

**Marketing Messages****MARY CHARLESON*****Marketing strategies for 2011***

Recently I attended a BC Chapter of the American Marketing Association breakfast meeting to hear what an advertising agency panel had to say about strategies for 2011. Judging by the 300+ people in the room at an early hour, the promise of a sage on the stage to enlighten was attractive. It could also be that many are both anxious and excited about the changes unfolding.

Predictably social media dominated the conversation, but a few themes emerged:

1. The traditional model of unearthing the 'big idea,' then using push media and repetition to gain recognition is over. Launch and leave is simply not as effective in an age of social media. Agencies now need to monitor and manage a brand. Call it nurturing the garden, not just planting the seeds. This is challenging both the way ideas are approached and executed as well as how agencies get compensated.
2. Social media needs something to talk about, which makes storytelling even more relevant. Start your story in one media and then extend it to another. Stephan Hawes, Managing Director, TBWA Vancouver coined the term 'transmedia' as a new approach to integrating communications, where each media gets a piece of the message and consumers are allowed to put it together by engaging and exchanging. Lance Saunders, Executive VP, Managing Director DDB suggests, "We need to create a story where people can insert themselves." Storytelling today is a conversation, not a lecture. "We've been hyper-focused on digital channels. They are just pipelines for content. All these channels still need a good idea," notes Saunders.
3. Accept that you may no longer be in control. New social media tools, in the hands of consumers, have changed the power relationship. However, a powerful insight emerges: people trust people. The less control you have over your marketing, the more credibility you will have. Saunders suggests, "Stop, listen and lasso the conversations that matter to your target and engage them."
4. Mobile is very important for some markets. Although penetration of smart phones is still small overall it is significant for some audiences, such as small business and millennials. Neilson Online reports 5 million Canadians using mobile devices to access the internet in 2010. By 2014 half of internet impressions are expected to be off mobile devices. That may change the content, context and interactivity considerations for your website.
5. Traditional media is not dead. Media such as print and TV are still big and relevant, however there is no doubting that PVR's pose a threat to commercial viewing, and tablets like the iPad threaten how print content is delivered and paid for. But consider the success of the Old Spice commercials and subsequent engagement online through Facebook and Twitter with custom video responses to an online audience. They spent handsomely on a TV campaign initially to reach a mass audience. Then the online component kicked in. They gave people something to talk about, and then selectively engaged certain conversations. Flash back to points 2 & 3.
6. If the idea is king, data is queen. I have to give credit for that line to Tom Shepansky, Founding Partner, Rethink. ROI is driving decisions, and the increased influence of digital and social media means that IT is at the creative table. He suggests hiring 'digital citizens' (those under 30 who have grown up immersed in this stuff) to train the 'digital immigrants' (those over 40 who think they're knowledgeable, but secretly go to bed every night afraid of what they DON'T know).

The Harvard Business Review published an article in December 2010 called Branding in the Digital Age: You're Spending Your money in All the Wrong Places. Do yourself a favour and read it. Researched based, this article challenges the traditional funnel of the consumer decision-making process. It reveals how we have moved to a loyalty loop, which profoundly changes where advertising messaging should be placed. As a marketing professor at Sprott-Shaw Degree College and University Canada West, I found it compelling. Textbooks will be re-written. I made it mandatory reading for my students.

Of course with any good forecast session, the usual caveats prevailed. Noted Saunders at the end of his presentation, "On the other hand, I could be totally off." Indeed, but not far off.

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