



Marketing Messages

MARY CHARLESON

Marketing's new digital realities

I teach a media course at one of our local universities. Recently I brought some newspapers in to my class for the students to look at. My father was a "newspaper historian" and had saved papers from noteworthy events over time such the Halifax Chronicle the day WW11 ended, and the Toronto Star marking man's first walk on the moon and Paul Henderson's goal.

I watched with fascination as these 20 something's approached the papers like historical artifacts. There was confusion over the Radio Shack 8-track player ad, and disbelief at the Vancity ad for 15.5% interest rates in the 80s.

Why the fascination? Papers of this size and editorial detail were a foreign experience for them. They were a generation that gets their information primarily from digital means. This story is relevant for marketers today for a number of reasons. There's a fundamental shift taking place. Marketing is a "lagging" indicator. It follows the places people spend their time - and they are increasingly spending more time with digital.

Forrester Research recorded some interesting comparisons in a September 2009 poll.

The amount of time we are spending with digital media is increasing, but the % of marketing budgets being spent on it has not kept up. 34% of our time is spent on the internet, yet only 12% of advertising spending is allocated there. In contrast, TV viewing was 35% and commanded 31% of marketing budgets.

There are three stages consumers go through when purchasing - brand awareness, brand consideration, and brand purchase. Digital has been good at facilitating the first and last steps. Search ads, blogs and emails are used to create awareness just like ads. E-commerce has made purchases quick, easy and available to worldwide markets. But the real opportunity, and where we're seeing a fundamental shift, is in the middle - the consideration and preference stage. This is where people seek out information and reasons to buy. This is the stage where word of mouth, mouse and mobile are very important.

Word of mouth is human nature. People love to share stories. Word of mouse is a logical progression in a world with readily available wireless and 24/7 computer access. We pass a lot of information on to others via our computers. But it's the word of mobile that is about to explode. Soon smart phones like the iPhone and Blackberry will be the only phone style available. Once that happens, everyone will have the internet on their hip or in their pierce all the time. And that is going to change how we approach marketing.

Let's take a look at an example to illustrate.

Who knew our Prime Minister could play the piano? Few. But that all changed after an October performance at the National Arts Centre Gala. He practiced for a week and didn't tell anyone. His handlers only found out about it two days before, and actually tried to stop it- fearing a Stockwell Day wetsuit fiasco. The video was shot on an iPhone by an audience member and posted to Youtube. Another audience member with 612 followers scanned Youtube and then Tweeted about it during the concert. It then spread virally online via texts, email, Tweets, social networking sites. Mainstream media picked it up. Within 3 days it was the 3rd highest viewed video on Youtube - worldwide with over 500,000 views.

Why did it work?

It was unexpected. Few knew he could play and sing. Few thought he'd make himself vulnerable.

It was emotional. He showed his human side. "Getting buy with a little help from my friends" was in contrast to his distant, aloof façade.

It was authentic. Although the event was planned, the way it spread was not. It was not spun. It just as easily could have bombed.

These three attributes, unexpected, emotional and authentic, are key to having others spread your message for you. And that's the power of digital for marketers. These attributes are the basis of a good story, and come to think of it what reporters have always looked for in traditional media. Maybe there's nothing new happening here at all, just a change of vehicle. As I was reminded by my class of students, almost all with their smart phones - the digital world is our new reality. Welcome to the world of mouth, mouse and mobile.

Want more insights? Visit my website: www.charleson.ca and hit the newsletter subscribe button top left. Marketing trends and research will be delivered to your inbox weekly.

Mary Charleson, is a marketing strategist, speaker, and consultant. Her recently published book Five-Minute Marketing is available through www.amazon.com and www.Trafford.com. She writes monthly and can be reached at mary@charleson.ca