars, Pepsi recently fell to third behind Coke and Diet Coke. Why? Industry observers have suggested that Pepsi's decision to drop the reach of traditional TV media in favour of online may have provoked the situation. Coke invested in TV, the Superbowl and sponsorship. The lesson here seems to be integrated marketing communications is key. Online on its own is not the magic bullet. In fact in isolation, it can hurt the cause.

3. Monetization of web content: While the purchase of goods and services on the web has been largely accepted, monetizing the value of information has struggled. The New York Times recently instituted a user pay wall. Essentially non-subscribers will be limited to 5 Google search links/day prior to being asked to pay. Curiously views linked from Facebook and Twitter will be unlimited and free. This was likely done for two reasons: (1) To fuel viral social sharing of content and (2) To keep the most vocal and web savvy online crowd happy.

iPad users can now subscribe online to their favourite magazines and newspapers. Apple takes 30% of the subscription fee, but more importantly owns the subscriber information. This has bristled some publishers and is likely to lead to Apple's control of the ad delivery platform with targeted user data. Apple is doing to print media with the iPad what it did to music with the iPod.

Alison Yesilcimen, former President and CEO of The Okanagan Valley Newspaper Group together with Bryce Cutt, a UBC Computer Science grad, recently launched Mediacooler.com. The site is essentially an iTunes for media bringing together professional journalists (the artists) and print and broadcast media editors from across Canada (the buyers). The site facilitates the sourcing of professional content allowing writers to sell into multiple markets and get easy payment. "There's a plethora of writers out there, but no one place to find their work. Good editors understand that quality content brings readers. This is simply about bringing these two parties together," notes Yesilcimen. Although more traditional journalists may lament the lower price point for their work, this is arguably about the long tail economics of the web. Sell it for less, sell it to more, and at least get paid. Mediacooler takes a percent on the deal for having facilitated the business.

What are the implications of all this? Monetization will change the model of content delivery and how companies that produce that content will make money. This shift is profound. It will create new media moguls and dwarf former titans. During the web 2.0 phase we became almost convinced that giving content away for free was ok because everyone else was doing it. As with any market correction, we are now realizing that all things free are not necessarily equal. The web has grown up. It's time to use tools that work in the boardroom - that means measuring, monitoring and monetizing.

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