“IMC means much more than simply bringing together and aligning the marketing communications activities of the firm.”

- Don Schultz
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ABOUT THE IMC PROGRAM

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) education was pioneered at Northwestern University’s Medill School. IMC is a strategic business process used to develop, execute and evaluate marketing communication programs that are coordinated and measurable. The goal is to generate both short-term financial returns and build long-term brand and shareholder value.

Today Medill’s IMC program continues to lead the industry by:

• Combining rigorous research and real-world expertise to create powerful knowledge and innovation in marketing communications.
• Understanding customers and stakeholders in order to identify insights that inform the creation of powerful communications which engage, entertain and connect with audiences.
• Emphasizing an analytical approach to developing, executing and measuring innovative marketing communications strategies and an integrated approach to planning and managing them.

Medill IMC is driven by major forces that shape integrated marketing:

• The challenge to turn the growing avalanche of user information and data into strategies for significant and successful marketing communications.
• A huge growth in consumer-initiated interactions with brands developing through networks, user-created content, advertising, reviews, word-of-mouth and search.
• The integration of communications across multiple stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, distributors, business partners and the news media.
• A strategic planning approach that requires an integration of media, including advertising, promotion, public relations, direct marketing and e-commerce marketing, in presenting a coherent brand positioning.

GRADUATE IMC CURRICULUM

The IMC graduate curriculum trains the world’s leading marketing communications professionals to engage, activate and persuade consumer by teaching the essential principles of integrated marketing while equipping them to meet the marketing challenges of tomorrow.

The full-time IMC program is a 15-month professional master’s program located on Northwestern Evanston campus. The part-time program is a two-year professional master’s program designed for working professionals. Classes for these students take place on Northwestern’s Chicago campus.

The program takes a managerial focus in teaching students to design and manage the integration of effective marketing communications activities, engage with stakeholders and demonstrate return on investment. Dozens of companies including Anheuser-Busch, Coca-Cola, Yum! Brands, Orbitz and AOL have sponsored in-class projects to provide students the opportunity to recommend solutions to real-life business situations and challenges.

Students are exposed to general business topics that emphasize concepts and strategies relevant to integrated marketing communications. Special emphasis is placed on understanding how the media and communications marketplace operates.

For further information, please visit us online at: http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/imc

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LETTER FROM THE DEAN

STAYING AHEAD

When the Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications was born, the best selling fiction book was Theodore Giesel’s (Dr. Seuss), Oh the Places You’ll Go, celebrating life as a “great balancing act,” but through it all “there’s fun to be done.”

He reminds us that the one certainty life will deliver is uncertainties, and rising to the challenge will reward us with oh-such-a-wonderful life.

Today, Giesel still looks pretty smart to me, if only applying his message to the uncertainties and changes in the marketing and communications landscape in this last twenty years; even the last twenty months.

As expected, in this time, the IMC program at Medill has continued to evolve. We owe a debt of gratitude to the leading-edge thinkers that inspired our programs, which were built on a storied history of advertising education at Northwestern that goes back to the turn of the 20th century.

The “IMC way,” as students then often described it starts with customer/stakeholder centric, data driven planning and strategy which demands understanding all the marketing and communications approaches to most effectively connect brands and stakeholders. This set the expectation that an education here would in fact put our students “ahead of the curve.”

This forward looking approach keeps us awfully curious today. Now, unlike then, companies and brands have the data... so much that we have increased challenges to find the insights. Happily we can now use it to understand behaviors and motivations for considering and buying products, services and even ideas. The rapid changes in how people are doing this, however, inspires us to keep asking questions to inform research initiatives, company sponsored projects, and in-class studies.

So many of our current students were asked in their summer projects by sponsoring companies to “help us think out our social media strategy.” Staying ahead caused us to pilot a Communities course three years ago. Other students were challenged to reframe market and/or customer segmentation approaches, as demographics alone no longer provide marketing power as they once did. Staying ahead drove the program to add a course in database analysis to the core curricula over a decade ago.

Twenty years ago, IMC students were challenged by some very prescient thinkers, many of whom continue to do research and teach here; Professors Martin Block and Don Schultz, among them. Since then, we’ve been lucky to attract more faculty who keep pushing us. For example, Prof. Kalyan Raman’s studies in media allocation models; Associate Dean Frank Mulhern’s work in IMC media; Prof. Ed Malthouse’s work in segmentation and lifetime value; Prof. Ashlee Humphreys in consumer behavior in social networks. And so much more.

The JIMC is another nice example of the way we wish to keep asking new questions, and we’re all grateful to the student teams that have been part of this effort to keep us ahead of the curve.

Dr. Seuss reminded us that what we do in the face of change is where our character presents itself. We hope to keep that nice reminder alive for the next twenty years.

And more.

Tom Collinger
IMC Chair, Associate Dean, Medill
For 20 years the Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications has been the voice of policy, strategy and tactics of the Medill School’s Department of Integrated Marketing Communications. The JIMC has been supported by thousands of hours of volunteer time by IMC students and nearly 200 authors to produce its annual content. It has also been supported by more than 500 graduate students who raised over a quarter of a million dollars to fund 90 percent of the cost of the Journal’s publication. Over the last two decades the distribution and readership have totaled nearly 80,000.

The Journal reflects a change in the IMC academic curriculum over the years to balance communications, marketing and management. We have always intended to educate and train “Renaissance men and women” in IMC who are superior in their qualitative and quantitative knowledge and skills. The Journal reflects this balance. IMC faculty are strengthening the communications standards of IMC education at Northwestern. The core graduate classes such as marketing require that the graduate students be as strong in rigorous research methods (statistically analytical as well as ethnographically sound) as they are in persuasively communicating the results.

With this celebration comes a warning that the cost of graduate professional education may be exceeding its value and benefit for some students. The intellectual value of a graduate education has been a constant. The practical application of the degree to the market has been constrained by the increasing economic costs of the degree.

A recent article in The Economist noted that, for the elite school MBA, “[t]he long term benefits sound substantial… but the short-term costs are also weighty.” The Economist concludes that “on balance, the benefits probably outweigh the cost, particularly in straitened times.” What the Economist surprisingly missed was an effort to help student decision-makers calculate the short-term and lifetime costs and benefits of their chosen advanced degree. A simple tool of an education-oriented return-on-investment analysis would show that a full-time degree has value for some students and a part-time degree is more beneficial for other students. Ironically, this financial process is taught to our students for their work with corporations. We should also be concerned for the future of colleges and universities that are either private or “pubvate” (public state universities embarrassingly underfunded by taxpayer dollars). The cost of education at a continuing 6 percent increase for many years to come may well exceed any economic advantage of earning an advanced degree.

My confidence in the next generation is often stronger than my confidence in my own. I should probably leave my concerns to the next generation of university students, leaders and faculty. I hope they will consider more part-time degrees, digital distance models and other learning and delivery systems that could ameliorate the economic challenges. However, I don’t want to be worrying about this topic when I author the publisher’s essay for the JIMC’s 40th anniversary edition. Finally, for 2009 and 2010, please follow my best advice: Hire my students!

Clarke Caywood
Director of The Graduate Program in Public Relations, Publisher/Founder of JIMC
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When Clarke Caywood and a group of graduate students in the Medill IMC program set out to create an academic journal in 1989, I was sitting in Mr. Skalsky’s third grade class attempting (poorly) to learn cursive.

So why, exactly, should someone in my position care about the 20th anniversary of the Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications? Due to the structure of the Medill IMC program, there is 100-percent turnover on the JIMC staff every year. Institutional memory is an unknown phenomenon at the JIMC.

Although there is a completely new staff every 365 days, those of us in the IMC program who joined the JIMC staff this year understood that it wasn’t just about hitting a 20-year mark, it was about what those 20 years represent.

The JIMC is unlike any other marketing publication out there. Our combination of classroom and boardroom expertise creates a permanent record of the ever-evolving field of integrated marketing communications.

Earlier this year, some fellow staffers and I took on the task of going back through all the past JIMC issues to identify the 20 best articles in the history of the JIMC. I was struck by how amazingly accurate some of the predictions for the future of marketing were—did you know way back in 1997 there was this crazy notion that one day we might be able to effectively track people’s web viewing habits and target marketing to their browsing tastes?

I’m not saying every piece of work over the last two decades was that prescient, in fact, some ideas are laughable in retrospect (I won’t mention any names to protect the innocent). But the important thing is that in a field often characterized by revolution, we also have a catalog of its evolution.

Marketing and communication can shift radically at a moment’s notice. Remember in 2005 when MySpace was going to take over the world? By the time people read this, I wouldn’t be surprised if Facebook and Twitter are supplanted by the Next Big Thing. And a year from now, I fully expect to be drinking Google brand orange juice.

Because of the emphasis on the present in this industry, the past can be forgotten and the future can be ignored. That’s where the JIMC steps in, as both an archive of IMC and as a forum to float innovative ideas.

So it’s not just about celebrating an anniversary for celebration’s sake—besides, we all know that 21 is the far better party—it’s about realizing that being part of the JIMC, even if only for a year, makes you part of something bigger. Everyone on the staff, the authors and the faculty who supported us can take pride in being a part of the permanent archives of IMC.

Though my time as the steward of the JIMC is coming to an end, a big smile comes across my face when I think of that third-grader out there who will one day be the editor-in-chief of the 40th anniversary JIMC. Let’s hope his cursive is better than mine.

Erik Johns
JIMC Editor-in-Chief
Like many new ideas, the Journal started with a question, “Imagine if?”

In the fall of 1989, a group of grad students and I were studying for an oral exam at my Evanston apartment, which I shared with my classmate, Tony, and my lovable pound-hound, Brinkley (named for stellar journalist David Brinkley, not Christie, as I was often asked). At the time, I studied corporate public relations; others in the program focused on advertising and direct marketing.

The notion of integrated marketing communications was still a leading-edge concept being weighed and debated in the hallowed halls of Fisk. I always was amused that those of us in public relations learned how to produce video news releases on one end of Fisk Hall; at the other, professors were encouraging our journalist-colleagues to throw them away.

One of the ways we were preparing for the exam that was to summarize the papers we had written, and the implications for communication. As my peers shared their insights, I recall thinking how smart, strategic, and thoughtful their ideas were. What they shared made me think, and in many ways broadened my thinking. I was learning a ton by listening, and wondered whether professionals in the field would benefit from these insights, too.

Imagine if we took the best of these papers and developed a journal?

The head of the program at the time, Professor Ray Ewing, was incredulous. “What do graduate students have to contribute to the body of knowledge?” he chided those of us who presented the idea to him. “A ton,” we told him, building a business case.

No journal of its kind existed in our field. We had the Law Review model as precedent, and this was the mighty Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. Our intent was to take theory and put it into practice in a way that would be valuable for professionals. “Wouldn’t one of the top graduate programs in the country be even better with a well-respected journal?” we asked him, thinking we were making headway. “Additionally, this would be a way for us to contribute to how professionals think about communication, and a way for us to lead.”

Bingo! We should have talked about leadership earlier. If this were a way for us to lead—as individuals and as a program—he was interested. But there was the practical matter of funding it. We told him we were going to solicit
professionals and would raise the money to get it published. If we could raise the funds, he said we could publish, as long as Clarke Caywood backed the idea, too. Clarke was sold right away, and the Northwestern Journal of Corporate Public Relations became a reality.

Much has changed in the two decades since the Journal began—both at Northwestern and in practice. The program is now officially “Integrated Marketing Communications” and has continued to energize the industry by providing a fantastic training ground and unparalleled opportunities for today’s graduate students to learn about and contribute to our field. In other words, to lead.

As I work with senior leaders at complex, global organizations every day and the communications professionals who support them, I see first-hand how leadership has changed over the past two decades. Today, the spotlight is on leaders as never before, and our organizations need leadership. The opportunity is unprecedented.

Today, you can’t separate communication from leadership, much like you can’t separate leadership from results. Communication is the way to do business. At my company, dg&a, we advocate an inside-out approach to communication, knowing the important need to engage and take care of those on the inside who take care of our customers (or choose not to).

Whether it’s about preserving, protecting, or enhancing reputation or the brand, being authentic and transparent, or building trust, I believe that most of the problems in business today lie in the absence of communication. And that begins and ends with leaders.

Smart, strategic communication is how leaders today can differentiate themselves, and accelerate their business results. Call it what you want—corporate public relations, integrated marketing communication, or something else—there’s never been a better time to work in our field, and never a greater need for our counsel.

I’m grateful for all the lessons I learned at Medill—both in the classroom and out. I always say humbly that I’d never be where I am today without my graduate degree. I also am incredibly appreciative of everyone who makes and has made the Journal a reality for 20 years—who believes in its importance and who works tirelessly to ensure it remains a valuable resource.

That’s real leadership. Ray Ewing would be proud.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A leading consultant, speaker and author of “You Can’t Not Communicate: Proven Communication Solutions that Power the Fortune 100,” David Grossman is one of America’s foremost authorities on communication inside organizations. David is president and founder of dg&a, an award-winning Chicago-based communications consultancy focusing on organizational consulting, strategic leadership development and internal communications (www.davidgrossman.biz).
By starting with the customer and continuously re-evaluating market situations, the IMC Planning Process not only has built-in adaptability, but also acts as a catalyst for innovation.

For many companies the New Media Genie has been let out of the bottle, and only time will tell if the cork should have been left intact.

Ironically, advertisers, who are pressuring the news media to give them editorial plugs in exchange for advertising dollars, are damaging the very feature that attracts them to the editorial world in the first place – credibility. The same is true for advertisers who take up editors on their proposals for guaranteed favorable coverage.

A connection too often overlooked in the rush to market may be one of the company’s most valuable resources, its relationship with its own employees. The goal here is to maximize employee operational efficiency, training and communications efforts—and yes, even sales opportunities.

When messages to customers, delivered across all media channels, capture the personality and feel of the brand and demonstrate concern for individual customers, value is added and an emotional connection is cultivated.

Corporate giving becomes strategic philanthropy when giving in integrated into overall corporate goals. The need for strategic philanthropy becomes even more apparent as profits decline, economic growth slows and the bottom line becomes more important.
JIMC THROUGH THE AGES

2000

Most notorious in the modern Panopticon is the use of ‘cookies,’ information-grabbing programs sent from a Web site to a user’s computer.

2001

The value of IMC to corporate America lies less in which companies have adopted it and more in the competitive advantage it can provide, and the fact that the complexity of human communication requires tenacious integration in order to be consistent and effective.

2002

Companies must remember that retention starts with the selective recruitment of the appropriate customers, and therefore the planning of such efforts needs to consider prospects’ long-term potential.

2003

Today, an expanded array of involved and empowered interest groups—including employees, regulators, trade partners, academics, consumer enthusiasts, investors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media—shape brand perception and corporate reputation. They operate in a sphere of cross influence, where ideas are continuously exchanged and subject to reexamination.

2004

In the last five years, a number of major consumer marketers have begun to effectively utilize consumer segmentation in ways that create a bridge between the data-drive, targeted approach of direct marketing and its mass marketing counterpart.

2005

We assumed – and wouldn’t you? – that the people who were technologically savvy enough to vote online would have learned about the option online or at least through broadcast media. Our exit survey data reveals, however, that most online voters found out about the electronic option through direct mail of community newspapers.

2007

“Effective measurement can only occur by linking marketing metrics to the organization’s overall strategic goals and by designing a right system that spans the entire marketing process, not just the marketing function.”

2008

Simply put, nagging works. A study conducted by the Center for a New American Dream in 2002 found that 55 percent of surveyed kids said they are usually successful in getting their parents to give in.

2009

Advances in mobile technology will allow online social media to become more integrated with peoples’ offline social lives. Imagine your cell phone suggesting what you can do or buy based on your various social media site memberships.
NEW, NEWER, NEWEST: Evolving Stages of IMC

by Don E. Schultz

ABSTRACT

It seems almost impossible that this is the 20th Anniversary issue of the Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications. So much has happened. So much has changed. So much is different. But, at the same time, it has now become clear that there has been a very traceable path in the development of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) concept. Since I was here at the beginning, the Editors have asked me to (a) review where IMC has been, (b) where it is now and (c) where the concept of integration seems to be going. Since IMC, even in its developmental stages, has always been about change, a look at the past, present and future seems in order.

I. THE FIRST STAGE OF IMC – A NEW CONCEPT

Integrated Marketing Communications evolved initially from the quantification of marketing and communication in the 1970s and 1980s. That quantification came from the development and use of computers, data capture and storage facilities, and advanced data analysis and manipulation, all driven by the digital revolution. As retailers began to capture individual-based purchase data from supermarkets in the 1970s and share it with manufacturers, the direct impact of sales promotion and direct marketing became obvious and their use boomed. With that came the shift of traditional mass media advertising funds to what has been called “below-the-line,” that is, to the more short-term, directly measurable forms of marketing communication.

AGENCIES RECOGNIZE THE NEED

Advertising agencies, seeing the budgets of their clients shifting away from commissionable mass media to trade and consumer promotion, responded by establishing or acquiring agencies in those areas. That was done primarily to protect their income streams, not because they necessarily believed that sales promotion and direct or public relations were better tools to solve marketing challenges than the traditional media advertising they had developed over the years. Agency leaders thought they could easily meld these new groups into their existing organization. Such was not the case. While the acquisition of these new agency resources and capabilities was fairly easy to do, the alignment and integration of those mysterious-to-mass-media marketers’ activities weren’t. Cultures, structures, compensation and competitiveness all reared their ugly heads in the board rooms of agencies around the world.

The American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) was the first to identify the need for external thinking and assistance in bringing together these often disparate functional experts. Since other marketing and communication groups faced the same problem, the agency group enlisted the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the American Advertising Federation (AAF) to assist in finding a solution to the problem. Working through a tri-partite steering committee, they contacted faculty at the Graduate Advertising Department at Northwestern and asked for their help.
The Graduate Advertising Department had some experience in the issues of integration having established a program in Corporate Public Relations and another in Direct Marketing in the mid-1980s to accompany their existing Graduate Advertising program. While the three educational tracks, Advertising, Direct and Corporate PR were operating as separate entities in the department at the time, the faculty did have experience with the problems and issues of integration and thus were the obvious choice for the needed research.

As a result of that contact, the three external professional groups, working with the three academic units at Medill, developed the first academic research in integrated marketing communications. That study, “Integrated Marketing Communications: A Survey of National Consumer Goods Advertising,” was conducted by Medill faculty, Caywood, C., Schultz, D., Wang, P. (1991), among marketers, agencies and media to determine the current status and the future of the concept of integration.

Coming out of that study was the initial definition of IMC which was jointly developed by the industry groups and the Medill faculty. That stated IMC was:

“A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines, e.g., general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations—and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact.”

“American Association of Advertising Agencies and Northwestern University” (1989)

As the definition implies, the initial study was based primarily on how the agency or marketing organization could align and integrate the four primary forms of marketing communication in use at that time: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations. The results of the research clearly showed that any integration would have to be done by the client firm, not by the agency, nor by the media. The marketing organization clearly drives the entire system and therefore, if it is not integrated, none of their other partners could integrate either. Thus, marketers were felt to be the key to the system. That set the direction for Integrated Marketing Communications at the professional level and has therefore been the focus of the Medill program ever since.

**TRANSITIONING TO AN ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

Recognizing the challenges facing the communication professionals, the Medill faculty determined the industry would need an on-going supply of new employees who were familiar with the concepts of integration and how the principles of integration might be developed and diffused throughout the industry and into the marketplace.

Using the initial industry study, and additional research done by the faculty over the next two years, it was quickly agreed that the three programs in the Medill Advertising Department should be merged to form a Department of Integrated Marketing Communications. Don Schultz, Department Chair, and Richard C. Christian, Associate Dean of Medill, developed the original concept, presented it to the faculty and got their approval. That concept was then presented to Dean Ed Bassett, who agreed with the approach. It was ultimately presented to Arnold Weber, then Northwestern University President. Weber approved the plan, submitted it to the University Board of Regents and the Department of Integrated Marketing Communications was formed, the first of its type in any academic institution, anywhere.

IMC as the “new communications concept” immediately took root in a number of other academic institutions in the U.S. and abroad. What really drove the concept, however, was the publishing of the first IMC text, “Integrated Marketing Communications: Putting it Together and Making it Work,” by Schultz, Stan Tannenbaum, both Northwestern faculty, and Bob Lauterborn of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (NTC Business Books, Lincolnwood, IL 1993). This text made basic IMC knowledge available both in the U.S. and, through translated versions, widely available abroad. It was particularly well received in Asia, especially Japan, Korea, Taiwan and China. All embraced the concept immediately.

What made IMC “new” during these first half
dozen years was that it was a holistic view of marketing communications. Historically, marketing communications had been viewed—and certainly in the academic community, been taught—as a set of functional specialties, i.e., marketing, advertising, public relations, direct marketing, events and so on. IMC, however, was based on the concept of “one sight, one sound,” meaning that all communication tactics sent out to customers and prospects should be viewed through the lens of the consumer. Simply put, that meant that all communication elements should come together at the consumer take-away-point as a clear, concise and consistent set of messages and incentives which the customer or prospect could easily grasp and understand. Again, meeting the theme of early day IMC: one sight, one sound in support of the product or service being promoted. Figure 1 (below) shows the basic structure of the initial stage of communication activities in the late 1980s.

OUTBOUND MODEL

Quite honestly, this first stage of IMC was rather simple. It took the basic outbound communication model, which was already understood and in use, and then aligned the various communication alternatives so that they all provided a single set of coherent messages and incentives. Figure 2 (below) illustrates the first-level IMC approach. The premise of this first stage of IMC was that if the communication activities of the marketing organization were aligned and integrated, the single, consistent message to consumers would enhance the value to all.

INTEGRATED OUTBOUND COMMUNICATION

While this made eminent good sense to the senior marketing management, it was totally alien to the functionally oriented specialists who were trying to implement it. Turf battles, arguments over who got the

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**FIGURE 1:** Traditional Outbound Marketing Communications

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<th>Agency → Media → Sales Force</th>
<th>Consumer / Prospect</th>
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<td>Unique Products / Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Messages and Incentives</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 2:** Holistic Outbound Marketing Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketer</th>
<th>Agency → Media → Sales Force</th>
<th>Consumer / Prospect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unique Products / Services</td>
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<td>Messages and Incentives</td>
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<td>Public Relations</td>
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largest portion of the available funds, discussions over what came first and the like, permeated organizations as they began to develop integrated plans and programs. Therefore, the faculty spent considerable time trying to help organizations identify the real issues, like what the benefit of an integrated program really was, not just to the marketing organization, but to the consumer as well. While some solutions were developed, they were quickly eclipsed by new IMC issues.

II. NEWER: EXPANSION OF THE IMC VISION DRIVEN BY TECHNOLOGY

In the mid-1990s, the Internet and World Wide Web burst on the communication scene. Initially, a trickle of content appeared on the web, but that quickly grew into a torrent of media forms, functions and activities, all delivered electronically, competing with the traditional media forms for the consumer’s attention. The development of these new communication forms drove a bevy of new IMC needs and requirements. Chief of those was the increasing need to understand consumer contacts through a host of what are now called “touch points.”

The challenge to the initial IMC approach was not long in coming. It developed as a result of the growth of communication approaches and methodologies which resulted in an exponential growth in the number of these new consumer contact points. As more consumer contacts resulted, the more obvious it became that greater consumer understanding was critical to move forward. Thus, the need to expand IMC from the four primary communication approaches of advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations to include a much broader range of communication methodologies was clearly the next step in IMC development. The explosion of digital information and contact coming from retailer data and the resulting analytics led to a widely expanded ability by marketers to capture, store and manipulate increasing amounts of consumer and marketplace data. That came to be known as CRM or Customer Relationship Management, which quickly became an integral element in the IMC planning approach.

ENTER BRANDS AND BRANDING

At the same time, knowledge and understanding of brands and branding was quickly expanding. Although the first book on branding did not appear in the U.S. until 1991 (“Managing Brand Equity,” David A. Aaker) the concepts and approaches clearly paralleled the development of IMC. When brand approaches were combined with the concepts of integration, many of the pieces of this new communication puzzle began to fall into place. Thus, IMC began to mean much more than simply bringing together and aligning the marketing communication activities of the firm. It began to express the total view of how consumers must be integrated into the overall communication system employed by the marketer and his or her associates. This new and improved view of IMC included a renewed emphasis on measurement and accountability.

A FOCUS ON PROCESS

Following the “dot.com bust” of 2000, IMC became even more important to most organizations. The lack of success of the many “new marketers” who focused primarily on technology-driven marketing solutions quickly demonstrated that the customer and prospects were the key elements in marketplace success, not simply clever slogans and nifty technological solutions. IMC began to be formalized as method of developing and implementing a consumer-focused, repeatable communication process. It was this idea of process which was new to the communication field and the differentiating feature was the process used to attempt to influence consumers, not the technology being employed. There had always been communication planning methods starting with AIDA (attention, interest, desire and action) but most all had been developed from the marketer’s view—what the marketer wanted to say about or on behalf of the product or service to be vended. The 2004 text “IMC: The Next Generation” (Schultz and Schultz, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2004), broke with that internally focused approach as illustrated by the new IMC definition offered:

“Integrated Marketing Communication is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive
marketing communications programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees and other targeted, relevant, external and internal audiences. The goal is to generate both short-term financial returns and build long-term brand and shareholder value.” Schultz and Schultz, 2004

The new definition also allowed for a more sophisticated planning approach. That came with the 5-Step Planning Process which is illustrated in Figure 3.

As shown, that process included (1) customer or prospect identification, (2) customer or prospect valuation, (3) creation and delivery of messages and incentives, (4) estimation of return on customer investment, and (5) budgeting, allocation and recycling. Thus, marketing communication began to develop the basics of a science, not just a non-repeatable art. With that change, however, came additional challenges.

NEWEST: THE NEW CHALLENGES OF IMC

As the digital age of communication took hold, it became clear that consumers had gained control of the marketplace, and particularly the communications area. They determined what they wanted to see, hear and process. All of that came about as a result of the development and diffusion of new forms of information technology. Some of those consumer controlled communication systems are illustrated in Figure 4.

CONSUMER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

With the advent of these new communication systems, many of which competed directly with traditional marketing communication forms for the time and attention of consumers, a new and more challenging issue developed for IMC. Simply put, integration became not an integration of existing media forms but the integration of old and new media forms as shown in Figure 5.

PUSH-PULL MARKETPLACE

We’ve termed today’s marketplace one of “push and pull.” That is, marketers continue to “push marketing communications out” to customers and prospects through traditional forms such as television, newspapers, magazines, radio, outdoor, sales promotion, public relations and the like. At the same time, the consumer has the capability of
FIGURE 4: Growth and Diffusion of Information Technology

- Internet — WiFi
- Mobile Telephony
- iPods/MP3 — podcasts
- Cable / Satellite
- Blocking Systems — TiVo / DVR / Filters / Pop-Up Blockers / etc

FIGURE 5: The “Push-Pull” Marketplace

- Web Search
- Commoditized Products / Services
- Messages and Incentives
- Consumer / Prospect
- Word of Mouth
- New Media Forms
- Agency → Media → Sales Force
- Competitors
- Employees / Recommenders / Friends / Influencers
accessing or “pulling information” from the marketer and the marketplace. As shown above, that consumer access comes from Internet and Web search, along with new forms of marketing communication such as mobile, viral, blogs and the like. And, increasingly, it comes from consumers developing various electronic variations of word-of-mouth, chief of which today are the social networks such as Facebook, YouTube and, of course, the darling of the moment, Twitter.

The primary change these new “pull” systems create, however, is that consumers are now talking to other consumers around the world, often without the knowledge of the marketer. It is, in effect, global word-of-mouth—unrestrained and unfettered—a true babble of consumers praising, denigrating or simply ignoring the platitudes of marketers and the organizations which have traditionally controlled most marketing information. Additionally, these new communication systems allow the consumer to access information when, where and how they want it—taking it further out of the control of the marketer. That results in a total loss of traditional marketer control over what is said about their products and services and more importantly, perhaps, how it is said.

This is the new frontier in IMC, i.e., the newest IMC: aligning and integrating the push and the pull formats in ways that create corporate value and also provide the information and solutions consumers are seeking.

One of the primary challenges in this new marketplace, of course, is that most marketing organizations are structured to talk, not listen. Hearing consumers in many cases is a totally new concept to marketers who are accustomed to communication control. Clearly, in a marketplace where consumers drive the dialog, it becomes critical for marketers to listen, yet that is not in their DNA nor do most of our marketing concepts and approaches provide much help. For example, the hoary marketing mantra of the 4Ps, with its focus on product, price, place and promotion, is all inside-out. “Here is what we as marketers want to tell you consumers, so, listen up” is a management system with little regard for what consumers want to hear or learn.

The biggest challenge in this new push and pull marketplace is aligning the outbound and inbound communication programs. When the internet first burst on the scene, marketing management viewed the new electronic forms of communication as alien. Thus, they banished the digital people to another room, or perhaps even another city, so they would not contaminate the traditional marketing people who were really driving the business. The switch to a totally integrated, inbound and outbound, push and pull, digital and analog system is required. Consumers have already crossed that chasm. Marketers are finding it most difficult.

So, today’s challenge, what I have termed the “newest IMC,” is simply how to bring online and offline together. To see communication the way consumers see it: holistic, integrated and always available. That is today’s challenge. But, what about the future?

WHERE DOES IMC GO FROM HERE?

Integration, whether that be IMC or some other form of alignment, is clearly here to stay. Like the old saying about the weather, however, everyone talks about it but few do much about it. The short-term challenges to IMC are clear in the need for the alignment of all forms of communication both online and offline. The bigger question, of course, is what comes next.

One area which all marketing, even IMC and integration, has not yet fully addressed is how to overcome the western cultural bias which permeates all marketing and communication concepts. Most marketing concepts, based on the 4Ps and supported by western concepts of consumer behavior, were developed and matured in sophisticated, media rich, data intensive markets where resources were readily available and managers had extensive marketing and communication training. Thus, realistically, most marketing as it is being practiced today is relevant to only about one-third of the world’s population. The other two-thirds of the consumer market that organizations are trying to reach are found in emerging economies. There, limited resources, finite communication systems, minimally developed infrastructures and communication systems that may be limited or controlled by governments who are not as interested in consumer knowledge as they are in keeping the system currently developed in place, are the norm.

To be really relevant to customers and prospects going forward, marketers need new concepts and approaches. That is where I believe the future of IMC lies. Adapting the IMC concept to accommodate the other two-thirds of the world’s population.

While IMC always starts with consumers (customers
and prospects) we need to acknowledge and develop expanded views which acknowledge that not all cultures are alike and that some of the cultural values which are treasured in the west are irrelevant or perhaps an anathema in other parts of the world. In short, IMC needs indeed must be adapted and adjusted in forms and manners that fit these emerging two thirds of the world, not just the one-third from which it sprang. One of the most fundamental principles of IMC is the idea of starting with customers, not with products or services. This principal is the keystone on which IMC can be used to help organizations in both established and emerging economies.

The Medill IMC program has been blessed with a culturally diverse student body. They bring their own culture to the classroom and to their studies. Many of these students are from developing or emerging economies. While we can teach them how IMC works in our markets and in our cultures, we must learn from them about how IMC can and should be adapted to their home markets. In short, we need to start listening and stop preaching about IMC. Only in that way will what we have developed over the past 20 years truly be relevant in the next 20.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don E. Schultz is Professor (Emeritus-in-Service) of integrated marketing communications, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. He is also president of the global marketing consultancy Agora, Inc. also located in Evanston. Prior to his academic career, Dr. Schultz spent 15 years in media and advertising agency management, the last ten at Tracy-Locke Advertising and Public Relations, Dallas, Texas where he was a senior vice president and management supervisor on a number of national accounts. He resigned from Tracy-Locke to pursue a career in academia. Schultz lectures, conducts seminars and conferences and consults on five continents. His current research and teaching focuses on communication integration, branding and the financial measures of marketing and communication and internal marketing. He has or currently holds Visiting/Adjunct/Guest professorship appointments at Cranfield School of Management and Hull University in the UK, Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, Peiking and Tsinghua Universities in Beijing, China, Haken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland and others. Schultz holds a B.B.A. from the University of Oklahoma (1957), an M.A. in Advertising: Specialized Curriculum with a major in Marketing and a minor in Journalism from Michigan State University (1975), and a Ph.D. in Mass Media (1977) from Michigan State University.
In the 1995 Wayne Wang film “Smoke,” William Hurt’s writer character tells a possibly apocryphal story about how English explorer Sir Walter Raleigh made a bet with Queen Elizabeth I that he could weigh the smoke from a cigar. First, Sir Walter placed an unsmoked cigar on a scale and weighed it. Then he lit up and smoked the cigar, tapping the ashes into the scale pan. When he finished, he placed the butt into the pan along with the ashes and weighed what was there. Then he subtracted that number from the original weight of the unsmoked cigar. The difference was the weight of the smoke.

Elizabethan bar bets aside, weighing smoke is problematic, if not an exercise in futility—and viral marketers face a similar problem in measuring the ROI of word-of-mouth. The buzz about viral and word-of-mouth (WOM) has transformed marketing, as marketers eschew the hard work of building customer relationships through loyalty and database marketing in favor of distracting them with such shiny baubles as YouTube videos and interactive adver-games.

“We are really at the early stage of a big change,” says Jim Nail, Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer at Watertown, Mass.-based Cymfony. “Companies are creating titles and even departments around word-of-mouth marketing. It’s really beginning to take a grip.”

Though WOM spending is difficult to track, the trend is behind the increase in Internet ad spending, with the Interactive Advertising Bureau reporting that companies spent $4.9 billion on the Internet channel in the first quarter of 2007, up 26 percent from the same period last year. If you doubt that WOM is leading the virtual land rush, then note a recent Inc. magazine study, which found that 82 percent of the fastest-growing private companies employ WOM techniques.

Viral campaigns build awareness, but do they build market share? Can marketers identify or create brand evangelists—those consumers who actively promote their favorite products and services to family, friends and business associates? Can their effect on the bottom line be measured? How can viral campaigns link to existing loyalty marketing efforts? Is a viral video really all you need to create customer advocates—or are agencies who sell viral services simply blowing smoke?
THE MODERN AGE OF VIRAL MARKETING

Viral marketing is not a recent phenomenon; before the advent of the printing press, broadcast media and the Internet, word-of-mouth was the only way to market your goods.

In 2003, the Pabst Brewing Company traced the epicenter of a 9.4 percent sales increase of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer to Portland, Oregon, where PBR had become the beer of choice for anti-establishment hipsters. Through word-of-mouth advocacy amongst the tattooed and pierced, PBR sales enjoyed similar spikes around the country; in Chicago, sales spiked by 134 percent. In April 2004, fast-food chain Burger King launched www.subservientchicken.com—a site that allowed users to issue commands to a guy dressed in a chicken suit—and enjoyed 20 million hits. Nobody knew if Burger King tied the chicken to a sales increase, but it did wonders for brand awareness.

The Pabst and Subservient Chicken episodes, among others, found marketers in every industry scrambling to analyze and exploit this seeming explosion of viral marketing. With the proliferation of broadband access and social networks, video-sharing sites and blogs, word-of-mouth now spreads at the speed of thought. Marketers who fear getting run over by the WOM train are attempting to get on board, if not pilot the locomotive, with such tactics as buzz marketing, influencer marketing and crowd-sourcing.

The quest to create and measure the ROI of what used to happen quite naturally has led to the development of a growing industry dedicated to managing and influencing word-of-mouth. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA)—formed in 2004 to define standards, best practices and metrics for this new discipline—has coined such terms as WOMUnits, Polarity, Source Diversity, Clarity and Depth to define and sell WOM marketing services in much the way that the diamond industry created the “four Cs” of diamond grading to help promote the value of the stones. Though you might think cynical, tech-savvy young adults would avoid branded content, a 2006 Sharpe Partners survey found that only five percent of consumers surveyed would refuse to share branded content with friends. More than 40 percent are more likely to forward branded content.

“People like to talk about brands,” says Andy Sernovitz, CEO of WOMMA and author of “Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking.” “We now mention 20 or 30 brands a day in the course of regular conversation. So the word-of-mouth challenge is to get people to talk about your business.”

We’re all marketers now—whether we realize it or not. Dave Balter, founder and president of BzzAgent, a Boston, Mass.-based word-of-mouth marketing firm, describes attending a meeting between an advertising account executive and his client at which they previewed a new television commercial. When the preview ended, the account executive said, apparently with a straight face, “This spot is viral. The buzz it creates will be better than word-of-mouth.”

The difference between viral marketing and word-of-mouth is one of cause and effect. Viral marketing—such as influencer marketing programs, community-building portals, viral videos and street-level guerilla campaigns—builds awareness and buzz; it’s the cause. Positive word of mouth, which theoretically leads to trial and acquisition, is the effect. The publication of Fred Reichheld’s The Ultimate Question and the continued success of such viral promotions as CareerBuilder’s “Monk-e-mail” campaign, has convinced even the most stubborn marketers that they’re only one great viral campaign away from that summer home in the Hamptons they’ve been dreaming about.

“Marketers think that [WOM] is some new magic bullet,” says Jim Nail, who also sits on WOMMA’s board of directors. “In fact, it’s a lot harder to do right than a television commercial, because word-of-mouth happens all the time whether you do anything about it or not. It really requires a marketer to think not just about the word-of-mouth marketing campaign you’re going to do this month, but also to think about the customer’s entire experience with the brand.”

There is no doubt that successful WOM campaigns can move the needle. One of the earliest adopters of this discipline, ironically, is corporate giant Procter & Gamble (P&G), which launched its Tremor service in 2001 to help market products to teens through managed WOM techniques. Tremor has grown to encompass more than 225,000 teen agents, and the experience led P&G to launch Vocalpoint in 2005 as a vehicle to spread the P&G gospel to its other core constituency: moms. Vocalpoint now boasts more than 600,000 “connector moms” who receive coupons and new product samples in the mail and then share their experiences with upwards of 25-30 other women a day (the average mom speaks to just
Based on global averages across 300-plus campaigns, we think about word-of-mouth in terms of one-off promotions? simply deliver a temporary boost on par with other tactics that draw short-term attention but little else to individual campaigns to tactics that allow for prospect identification and capture of behavioral data. Swiss computer peripheral manufacturer Logitech, for example, recently punt their viral campaigns for a trio of adver-games hosted on its web site. Players of its Ball Balancer, Jelly Jump and Jellybattle games are prompted to register their email addresses and receive traceable discount coupons for unlocking higher game levels.

We think about word-of-mouth in terms of generations,” Bigay says. “Academics who are measuring the space look at it in the same way. Based on global averages across 300-plus campaigns, we know the average BzzAgent will talk to about 12 people. And those people, whom we call Generation One, will then talk to about four additional people. What we don’t yet have is comprehensive ability to measure the effect beyond that second generation.”

**THIS ONE GOES OUT TO THE ONE I LOVE**

Measuring the effect of viral marketing may not be quite as fruitless as weighing smoke—but it is akin to navel-gazing. Viral marketers can measure the reach of a viral video, isolate the incremental effect of agented word-of-mouth, and determined the polarity of blogosphere buzz. But can they tell you definitively that the viral campaign on which you just dropped a dime led to increased market share? The jury is still out.

Consider the problems of the Dunkin’ Donuts test. Because BzzAgent didn’t have access to point-of-sale information, they couldn’t isolate Latte Lite drink purchases; they could only measure category espresso drink sales. The imperfect test-versus-control environment saw one control market outperform its companion test market. These aren’t fatal flaws, but they demonstrate the difficulty viral marketers face in collecting actionable data. And it’s not just marketing executives who are dissatisfied with current ROI measurements. Interactive agencies themselves encounter client executives whom they sometimes have to talk down from the diving board.

“Sometimes the VP Marketing or the CMO looks at one or two videos that have really broken out and says, ‘Let’s do this for our company. You guys just put a cool video out there, it’ll get a million hits within a month and we’ll make a million dollars,’” says Michael Wunsch, Director of Interactive Marketing for Louisville, Ky.-based Leapfrog Interactive. “Our answer is always, ‘OK: it’s great that you want viral to become a piece of your overall strategy—but by no means is it going to be the complete strategy.’”

The quest for reliable metrics has led some marketers away from viral tactics that draw short-term attention but little else to individual campaigns to tactics that allow for prospect identification and capture of behavioral data. Swiss computer peripheral manufacturer Logitech, for example, recently punt their viral campaigns for a trio of adver-games hosted on its web site. Players of its Ball Balancer, Jelly Jump and Jellybattle games are prompted to register their email addresses and receive traceable discount coupons for unlocking higher game levels.

“The ability to measure our results was certainly
important,” says Garreth Hayes, European Marketing Director for Logitech USA, of the switch to adver-games. “We also felt that viral games were more brand appropriate with a better chance of return as we try to connect with computer users. The effect of viral video generally is much more difficult to measure.”

The dirty secret of the viral marketing industry, then, isn’t so secret after all: Outside of Subservient Chicken-level success or expensive sustained WOM efforts like P&G’s Vocalpoint, viral marketing is difficult to execute successfully and measure adequately. A 2006 Millward Brown survey, for example, found that only 35 percent of all U.K. consumers regularly received viral emails—and only 13 percent of that group passed the email on. “Viral ads,” Millward Brown concludes, “need a clearly-defined role in the overall marketing plan.”

**THE MOUTH THAT ROARED**

If viral marketing isn’t the magic bullet, it has at least become a deadly arrow in the marketer’s quiver. Going viral confers considerable advantage: You can spread word of a new product or service at light speed; generate buzz at the approximate level of a Hollywood premiere; and leverage brand evangelists to encourage trial and activation. To build true customer loyalty, your viral campaign must connect at the front end of your customer strategy, open a doorway into customer data collection, and then connect on the back end to engage your most valuable segments. Viral content that doesn’t encourage identification or dialogue is just mass marketing tarted up for the digital age.

“None of these sophisticated, crazy viral strategies drive conversation,” says Andy Sernovitz. “And in some ways we tend to overcomplicate the purpose of word-of-mouth. Your customers have invested in you, they own your stuff, and they really do want to connect with you—so let them. When a company opens up and shows a willingness to listen in an interactive way, that openness alone has an impact.”

The perception in some marketing circles is that viral marketing can somehow replace the hard work of collecting and mining customer data. If viral is Mac Guy—cool, trendy and of the moment—then loyalty marketing is PC Guy—competent, but stodgy and uncreative. But is marketing a zero-sum game? Or can viral techniques become an important part of your loyalty-marketing strategy?

A 2006 Nielsen BuzzMetrics white paper advocates just this approach: “In order to market effectively and intelligently, you need to know your audience. Once you’ve pinpointed active online consumers, get to know them and their habits by offering opt-in programs that allow them to engage further. Segment high-value customers and treat them as special ambassadors by offering them loyalty programs, member clubs, special offers and the like.”

“To succeed in word-of-mouth marketing, you need to find that segment of real ardent fans and create special programs and tools that will empower them to share that enthusiasm,” says Jim Nail. “In that sense, I think viral is an extension of the loyalty discipline.”

To integrate viral marketing into your own customer strategy, consider following these Viral Commandments. The marketing resources you save may be your own.

**Use viral tactics to build awareness and trial.** P&G’s Vocalpoint campaign and BzzAgent’s army of advocates have successfully tapped into a fundamental human desire: To appear trendy and in-the-know. We all like to share good news with our extended networks; the ability to tell your friends and family about a new product and bask in the attention is, in itself, a compelling soft benefit for your best customers.

**There is no acquisition without identification.** Customer identification is essential to building long-term advocacy. Viral marketing without capture of customer identification—by collecting an email address, signing up the customer for an opt-in program or tracking offer redemption—is not an effective acquisition technique. Metrics that end by measuring the reach of your viral campaign only tell you how consumers responded to that particular campaign. They can’t tell you whether any of those consumers try your products and become long-term customers. Identification is the first and most important step in the relationship chain that leads to cross-sell, up-sell and increased customer lifetime value.

**Look beyond the transactional.** The most cutting criticism of loyalty marketers is that we’re loath to admit that transactional loyalty doesn’t always, or even frequently, equate to emotional loyalty. Viral marketers say their techniques are ideally suited to identify and engage those hidden champions in your customer file. Customer potential becomes a measure not simply of propensity to buy, but also of propensity
to advocate on behalf of the brand.

**Connect your advocates to product development.** Perhaps the greatest potential of viral marketing is as a platform to connect brand advocates with your product development cycle. Toy manufacturer Lego relied on customer feedback through their Lego Club to identify lucrative new product lines. Likewise, Dell Computer recently launched a new website, DellIdeaStorm.com, to allow Dell customers to suggest improvements and new product lines—and saw more than 200,000 posts in 90 days.

American Express has also exploited this trend with their viral Members Project campaign. Anyone can register to suggest a charitable project for American Express to fund—and Membership Rewards members can vote to pick the winning idea, which American Express has vowed to fund up to $5 million. It’s the type of viral campaign that will funnel identifiable prospects into the American Express marketing stream and engage current cardholders on a deeply emotional level. It’s a textbook example of how to generate and leverage buzz.

**SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES**

Is viral marketing the next transformative paradigm that will forever alter the way businesses connect and build relationships with customers? Probably not—but neither is it simply a fad. As marketers strive to improve the ROI of viral marketing campaigns, successful techniques will merge with loyalty marketing efforts to capture and identify prospects at the top of the funnel and build advocacy with high-value segments.

So maybe measuring the success of viral marketing can become more than the equivalent of weighing smoke. Sir Walter Raleigh was a clever guy, no doubt—but he’s probably not the best role model. He was, after all, tried and executed for treason. Marketing ROI has to be more than just a way to win a bar bet.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

As Editorial Director of COLLOQUY, Rick Ferguson is responsible for all COLLOQUY print and online publishing, educational and research projects. Under Rick’s direction, the COLLOQUY magazine and web site provide a worldwide audience of 32,000+ subscribers with news, expert commentary, program summaries and research on all facets of loyalty marketing around the globe. An acknowledged expert in the theory and practice of loyalty marketing, Rick has published numerous articles and white papers describing the characteristics of marketing programs which seek to change customer behavior. He has been quoted as a loyalty expert in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, USA Today, Guardian UK, Fast Company, and Smart Money, serves as a contributor to The Journal of Consumer Marketing and has written monthly columns for NACS magazine, DM News (Canada) and the Chief Marketer web site.
COMMUNICATING ACROSS FOUR GENERATIONS:
Are You Mixing, Missing or Marketing Your Message?

by Donna M. Gallagher

ABSTRACT
This is the first time in history when four distinct generations may be found across one conference table. Each of these generations: Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Gen X and Millennials are shaped by unique generational DNA. The strategies, case studies and tools provided cause marketers to consider new paradigms as traditional business models evolve and change. I call this the Play Dough Rule. Play dough is timeless because it was used by baby boomers, their children and grandchildren all the way to today’s youngest generation. It can be stretched, reshaped and molded. But, if left unattended, play dough will harden, become unbendable and of no value. This analogy relates to the willingness to understand differences among the generations. We must reshape our thinking and be aware, not just of trends, but of new dimensions of a full marketing experience. Understanding how to “cross-generate” your message, materials, campaigns, training and benefits is a total marketing experience.

What do you do if your employee, business owner or customer is twenty-five years younger or twenty-five years your senior and looking at life through a distinctively different generational lens? How do you manage, motivate, communicate and market to vastly different audiences with one stroke of your marketing brush?

For the first time in history there are potentially four generations across one conference table. Each brings a unique perspective, management style, set of expectations, and historical and cultural identity. Views on communication, marketing techniques, compensation, rewards and retirement create a tapestry of complex and intricately woven threads that can connect or tangle. Understanding the layers of “generational DNA” can be the difference between communicating and colliding; between successfully marketing your message or completely missing your mark!

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
The Traditional Generation, also known as the Silent Generation was born between 1900 and 1945. While many assume most of this generation is now retired, in reality many are working into their seventies, especially in these economic times. Of those that may have retired, a notable percentage is re-entering the workforce. The headline of an October 2008 Washington Business Journal article reads, “Retirement Gets Old...more people entering their golden years are realizing they still have a lot of work left to do before they can fully retire.”

The next generation is the Baby Boomer (BB) generation. Born between 1946 and 1964, this group sees themselves as forever young. With a population of approximately 80 million, they make up the largest segment of corporate management, business owners and entrepreneurs. Although BB’s may leave a current position under the guise of retirement, a baby boomer rarely or truly retires; rather he or she will reinvent him or herself. This group also has the most disposable income. Marketers know that to tap into the Baby Boomer market is to understand the Baby Boomer mentality—which varies greatly from the younger Gen X’ers and Millennials.

Generation X is the smallest segment numbering about 46 million. They were born from 1965 through 1980 and comprise today’s middle management or entrepreneur.
Unhappy with the legacy and image of baby boomer parents and rejected or released by corporate downsizing and the dot com bust of the early nineties, Gen X carved out a reputation and niche that defied the marketing trends of their elders.

Our youngest group, known as the Millennials or Generation Y, is almost twice as large as Gen X, at 76 million. Perhaps the most controversial of the four generations, Millennials challenge marketers in unchartered waters that crest with waves of new technology, new paradigms, new demands and new niches. A 24-year-old woman stated it perfectly when she said, “I want to be able to read your message while walking, talking, texting and listening to my iPod. I want to be able to send your message via Facebook, video clip or find it on YouTube. Keep it short, keep it strong!”

THE PLAY DOUGH RULE

Understanding the needs, expectations and hot buttons of each generation is a wise investment for marketers regardless of your product or service. And the first step to understanding is to embrace what I call “the play dough rule.”

Play dough is timeless because it was used by baby boomers, their children and grandchildren all the way to today’s youngest generation. It can be stretched, reshaped and molded. We all have preconceived ideas about other generations and we should think of these ideas as lumps of play dough. One can make a bridge to connect two disparate objects with play dough and, as long as it’s kept “fresh,” can keep reshaping and remolding it. But, if left unattended properly, play dough will harden, become unbendable and of no value. With play dough, if you don’t agree, you can squeeze, but the rule is, you can’t play, reshape and leave.

This analogy relates to the willingness to understand differences among the generations. We must build bridges and messages that connect not clash. We must continually reshape our thinking and be aware, not just of trends, but of new dimensions such as a full marketing experience.

GETTING TO KNOW THE PLAYERS

What are the major distinguishing characteristic and clash points of each generation?

Let’s peel back some of the layers of generational DNA and see what, why, when and how each group collectively evolved.

“...We all have preconceived ideas about other generations and we should think of these ideas as lumps of play dough.”

Traditions generally hold to a military management style of “Chain of Command – Do as I say, Don’t ask Why.” As a group they are loyal to institutions, government and companies. They are hard workers and having grown up with reminders of the Great Depression, they often are glad to have any respectable job. Known for longevity in the workplace, they place an emphasis on process, policy and structure. Many are patriotic. Their career goal is to build a legacy.

The Baby Boomer management style is “Change of Command.” These are the grown-ups who made Woodstock historical, protested Vietnam and bought into John Lennon’s “Imagine” to make the world a better place. They are characterized as optimistic and idealistic. Power, money, titles and the corner office all motivate the typical boomer profile. Women’s rights, environmental movements and the advent of rock and roll all gained momentum during the apex of the young boomers. Building an outstanding and notable career is more the mantra of this generation.

A boomer never really retires. They reframe, refocus or retool as long as they can be productive. This gives marketers new ways to reach new sides of the multi-faceted, never-grow-old baby boomer.

A lot changed with Generation X. They had a very different, almost opposite experience from the Traditions and Boomers. Many Gen X’er’s were Latch Key kids, as ambitious boomer parents needed, or wanted, to work outside of the home. They became an independent generation with a management style of “Self Command- I’m not sure I trust you.” They despise micro-management, demand flexibility and are responsible for ushering in the beginning of flex-time and home-life balance concepts in the workplace. Many became entrepreneurs, having developed skeptical personae attributed, in part, to their time and place in history alongside the dot.com bust, failed corporate and government leaders,
and failed institutions. While they trust themselves and their colleagues, a Gen Xer does not typically feel loyal to a company or an institution and are the segment most likely to change jobs or quit to take an extended sabbatical—which is not always for pleasure, but often for training and cultivation of new career opportunities.

Because they are the smallest of the four generations, at only 46 million, and technologically savvy, they have developed the knowledge and power to negotiate well.

It has been said that Generation X often feels “overlooked,” sandwiched in between the enthusiastic, optimistic boomer and the great expectations of the Millennials. Marketers beware! This is not your Happy Days crowd, and your techniques and messages must reflect an understanding of a unique Generation X.

It’s a new world with the Millennials. The opinions, comments and experiences gleaned from knowing or employing Millennials are a blend of intriguing, interesting, frustrating and sometimes shocking responses.

Millennials are the children of the boomers and older Gen Xers. They have been called “Trophy Kids” referring to their over-achieving boomer parents who have extended their enthusiasm of younger years attempting to raise the perfect, brightest, winning generation. A millennial young adult is often extremely confident, demanding and without doubt, multi-dimensional. The child, who may have been given a trophy for just showing up on the soccer team, may enter the workplace and assume that because they have been hired, they can possibly change everything or immediately be part of board room discussions because they feel they have so much to offer. And thus, the shock and basis for conflict converges as older management feels that knowledge and experience comes through hard, earned hours.

Extremely technological savvy, it is said that a Millennial’s career goal is to build “parallel careers” and may have as many as ten careers. Note that I did not say ten job changes, but ten distinct careers. Their management style is to “Collaborate” and the success of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media validate this concept among this generation.

Millennials also embrace a strong social consciousness, much like their boomer parents, but with a different approach. A patriotic resurgence, an increased college population who skip traditional internships opting for service projects like volunteering in orphanages or rebuilding devastated areas, reveal an endearing and admirable fabric in the complex tapestry of this powerful but young group. At somewhere between 76 and 78 million strong, they truly believe that together – through collaboration – they change the world.

“There is a new phenomenon. The Young are discovering they don’t have to be helpless, because they can have an impact by getting together.” J. Nelson, UNICEF

And, here among the colorful and entwining strands of millennial thread, must the marketer excel. This generation of walking, talking, texting, techno savvy, confident crusaders, insist on transparency. They live by new rules. They Google every and anything and can extract the facts from the mask of the message.

CREATE AN EXPERIENCE TO SUPPORT YOUR BRAND

Successful marketing is often instinctive as well as scientific. Author, Lisa Johnson, states in her book Mind your X’s and Y’s, “Brands that attract loyal Gen X/Y customers are not just lucky….While it is not formulaic, there is a clear market code…and you need to understand this is a colossal shift.” She continues the warning, “It is critical to realize that these market changes are not just a trend. The hierarchical structure of business has collapsed. One era has ended and a new one has begun.”

It used to be that the essential criteria for marketing were age, income, place and brand recognition. The new code demands, among other things, experience and transparency.

A brand can be elevated or torn down by bloggers. A grassroots campaign can be mobilized on Twitter. Four generations can be connected by Facebook. Print magazines are going digital with video links for advertisers and hot link access embedded within articles. I am fond of a print ad for mid-age women’s jeans that says “These are not your mother’s jeans.” And, colleagues, this is not your father’s Sunday newspaper.

Experience is mandatory in today’s marketing mix. It is said that “experience is the new currency.” Technology and entertainment have allowed us to be creators rather than observers. Understanding the
kind of experience your audience wants is the magic of marketing. According to International Association of Conference Centers (IACC), Thought Leader Summit of 2008, “Ten years ago, event planners were worried if a venue had enough breakout space. Today, we worry if people are going to be pleased with what they see, what their bedroom space feels like to them; what their dining experience is going to be. In short, people come to an event to feel inspired not just from content, but from everything they encounter.” The mantra of today in marketing is a demand for a full experience regardless of age or interest.

IT IS NOT WHAT YOU SELL, BUT WHAT THEY WILL BUY

Starbucks: A Case Study

Almost as much as I enjoy a grande, skinny, one-pump vanilla soy latte sprinkled with cinnamon, I love this quote from the book Mind Your X & Y’s. “Starbucks was the first to transform the simple act of drinking coffee into a full life-style statement...creating a rich and deeply textured experience by elevating everyday activity to a special place and wrapping the entire brand in a cozy place.”

Starbucks sells coffee, but people buy the experience of visiting a Starbucks and paying big bucks for a not-so-simple cup of coffee. On most any day, at most anytime you can find the true blend of cross-generations on any Starbucks corner. The Traditional may be reading the daily paper, the Millennial plugged into laptop, texting on a mobile phone or hanging out.

The young Gen X mother with the next, yet unnamed generation pushes a designer stroller that seems to complement her designer, low fat coffee. And there, in the remote corner, is the Gen X entrepreneur in sandals and jeans, or possibly in a non-traditional suit with no tie, cracking the code to the next operating system or inventing the next fabulous whatever. The baby boomer comes in slightly huffing in running shoes, t-shirt and pedometer or the contrast of expensive high heels, polished loafers and powerful navy suits with wrinkles hidden beneath the latest miracle makeover.

The brilliance of Starbucks is they have merged home, work and play, technology and the complex dynamics that surround not only four diverse generations but a brand-focused community. Did you know that even the music you hear at various Starbucks locations is not by random choice? But rather, each location has selected music, strategically, to satisfy multi-generations with sounds and style focused to enhance the experience of each segment of their target audience.

THE PINOCCHIO SYNDROME

Depending on your generation, you may have grown up with fairy tales. Pinnochio has always been a favorite through four of my family generations.

A wooden puppet made in the toy workshop of Geppeto, Pinnochio can become a real boy instead of a wooden puppet only by telling the truth. If he lies, his wooden nose will grow and grow and grow.

Companies may not grow wooden noses when they stretch the truth with advertising claims and marketing speak, but consumers of all generations, and particularly Gen X and Gen Y, are increasingly demanding truth and transparency. USA Today’s July 22, 2009 article, “Consumers’ ability to track orders gives them control” addresses one way transparency is being demanded. The article quotes Patricia Martin, author of “Renaissance Generation: The Rise of Cultural Consumer and What It Means to Your Business”: “The more information you have, the more interesting you are.” It tells how “tracking” all kinds of information is a new past-time and a means for customers to hold retailers and companies accountable with transparency. Domino’s rolled out “Pizza Tracker” so customers know exactly when to expect their delivery order. The Chicago Transit Authority has an online Bus Tracker. Airlines allow us to track flights, UPS and FedEx pinpoint package locations, city governments allow tracking of things from emergency response time to how quickly potholes are filled. And parents track their children’s first everything on TrixieTracker.com.

All of this is more than a past-time in our busy lives,
but a multi-generational trend that supports marketing criteria of transparency.

BEST PRACTICES TO REACH ALL GENERATIONS

The companies that take the time to understand and develop best practices to cross-pollinate all employee and customers are the companies that will have the edge.

In this collaborative world, peer-to-peer word of mouth is a foundation of any solid marketing strategy. And the use of technology further enhances that edge. But, in addition, employing strategies that create a healthy workplace and happy client base is well-worth the time and effort, not to mention the benefit to the bottom line. Consider some of the following best practices for multi-generational communications:

1. Know your audience – employees and customer. Ask meaningful questions, then listen and apply the information. Know the need before building a solution

2. Foster a mentoring culture and develop “cross-generational” mentoring programs where both young and old can mentor each other. Wisdom and experience from the older generation can be a comfortable marriage with the innovation and out-of-the-box thinking of the younger set.

3. Everyone deserves respect. Communication styles vary and what may sound arrogant from a younger employee or customer, may not have insolence at the root of the motive. Millennials need to understand the “whys” of the big picture. Create vision and ownership.

4. Consider flexible schedules. Work-life balance is a central theme to many of the generations today. Better productivity is often a result of happy employees, but create expectations and accountability standards.

5. Create inclusive teams. This extends to team-building and project assignments. But balance direction with flexibility to create ownership of tasks and results.

6. Develop or provide training programs that focus on current and future career paths. Considering partnering with socially-responsible organizations that match the interests of your company culture and your employees/customer sensitivities to allow for volunteerism and opportunities to “give back” to the community and make a difference. This is important for all, but especially a demand of the Millennials to work for companies that have the good of the world in the corporate DNA.

7. Create phased retirement, allowing workers to gradually down-shift into lighter more flexible schedules and thus keeping the experience and institutional knowledge within the company for a longer time.

8. Provide feedback. Generation X and Y need consistent if not constant feedback. Customers need to know their comments are taken seriously and that they have input into product development.

9. Consider, when appropriate, incorporating social media into your marketing plans. Some companies are setting a specified timeframe, such as an hour on Fridays, for employees to scour and respond to comments about their company, products or brands. Remember that peer-to-peer recommendations can make or break a brand and grassroots campaigns, as well as media coverage often begin with blog comments.

10. Make sure that each employee has a well-defined career path, opportunities to provide input and clear understanding of the company’s vision, mission and immediate goals. Start with best practices that include the use of knowledge management systems to track the different generational needs. Also, create a vehicle for customers to understand the full value of all that you provide and make sure that includes an experience appropriate to your target market and a commitment to full transparency in all of your claims. Your brand is your promise. Your promise is your word. Your word is your reputation.

IT’S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL

Each generation is different; but different is not wrong. Each has something good and unique to offer. History is a teacher and understanding prior generations is a key to understanding current generations. The biggest mistake a marketer can make is to assume the next generation will follow a linear path. In more than 200 years, none have done so.

Skilled marketers will learn how to ride the wave of change. The brands they design will understand the complex layers of generational DNA. The colors and experiences they unfold will weave a new tapestry translucent with the beauty of diversity, integrity and
relative creativity. The messages they craft will demand authenticity.

They will embrace the challenge of building cultural and generational bridges. They will connect lives to worthy causes and empower people of all ages. They will help create a future by saving the best of the past and bravely venturing into the best of today while paving the path for, yet, the next new generation.

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WHATEVER THE QUESTION, THE ANSWER IS “TESTING”

by Albert Liu

ABSTRACT

As both off- and on-line businesses continue to see their marketing budgets slashed amidst the current economic climate, the need to drive measurable and rapid ROI becomes ever more pressing. Brick and mortar companies must shift traditional advertising dollars to database marketing to become more targeted. Online organizations can leverage search engine optimization (SEO) efforts to increase the quantity and quality of their site traffic. The fundamental problem here however, is that the reallocation of funds, albeit arguably better spent and more quantifiable, doesn’t necessarily translate into improving the marketer’s ROI. Ultimately, it’s the end consumer who will dictate which marketing tactics provide the most persuasive calls-to-action. The question is, how do marketers know which ones, and more precisely, what execution is likely to derive the optimal results? The answer is testing. Taking a strategic approach to testing, imbedding it into the organizational culture, establishing an infrastructure for implementation, and acting with speed and purpose can increase customer engagement, improve conversions and maximize the marketer’s ROI.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of testing is neither a new nor profound notion in the marketing arena. Yet in many organizations the role of the database marketer is still typically relegated somewhere between being “the mail people” and a functional department tasked with a specific yet narrow scope of responsibility. In many instances, the database marketer is actually losing mindshare with top management. Thirty-seven percent of respondents in Forrester Research’s The State of The Database Marketing Organization in 2008 indicated they reported to a C-level executive, compared to 51 percent just two years earlier. This adverse shift seems counterintuitive given the current economic climate.

In an era where both off and on-line businesses continue to slash marketing budgets amidst deteriorated business conditions, the need to drive measurable and rapid returns becomes ever more pressing. Brick and mortar companies can shift traditional advertising dollars to direct mail to become more targeted. Online organizations can leverage search engine optimization efforts to increase the quantity and quality of their Web site traffic. The fundamental problem however, is that the reallocation or refocus of funds, albeit better spent and more quantifiable, does not necessarily translate into results. Ultimately, it’s the end consumer who will dictate what marketing tactics, messages and offers provide the most persuasive and compelling call to action. The question is – how do marketers know which ones are likely to drive the optimal results? The answer is simple – testing. But success demands more than just doing it. By taking a strategic approach to testing, acting with speed and purpose, insuring buy-in from top down and imbedding it throughout the organizational culture, marketers in virtually any on or off-line business can increase customer engagement, improve conversion events and maximize ROI.

THE NECESSITY OF NOW

In The State of Retailing Online 2009, Shop.org’s 12th annual study conducted by Forrester Research, conversion rates among the online retailers it surveyed hovered around 3 percent and 3.5 percent, comparable with the previous few years. This is in part due to the practically non-existent switching costs in the digital world, where a user at any particular commerce site can easily jump ship simply by typing in the URL of a competitive Web site. Further exacerbating the
problem are the likes of popular comparison engines such as pricegrabber.com, bizrate.com and dealtime.com, which can instantaneously present a user with a myriad of options in mere milliseconds.

Brick and mortar counterparts face equally challenging circumstances. While a consumer has to calculate the trade-offs of gas and time to scout a product at an alternative retail outlet, for instance, in today's environment one often walks into that store armed with the confidence that the purchase will likely be complemented by a deeply discounted offer. Take Bed Bath & Beyond for example, the 1,000-unit home furnishings store. As TheMotleyFool.com’s Rich Duprey descriptively explains,

“If you live within sight of a road that might lead to a highway that perhaps flows past a Bed Bath & Beyond then undoubtedly you’ve found your mailbox crammed with blue-and-white coupons from the home furnishings retailer. Sometimes you can get two or three on the same day.” (3)

Quite frankly, marketers are often handcuffed-pulled between the dueling priorities of achieving the revenue goals of today and building the sustainable and longstanding brand of tomorrow. The question is, how does the marketer know when, where and to whom to promote and discount to in a way that is truly accretive to the business? How does the online marketer know what Web site elements will truly engage the visitor and translate interest into action?

The answer is simple – testing.

**FUN IN THE WINDY CITY**

Chicago.com, one of the windy city’s premier Web portals where anyone from first-time tourists to long standing residents of the city go for comprehensive resources on hotels, restaurants, real estate and more, draws over 100,000 visitors each month. Ninety percent of the site’s visitors are ready to make tourism-related purchases. In order to maximize conversions, Chicago.com began simple A/B testing of select, key home page elements.

Among the early set of elements tested included the site’s hotel search function, an attractions module, its newsletter sign-up and the home page’s main header image. Can simple modifications, as subtle as the color of a call to action button or a slight adjustment in promotional copy, alter customer behavior? Let the customer decide. In varying the presentation of the call to action button of a hotel search test, Chicago.com was able to generate close to a 25 percent higher click-through rate versus a control version. Josh Metnick Chicago.com’s CEO says, “We are huge fans of testing. Incremental improvements in conversion rates translate in direct revenue. It is having a significant impact on the way we operate.” Chicago.com also looked at testing several landing page options, such as setting the default tab for “entertainment” information for in-state visitors and for “hotels” for out-of-state users (based on IP addresses).

**NOT GAMBLING ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

Gila River Gaming Enterprises manages three casino properties in metropolitan Phoenix, Arizona. Its Vee Quiva casino, located 15 miles from Phoenix, provides enthusiastic gamers access to over 800 slot machines, nearly 30 table and poker games and valuable guest amenities such as valet parking and a fresh deli. But as many drive-in, frequency market casinos across the nation are facing, Vee Quiva is challenged with maximizing profit margins amidst a heavily promotions-driven industry.

To understand its customers’ proclivity to change behaviors based on the marketing offers they receive, Gila River Gaming Enterprise’s Corporate Director of Marketing, Arlene Alleman, launched a direct mail test for its Gila River Casino Player’s Club members. The casino’s loyal guests historically receive cash offers based on their recent play – a standard practice in the industry. The promotional offers typically represent a standard percentage of the guest’s daily worth. For example, if a customer has a six monthly average worth to the casino of $200 each time he/she visits, that customer might receive a $10 cash offer, or a 5 percent reinvestment. But layer on additional incentives such as complements for the guest and special event invitations, and the financial equation quickly tightens. Furthermore, in many instances the customer isn’t forced to play at all and can pass on the offer. This occurrence becomes a costly miss for the casino marketer. In addition, the Phoenix gaming market is similar to other jurisdictions in the United States in that consumers have multiple options at their discretion – over a dozen casinos within two a two-hour drive of Phoenix.

Alleman tested “play up” incentive offers against a standard cash control offer. Through this offer, half of the players club members received a standard cash incentive. The other half received an offer that
provided double the cash reward, but in exchange for playing a predetermined requirement of credits on any of Vee Quiva’s 800+ slot machines. In testing the varied incentives, Alleman was able to allocate her marketing budget more efficiently, all the way down to a segment-specific level. Customers with a lower worth of $25.99 are typically the consumers who are more likely to cash in the offers sent in the mail and “walk” without playing (the casino reports a 40 percent walk factor). Such a test allows the casino to entice play and encourage players with a larger reinvestment. The results revealed that lower-end players played up at a higher rate of 60 percent, whereas the more casual gamers redeemed the cash offer 40 percent more often than the play up incentive. Alleman adds, “We are able to derive specific insights that are driven directly by guest’s actions. There’s no need for guess work.”

**RETENTION AND UP-SELL IN THE ISP MARKET**

United Online, Inc. is a leading provider of consumer products and services over the Internet. The company’s brands include more than 60 million registered accounts. Its communications unit includes two value-price brands, NetZero and Juno, which provide consumers with a variety of options for Internet access, including DSL, standard and accelerated dial-up and a free dial-up access service option. As resources and consumer preferences transformed the market environment, United Online has shifted its marketing efforts from media and consumer promotions to a marketing mix of media, search, channel marketing and email marketing.

With its focus on email marketing for retaining and upgrading its existing customer base, United Online has emphatically embraced testing to improve conversion rates with an emphasis on lists and creative. In one set of creative tests, United Online utilized multivariate testing to examine multiple best practice creative elements including button placements above the fold, strongly branded images and more prominent call-to-action items. The test versions generated a dramatic increase in both click-throughs and orders. In another test, United Online looked to stem attrition and increase win-back, and the marketing team conducted email tests based on cells segmented by the recency of customer cancellation. Bendee Anzures, director of product marketing at United Online explains, “As we’ve looked for more cost-effective approaches to communicate with our customers, email has been our most utilized driver. As a result, testing has been more ingrained in how we operate.”

**A TESTING ROADMAP FOR MAXIMIZED ROI**

Buying into the necessity of testing is an essential first step. But the journey doesn’t stop there. To truly optimize the power of testing, marketers must also synthesize four critical essentials:

1) Ask what strategic question or problem a marketing test is designed to solve.
2) Parlay insights and learnings into actionable changes.
3) Ensure top management visibility and buy-in.
4) Make testing pervasive throughout the organization to ensure cross-functional support.

Ask what strategic question or problem a marketing test is designed to solve. Testing for testing sake is a waste of time and resources. While results generated may yield interesting factoids, without clearly defining the problem to be solved up front, a marketer risks tying up resources that could be better allocated to higher return marketing efforts. E-Commerce Web sites are ripe for this potential pitfall. Consider all the points of engagement throughout a Web site — from home pages to landing pages, category areas to product detail links, internal search results pages to FAQs— there are infinite points of opportunity to test.

Yet in order to execute tests, creative variations must be developed and implementation via IT or webmaster coordinated. So where does the marketer start? With detailed Web analytics, a marketer could ask “where are my highest abandonment points?” The answer would yield a great place to start. By defining a strategic and specific problem that testing is designed to resolve, the marketer can prioritize efforts to the areas of the Web site where page element testing can deliver increased customer engagement and the biggest impact.

For Gila River Gaming Enterprises, Arlene Alleman might ask, “which entertainment offers are most likely to drive the highest online sales for one of my
entertainment venues?” By exploring this question, the marketing team could test a myriad of offers like buy-one-get-one free opportunities, 25 percent off (up to four tickets) or free parking with purchase of two tickets. This kind of testing would help determine which offers generate not only the best response rates but also the most profitable return as well.

Beth White, former VP of marketing at Spiegel Catalog, which carries high-quality, affordable apparel designed for fashion-conscious American woman, would send an annual pre-mail trendsetter book 12 weeks in advance of the company’s famous Spiegel Big Book. In mailing to a select group of approximately 5 percent of the Big Book’s total distribution, White could answer the critical question of, “which merchandise the company’s buyers should focus its attention on for the Big Book.” In addition, since customers did not receive their merchandise until the debut of the Big Book, White would also test varying discount offers of percentages or dollar amounts to determine the optimal offers that translated into action.

Parlay insights and learnings into actionable changes. The beauty of testing is that the “why” matters much less than the “what.” For any frustrated marketer who has ever sat with a creative director reviewing print ad concepts or radio scripts, the process of understanding which concept is a winner can be more challenging than learning a new language. With testing, marketers can take comfort in knowing that customer actions dictate the winners. But once test results are obtained, the marketer must act decisively to implement such changes.

For Chicago.com, Josh Metnick’s marketing team might test recommendation suggestions for its attraction module. For example, the marketing team could take a month’s worth of online traffic and, for visitors who purchase tickets to Chicago’s Art Institute, allocate 25 percent to each of four add-on offers. The first quarter might receive an enticement to also purchase tickets to The Field Museum. A second 25 percent might be presented with an invitation to purchase dining credits good at select restaurants within a short distance of the Art Institute. A third quarter might be offered the option to pre-purchase a $25 gift certificate valid at the museum’s gift shop for only $15. The final 25 percent of the site’s traffic might receive an offer to tour the city by trolley. As conversions occur and statistically significant results are achieved, Chicago.com’s marketing team can redirect new traffic (in terms of increased percentages) to the offers that generate higher average order values.

At Spiegel, the insights from the pre-mail trendsetter book would assist the inventory team in adjusting their buying needs. The advertising team leverages the test insights to modify page layouts, such as increasing the image size for better performing products and decreasing visuals for lower performing items.

Ensure top management visibility and buy-in. As the Forrester research revealed, testing (and the folks who do it) still have a significant hill to climb in garnering the attention and appreciation of top management in many organizations. But perhaps as traditional mass media options continue to become more fragmented and strained by the likes of cable proliferation, digital video recorders, new Web-based multimedia distribution options like Youtube and Hulu command other medium-changing disruptions, the indoctrination of testing within the organization will revel in its accelerated growth. With Chicago.com, it is no coincidence that testing is ingrained in the Web portal’s DNA since Metnick is presented the results with each Web site element test from his marketing team.

White adds, “It’s important that management buys into testing. The only way to show them that it pays off is to share the results at a profit level. You can’t stop at showing lifts in order response, average order value, sales/book, click through rate, open rate, etc. It must be demonstrated to impact the bottom line. Are you helping them achieve more profits? You’ll always have someone in finance who will challenge your budget if you can’t show the results at a profit level.”

Make testing pervasive throughout the organization to ensure cross-functional support. In May 2009, Kentucky Fried Chicken ran a free chicken giveaway promotion in conjunction with the Oprah Winfrey show. Due to overwhelming response that resulted in long wait times and insufficient supply to satisfy demand at many locations, the fast food chain cancelled
the promotion. While this example illustrates the basic necessity of integrating programming with front line organizations, especially in service-based sectors, it’s even more essential for organizations that test.

A department store might test a special shopping event with its most loyal customers. One segment might receive an invitation to attend a wine and cocktail after hours shopping event. As part of the event, the retailer may also incorporate an incremental “Spend $100 and receive a special gift” test offer in conjunction with the event.

If the details of the promotion aren’t shared at the individual store level, how can a sales associate or cashier be expected to handle a situation where two shoppers check out at the same time, with one receiving the added gift offer whereas the second doesn’t? Does the cashier offer the special gift to both, thereby diluting the integrity of the test? Does the employee risk alienating a customer, perhaps with what is thought to be an innocuous statement “These coupons are actually for our VIP guests”? One can imagine how a customer who may have spent thousands of dollars at that store over the past year might respond. Proper training helps keep front-line teams out of the customer’s line of fire. Information sheets with instructions on how to communicate responses can go a long way in securing organizational buy-in and remove potentially explosive customer conflict scenarios.

CONCLUSION

Jason Burby, co-chair of the Metrics/KPI Committee of the Web Analytics Association, commented that at a recent conference in spring 2009, he asked an audience whether they worked for companies that do online testing. The response was approximately 5 to 10 percent.

Consumers now more than ever drive the relationship with marketers. That’s not likely to change. In most industries, they have many options to choose from and an easy way to get the information they need. The good news is that testing provides an effective way for organizations to uncover the best ways to keep customers engaged. Chicago.com, United Online and Gila River Gaming Enterprises reflect the diversity of organizations that can benefit from testing. For these, and virtually any other off or online businesses, there are an infinite number of questions posed by marketers. But regardless of what the question may be, the answer is testing.

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Albert Liu is Director of Marketing for LAMB Partners, overseeing corporate marketing strategy for the investment firm’s gaming properties. Previously, Albert oversaw all marketing and communications functions at Amadesa, a Web site testing and personalization software provider. He has also held market leadership roles at Accenture, Verizon and Harrah’s Entertainment. Albert earned a Bachelor of Arts from UCLA, a Master of Science from Northwestern’s Medill IMC program and an MBA from Northwestern’s Kellogg School of Management. A transplant from Southern California in the early 90’s, he is an extremely patient Chicago Cubs fan.
IT’S ABOUT GOOD LINK, NOT GOOD INK: Corporate Reputation in the Digital Age

by Debra Charlesworth

ABSTRACT

Today, even the hardest-to-get media placements are becoming diluted because of an explosion of new media channels that are forcing companies to change their approach to media coverage. This article addresses how corporate communicators should navigate the changing digital media landscape to manage corporate reputation. Based on the review of recent corporate practice – both the successes and the failures – the article identifies specific strategies that corporate communicators can employ to navigate the digital media landscape. The corporate communicator must view media relations from a different strategic perspective. Instead of focusing on individual news stories – whether print or broadcast – the corporate communicator must view all forms of media coverage as pieces of information that contribute to an ongoing dialogue. To manage reputation, companies must own topics around their vulnerabilities as well as their strengths. Corporate communicators need to develop new tools to influence digital content and new metrics for measuring their success. The future of corporate public relations depends on it.

I. INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, corporate public relations tactics meant pitching journalists to obtain good ink for the company or to downplay a negative news story. Today’s hardest media placements to get, such as NBC’s Today show or the cover of FORTUNE, are becoming diluted because of an explosion of new media channels that force companies to change their approach to the media and their own reputations.

While corporate communicators still seek “good ink” to improve their companies’ reputations, they must also establish “good links” with online news sites, bloggers, Facebook groups, Tweeters and emerging forms of social media. These new links have an effect beyond the promotion and protection of products and brands because they directly connect companies with their customers and other stakeholders.

II. CORPORATE REPUTATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

As news channels fragment, become more participatory and potentially lose credibility, companies’ reputations are more vulnerable than ever to inaccurate and biased information. Misinformation can originate anywhere in the digital space and spread like wildfire in minutes. In the fall of 2008, both Apple and United lost significant market value, $9 billion and $1 billion respectively, in a matter of minutes because of unchecked rumors spreading online. According to Harold Burson, co-founder of Burson-Marsteller, “A posting of that once obscure clipping or that 50 seconds of damaging reportage on YouTube or Twitter multiplies its audience by a magnitude of ten or more. A thousand readers or viewers can easily become more than a million.”

Interactive communication channels allow the public to consume information much differently than just a few years ago. As of August 2008, almost 40 percent of Americans went online for news, up from only 19 percent in 2006. Increasingly, people are publishing, linking to and commenting on information about companies through social media networks. Facebook has more than 300 million active users as of September 2009, and its fastest growing demographic is people who are 35 and older. In the United States, almost 80 percent of the 152 million Internet users viewed
16.8 billion online videos in April 2009, a 16 percent increase from the previous month.

As a result of new media’s explosive growth, the traditional news industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation in the way that news is created, distributed and consumed. These revolutionary changes also are transforming the role of corporate communicators. According to an Arthur W. Page Society report, corporate communicators must be more interactive and collaborative than in the past, becoming facilitators of two-way and multi-directional conversations and influencing stakeholders through partnerships, trust and mutual self-interest.

News is no longer a top-down enterprise where news outlets push filtered information to passive audiences. Blogs extend the discussion of a news story beyond the regular news cycle. A qualitative analysis of the global news cycle and its relationship to social media showed that the news cycle slowly builds to a peak and declines quickly afterwards. By comparison, the lifecycle of blogs is more extended than the traditional news cycle, taking longer to reach a peak and longer to decline. As a result, negative corporate news can have a longer life in the blogosphere than in traditional news channels.

As the quantity of news sources grows and the pace of news delivery intensifies, the burden of ensuring reporting accuracy increasingly shifts to the company. Traditional media outlets follow set editorial standards while new media news may not be subjected to such standards.

III. CASE STUDIES

To take a closer look at how the new media landscape is affecting corporate communicators, let us review two recent situations in which companies faced emerging crises.

1. COMCAST

Comcast, one of the leading phone, cable and Internet providers in the United States, had been under online siege from its unsatisfied customers since 2006. Comcast customers had created Web sites about the company’s poor service, including comcastsucks.org, comcraptic.com and comcastwatch.com. Customers blogged about their bad experiences and some posted videos on YouTube showing Comcast technicians sleeping on the job. One of those YouTube videos received more than 1.3 million views, is linked to five other URLs and has almost 1,000 comments. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvVp7b5gzqU] The online customer complaints and subsequent traditional news coverage contributed to the widely held perception that customer service at Comcast was poor. The company had to address the online movement that was building momentum and hurting its reputation.

Senior management supported Comcast’s “Customer Care” initiative to reach out to frustrated customers online. Usually, customers who complained online had multiple frustrating experiences with the company. The team actively searched for negative comments by using tools like Twitter Search, Google Blogs and Technorati.

Comcast’s customer care team was quick to recognize and implement Twitter as a powerful communication tool. Frank Eliason, senior director of National Customer Operations with Comcast has almost 30,000 followers on Twitter as of September 2009 and has been featured on the front page of the New York Times. Comcast’s success with social media came because they have put human faces on what was a faceless corporation. The ten customer care representatives on Twitter are often able to resolve customer problems faster than the standard customer service process.

Comcast uses its online presence to solicit valuable customer feedback, identify patterns of customer service problems, and to adjust their customer service process to address the patterns that they observe. Additionally, when customers know that there is a real person on the receiving end of online communications, they are likely to be more congenial.

Comcast maintains an active online presence with different blogs and forums to reach various consumer segments. The company’s engineers communicate with technology-savvy, high-speed customers through online forums. The corporate communications department posts a blog on everything from television programming to the company’s community activities [www.comcastvoices.net/blog/]. The site is managed by an actual blogger, not a PR professional. The corporate communications department works closely with other departments on their online activities but does not tightly control the content. For example, blog managers are given relative freedom with only a set of clear guidelines regarding what content is permissible. While the corporate communications
department monitors blogs related to different areas, responses often come from other departments as technically inclined customers prefer communicating with representatives who also have a high level of technical expertise.

Comcast’s efforts to find and converse with critics and stakeholders online are part of a strategy to improve customer service and the company’s reputation. Thus far, the customer care group has made a significant contribution to improving Comcast’s reputation, especially among avid social media users who have witnessed Comcast’s engagement with the online community. Comcast’s initiative to improve its customer service is already producing measured results as indicated in the May 2009 American Customer Satisfaction Index, which reported a nine percent increase from the previous year.

2. KRYPTONITE

Kryptonite was one of the first companies to face a crisis generated from an online discussion. In September 2004, before the creation of either YouTube or Twitter, an online bike forum called bikeforum.net was abuzz with posts about how a common Bic pen could be used to open a Kryptonite bike lock. Within two days, the forum had 1.8 million blog posts, including a how-to video, on the topic. Kryptonite received 150 calls from the media because of the online activity, which resulted in 1,500 news articles and broadcast stories. Responding to the crisis, Kryptonite quickly implemented a successful lock exchange program, and as a result, the company was able to retain and even improve its brand reputation by doing the right thing for its customers.

The Bic pen crisis was the catalyst for Kryptonite to pioneer online interaction with customers and stakeholders. Donna Tocci, then Kryptonite’s public relations manager, began following various online bike forums and blogs to understand their dynamics. Tocci began contributing as an identified Kryptonite employee by correcting misinformation. Tocci eventually became a resource for Kryptonite lock users, helping them with everything from how to get a key unstuck to lock maintenance.

Kryptonite’s success in communicating online prompted the decision to start a corporate blog [http://unbreakable-bonds.blogspot.com, http://tidbitsandmore.blogspot.com] and a micro-blog on Twitter http://twitter.com/donnatocci]. Tocci sought advice from established bloggers and learned that a conversational tone, rather than a corporate one, would be more effective. When responding to a critical blog posting, Tocci commented on her own writing style, “Yes, it may sound like ‘fluff’ or ‘bs’ when I talk so earnestly, Jose, and I know my title works against me on this, but it is only passion. I honestly believe in this company and what we do on a daily basis. Thieves stink and we work every day to do our part in putting them out of ‘work’.” Tocci’s colloquial posts have proven to be a successful form of online communication.

In the spring of 2007, an international competitor started to use video, blogs and forum discussions to challenge the security of one of Kryptonite’s locks. Kryptonite was prepared to engage with its stakeholders about the competitor’s accusations online because the company had already established a credible online presence with the online cycling community across blogs, forums and other forms of social media. After Kryptonite conducted the necessary testing to confirm that the competitor’s claims were false, Tocci went online to directly address the issue. By acting thoughtfully, Kryptonite maintained its customers’ trust, which had taken years to acquire.

ITV, a public service network in the United Kingdom, ran a documentary called “Gone in 60 Seconds: The Bike Crime Wave,” which used video provided by the same competitor showing how to break into bike locks produced by Kryptonite and several mutual competitors. According to Kryptonite, the documentary depicted the common bike thief using 42-inch bolt cutters. Kryptonite’s own research disputes this claim because most bike thieves do not use 42-inch bolt cutters, which are large, expensive and difficult to obtain.

Kryptonite posted its response to the documentary on its corporate blog. The post included photos and linked to other bike blogs and forums. [http://unbreakable-bonds.blogspot.com/search?q=ITV] Traffic to Kryptonite’s blog increased significantly. The online communications prior to the ITV documentary as well as Kryptonite’s direct response to the program on its blog successfully blocked the competitor’s assault. After the show aired, Kryptonite did not receive a single inquiry from customers or journalists, proof of the potential power and effectiveness of an established company blog to reach the right stakeholders. “When you have your voice,
you are better able to have your say,” explained Tocci. “We didn’t have that during the previous crisis.”

IV: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

As a company systematically considers how to integrate social media into its public relations toolbox, it must develop a strategy that is consistent with its corporate culture and business objectives.

1. Audit the communications landscape. The corporate communications department should lead a process with other departments to create a stakeholder map and determine how each stakeholder group gathers, uses and distributes information. Journalists, for example, are a common stakeholder group across industries, and they are likely to blog and tweet, in addition to publishing or broadcasting stories. Companies should monitor the same communications channels that their stakeholders use to stay ahead of evolving issues. Topics covered online also are potential stories that journalists may reference and reuse in mainstream news media. The corporate communications department should determine which communications channels allow for the most effective communication with each stakeholder group.

An integrated communications strategy must cover the breadth of traditional and digital media channels.

In the new digital media landscape, one size does not fit all: differentiated tactics should be employed by audience size, channel and the complexity of the message.

2. Coordinate Communications Responsibilities Internally. To present a clear and consistent corporate message, corporate communications should coordinate other departments’ communications to outside stakeholders. Incorporating social media into the communications mix requires an approach that is more proactive, open and decentralized.

Stakeholders who engage in a dialogue with a company through a social medium expect a public conversation that goes beyond one-way communication from the company to an audience. Only a small number of large companies are taking advantage of social media to build their corporate reputations. In 2008, only 81 of the Fortune 500 companies (16 percent) had any kind of blog. By appropriately employing social media channels, a company will have more tools with which to build and defend its corporate reputation.

3. Integrate Internal Groups that Communicate to Various Stakeholders. As a company embraces decentralized communications, the need for operational integration increases. Integrating messages across different social media channels will help maintain a consistent voice for the company’s many participants. Companies may find themselves at a significant disadvantage responding to critics if the company is not participating in the same media channel as its critics.

“New media” changes the dynamics of communicating with stakeholders because there is little or no interference from traditional mediators, such as financial analysts and journalists. The result is fragmented two-way communications between the company, its stakeholders and information mediators.

To succeed in this environment, companies need to distribute guidelines across their internal departments to guide

FIGURE 1: Digital Media Landscape

![Digital Media Landscape Diagram]
employees who communicate externally. However, it is important to note that the mere existence of a policy will not guarantee adherence, particularly for individual employees who are not authorized company spokespersons. Forty-nine percent of employees recently surveyed reported that they would not change their online behavior if their company had an applicable policy. In a new media world of decentralized corporate communications, companies need internal policies, and they should recognize the challenges involved in influencing employee behavior.

4. Implement a Proactive Communications Strategy. Proactive public relations strategies designed to support business objectives will ideally incorporate both traditional and non-traditional modes of communications to target stakeholder groups. Since content is often relayed between traditional and non-traditional media, a post, a conversation, or a news story can be amplified across media channels. In order for a true conversation to occur, companies must view themselves as being on equal footing with their stakeholders. Two-way communications channels will require that companies listen, engage and, most importantly, act. Proactive communications promote the corporation and its products and build familiarity around the corporation, which can help in a crisis.

Users of social media are quick to identify whether corporate communications are authentic. Therefore, proactive communications – such as Comcast’s “How can I help?” – must be supported by subsequent action. As the need to have employees engage in a genuine manner grows, additional emphasis should be placed on employee relations. Any lack of sincerity in proactive communications through a social medium will be detected and may lead to the demise of even the best communications strategies.

In social media, there is an abundance of influential critics who will readily reveal themselves. Seeking out and participating in online forums gives a company an opportunity not only to win over the outspoken critics, but also the chance to convert other visitors who are passive readers but not active participants. According to a web-based survey of active Internet users, 85 percent responded that one person could influence many people about a bad customer care experience, and about 80 percent believed that blogs, rating systems and discussion forums can give consumers a greater voice in affecting changes in customer care.

5. Prepare a Strategy for Reactive Communications. A corporate critic in a social media channel can gain the attention of traditional media, thereby spreading the criticism to a broader audience. Numerous consumer advocacy websites cater to critics and amplify customers’ complaints. For instance, The Consumerist, a blog operated by Consumer Media LLC, has been ranked as high as the 38th most read blog in the world as measured by Technorati, and Time.com described it as “the blog where shoppers can bite back and sometimes even leave deep teeth marks.” No wonder when companies publicly respond to consumer complaints online, readers are often surprised and impressed. One online consumer wrote, “I just really do find myself amazed and respectful of company representatives who respond on this site because they open themselves up to a lot of … feedback.”

In a communications crisis, an effective corporate response often includes a timely admission of a mistake and a solution to fix the problem. Most of all, a company’s communications must be transparent. Especially in a crisis, a lack of transparency can inflame critics and result in long-term damage to corporate reputation.

6. Monitor, Measure, and Learn. When companies communicate through both traditional news media and social media, corporate communicators need more complex metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their activities. To determine the impact of corporate communications on various stakeholders across different media channels, companies need online metrics that measure stakeholder participation and changes in sentiment over time.

The impact of interactions between channels is an important metric for companies to track. For example, if The New York Times writes a positive article on a company, what is the impact on the company’s website traffic, blog comments, Twitter followers, and Facebook group members or fans? To move beyond anecdotes, it is necessary to have metrics that identify how various communications channels influence other channels. With rigorous measurement, corporate communicators can focus on influential media channels that might otherwise have been neglected.
CONCLUSION
The emerging forms of social media have reduced corporate communicators’ ability to control their communications message. The longstanding system of one-way communications is being replaced by two-way and multi-way communications. This explosion of communications channels has substantially increased the noise level, often overwhelming the voices of corporate communicators.

Even though corporate communicators today possess less control over media channels than they did traditionally, they do have control over how and what they communicate in a new media dialogue. Corporate communicators must continue to develop their basic skill set – developing messages, preparing public releases and maintaining relationships with reporters – but to navigate the new media landscape, they also need to acquire new skills and a new mentality based on transparency and agility.

Companies have an opportunity to enhance their corporate reputation with online communications that support superb products and customer service. By using multiple social media channels to build relationships with key stakeholders when times are good, companies can acquire corporate reputation “insurance” that could pay off when times are rough. In the sometimes chaotic new media environment, companies that are transparent and authentic with their communications, regardless of the media channel, will garner goodwill and strengthen their corporate reputation.

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dunnhumbyusa:
A Case Study Why a Brand’s Most Loyal Should Be its Most Valued

By Michelle A. Elhert and Nicholas Ziegler

ABSTRACT

Many organizations frequently refer to having a “customer-first” strategy, yet often this catchphrase is merely conceptual. It’s the first thing to go when growth stalls, and the company often reverts to a bottom-line, shareholder-centric approach. It is the rare few that have been able to rework traditional marketing and sales initiatives to execute business operations and strategies to keep the customer top-of-mind. dunnhumby challenges organizations to embark on a customer-first journey, forcing a shift in the brand-management paradigm. dunnhumby finds itself in a unique position despite the downturn since it has worked to find ways to truly keep its stated goals as its main focus. Integrated marketing communications is very much alive at the company, serving as proof that the IMC methodology is a viable, profitable solution. At the heart of the approach is a customer-first strategy, supported by the Power of Three: the retailer, the manufacturer and dunnhumby. The following article shares a framework and case-study example to illustrate how brands may execute a customer-first strategy – allowing them to not only survive but also thrive in a tough economy.

The answer is two-hundred and seventy-five.

The question, though, could be “What is the longest looped expressway in the United States?” Or even “In what year B.C. was the Museum of Alexandria founded?”

But in our case, 275 is the number of new carbonated soft drinks introduced in the United States in 2008 — an average of more than five new products each week. The main innovations, naturally, come from the top two companies: Coca-Cola and Pepsico. Those top-two firms duelled for supremacy in the carbonated soft drink, or CSD, category during the “cola wars” of the 1980s and ’90s. The aftermath of those competitive times left both companies with large, sometimes unwieldy, brand portfolios. Those portfolios led to greater fragmentation among CSDs as beverage companies launched product after product, each designed to cater to a specific market niche. But now that the market has reached the point where 275 new-product introductions are made each year, it seems as if consumers are driving the marketplace – not the cola companies.

Dr Pepper, the oldest major soft drink in the United States, has seen what that market shift signifies. To meet the needs of evolving customer targets, the firm is evolving its brand approach to focus on its most loyal consumers. It’s important to note, however, that the shift does not signify a movement away from new-consumer acquisition, but rather a recognition that purchase-behavior data can be used to better understand current consumers and avoid the acquisition trap of a fragmented marketplace. In order to meet the needs of those loyal purchasers, Dr Pepper partnered with consumer-analytics firm dunnhumbyUSA more than two years ago.

MOVING FROM HIT-AND-MISS TO ANALYTICS

Dr Pepper approached dunnhumbyUSA based on the data-insights firm’s track record with Kroger, the largest traditional grocery chain in the United States. In the early 2000s, Kroger CEO Dave Dillon was searching for a business partner that could transform grocery data into usable customer insights and, therefore, brand loyalty. He saw that, by 2000, U.K.-based food
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retailer Tesco continued to deliver outstanding sales results and market-share growth year after year. Part of its success, he thought, was due to its partnership with dunnhumby, a U.K. data-insights firm. Kroger’s executive team was impressed the two firms’ symbiotic relationship and wanted to duplicate that success in the United States. After developing a plan specific to the U.S. market, dunnhumbyUSA formed as a joint venture with Kroger in 2003.

Five years later, the dunnhumbyUSA-Kroger partnership has grown tremendously, and hundreds of new partnerships with consumer-packaged-goods firms continue to fuel that increase. All of those partnerships, though, are born from the same principle: In order for Kroger’s loyalty program — the Kroger Plus Card — to have a positive impact, customers must feel rewarded for their actions. Customers, bombarded with choices, are always just a few short steps away from taking their engagement elsewhere. And with advent of database systems capable of supporting huge quantities of transactional data, any company can start its own loyalty program. The key difference is that few companies have developed the necessary strategy to create workable insights with that information.

Current research finds that many customers are oversaturated with loyalty programs. A 2008 Colloquy survey found that the average American household belongs to 12 different loyalty programs, but is active in fewer than five. Kroger has succeeded in its strategy — today, 95 percent of households actively shopping at Kroger stores use a Plus Card. In return, those households may be eligible to receive special brand coupons, recipes and tips because Kroger is committed to using its loyalty card as more than just a promotional tool. Data is used to develop one-to-one direct-mail campaigns that target Kroger’s best customers. This direct-communication strategy is becoming even more important, as the Food Marketing Institute’s State of Food Retailing 2009 report stated that targeted communication is now a higher priority for food retailers, mirroring a decline in the use of mass media.

The high level of customer engagement with Kroger’s program helps not only the grocery retailer, but also the CPG firms and their brands. Purchase data strengthens a brand manager’s decisions on available products, distribution channels and price points. He may be faced with a list of questions — Should 12 oz. Diet Cherry Vanilla Dr Pepper be offered in all Kroger stores? Why does 2-liter Dr Pepper sell better at Walmart than Kroger? Will there be enough product available to supply both Kroger and Target stores if 2-liter Diet Dr Pepper runs on sale this week for $0.99? — and purchase data will guide that decision-making process. In today’s economy, brand marketers are also challenged to determine where to spend available funds in a highly fragmented media space. The difficulty in quantifying a brand’s return on marketing investment has never been harder. How do you measure the impact of an advertisement in People magazine? A commercial run on CNN? A billboard on Interstate 275? However, as manufacturers form relationships with Kroger, their consumer data is available for brands to get to know their own best customers better and to directly measure the impact of highly-targeted marketing efforts.

"CUSTOMER FIRST" AS MORE THAN LIP SERVICE

But the dunnhumby/Kroger partnership isn’t a one-way relationship. In exchange for access to data on its customers’ purchase behavior, Kroger expects marketing efforts to follow the guidelines of its customer strategy. Brands must use Kroger’s data to guide future product offerings and to reward their loyal customers. While this customer-first strategy is not unique to the grocery industry, it is extremely important. It values loyalty over acquisition, starting and ending with the customer in mind, applicable to any organization that recognizes the priority of maintaining and growing customer loyalty. Don McGeorge, the outgoing Kroger president and chief operating officer, describes it simply. “We’re not in the grocery business,” he says. “We’re in the business of satisfying customers’ needs.”

A brand’s choice to follow the customer-first strategy is more important now than ever before, as private-label brands grow in both availability and popularity. In the April 2009 edition of Refrigerated and Frozen Foods Retailer magazine, Kroger reported that national brand sales were either flat, or slightly down, at the end of 2008. Comparatively, Kroger’s $12.5-billion private-label program ended 2008 represented as 27 percent of dollar sales and 35 percent of unit sales. This increase in private-label sales comes as no surprise, as the majority of grocery retailers have chosen emphasizing low prices as a competitive strategy. Without the marketing budget of a national brand, private-label brands can maintain lower price
points. To put Kroger’s sales into perspective, the Food Marketing Institute found that private-label goods grew at 10.8 percent during 2008, well above the 2.5-percent growth rate for national brands. Such industry-wide figures underscore a larger trend: It’s not just Kroger that can benefit from these data insights, as information on pricing, promotional and product availability is often applicable to the brand’s consumers at other retailers.

Growing customer loyalty should be a priority for every brand in the marketplace. What can brands do to ensure that customer loyalty is, at the very least, maintained? The commitment to deploying a loyalty strategy is a must, one that goes beyond an organization’s pledge to demonstrate a “friendly and caring attitude,” for example. Customers need to feel that their preferred grocery store provides excellent customer service, but that feeling is not sufficient. The customer must also believe in a continual reward, an added incentive, for his loyalty.

“While it may seem a good idea to bribe potential consumers with coupons, rebates or other offers, it can be detrimental in the long term.”

The value of lost loyalty can be quantified. In a study on CPG loyalty and defection published by the Chief Marketing Officer Council and Catalina Marketing’s Pointer Media Network, household-level consumer analysis indicates that a high level of loyalty churn is impacting CPG brands. Data collected in 2007 and 2008 from more than 32 million consumers, buying across 685 leading CPG brands, shows that for the average brand only 48 percent of high-loyalty consumers in 2007 remained highly loyal in 2008. In the study, a “high-loyalty consumer” is defined as one who made 70-plus percent of category purchases with a single brand during a 12-month period. And the study goes on to support the churn theory, finding that approximately one-third of all high-loyalty consumers defected from their normal brand in 2008 — ceasing to use a certain brand but still making purchases in the same category. This study further suggests that loyalty levels vary by category and brand. Switching and defection, however, are constant issues even for the industry’s well-funded, major brands. In the study, for example, one top cola brand outperformed nearly all others in its category in both consumer churn and loyalty defection, but its rates are still alarmingly high. One-fourth of the strongly loyal brand consumers in 2007 did not remain so in 2008.

From the evidence, a marketer cannot rely on the assumption that loyal consumers will stay loyal. Concerns about brand loyalty and defection should be preeminent for both brands and retailers. The overall impact of eroded loyalty is even more severe given 2009’s difficult economic conditions. In addition to high churn rates, brands are also experiencing increased difficulty replacing lapsed loyal consumers with new brand consumers. A common belief — and fear — for many marketers is that consumers who switch preferences will build new brand alliances that may outlast the recession. A look at basic marketing principles remind us that it is far easier to retain loyal consumers who are in the early stages of switching brands than to change their minds after they have completely defected.

BRINGING “CUSTOMER FIRST” TO MARKET

The question still remains: What can and should be done about customer loyalty? Not surprisingly, coupon redemption rates are now steadily increasing after several years of decline, suggesting that consumers have become more cost- and value-conscious. This insight alone should encourage a brand to communicate with its loyal consumers, sending a message and offer that demonstrates the commitment to keeping those consumers happy. In other words, there needs to be a commitment to a customer-first philosophy.

To enact a successful loyalty strategy, a brand’s stewards must recognize they cannot successfully operate in a silo. The CPG brands that have built partnerships with Kroger and dunnhumbyUSA did so to simultaneously maintain and grow loyalty. McGeorge made that point clear to an audience of more than 750 Kroger and consumer-packaged goods marketing and sales professionals during a 2009 conference. “Knowledge is our greatest tool,” he said. “It’s not about a choice Kroger makes. The only strategy that will work is a relentless approach to serving customers’ needs first.” Customer data, taken as a whole, is a tool box. Each measure, from frequency and recency of shopping trips to average spend, are the tools that can construct a loyal-customer contact strategy. But it is the ability to test and learn from a marketing campaign in a closed-loop, controlled customer universe that is the
most powerful instrument in the data toolbox. With such a closed-loop system, the data output will be used as an input for future analytics and developing insights, which furthers the entire process.

With those tools firmly in hand, it’s necessary to also dispel a few myths about brand loyalty.

• Myth 1: Big numbers = Big potential.
While it may seem a good idea to bribe potential consumers with coupons, rebates or other offers, it can be detrimental in the long term. dunnhumby analysis has shown that a highly loyal customer is nearly 20 times more valuable than one potential consumer. Value most those who value you most.

• Myth 2: Loyal brand consumers have no more room to grow.
On average, even the most loyal consumers purchase their preferred brand only 44 percent of the time, as calculated by dollar sales. This measure, known as share of requirements or share of wallet, indicates that even the most loyal of all brand-loyal consumers still buy other brands 56 percent of the time. There is plenty of room to grow SOR among a brand’s loyal consumers.

• Myth 3: Loyal consumers stay loyal.
The Chief Marketing Officer Council study illustrated the alarming rate of customer churn and defection across CPG categories. Loyalty cannot and should not be assumed, especially now that economic conditions have impacted consumers’ disposable income. More generally, consumers’ tastes and lifestyles also gradually change. Brands cannot forget that their competitors also have the ability to target consumers.

• Myth 4: Loyal consumers are all the same.
Demographics will only reveal so much about consumers, and averages can be very misleading. Consider what may be actually learned from knowing consumer purchase behavior by asking a simple question: “So what?” Just because a marketer knows the average consumer’s age, ethnicity, income, job status and hobbies, what does that mean? What marketing actions should be taken? And what about communication with the many consumers who don’t look like the average consumer?

• Myth 5: Reaching loyal consumers is too difficult.
Communicating with loyal consumers becomes much easier when you have access to a tool box. Data from the Kroger Plus Card is an information slice from 29 million customer shopping baskets each week, representing hundreds of millions of brand-purchase decisions.

DR PEPPER: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER
Let’s revisit Dr Pepper. Jim Trebilcock, Dr Pepper Snapple Group’s executive vice president of marketing, faces ongoing challenges with his brand. Dr Pepper is currently the number-one brand in its flavor category as well as the overall number-two flavored carbonated soft drink in the United States. In a May 2009 Advertising Age interview, Trebilcock shared his perspective on managing a smaller marketing budget compared to Coca-Cola and Pepsi. “If you look at our total CSD portfolio, [Coca-Cola and Pepsi are] heavily in the cola business,” he said. “I’m number one in flavors. That’s all I worry about.” Trebilcock isn’t suggesting that Dr Pepper must aim to replace Coca-Cola or Pepsi in the top slots. He concerns himself with maintaining Dr Pepper’s current leadership in its own category — he knows his brand’s strength and plays to it.

Within the last three years, Dr Pepper has built a relationship with dunnhumbyUSA and, as a result, has come to know its best Kroger customers. While brands in the cola category have lost three share points since 2005, Dr Pepper Snapple’s dollar share of the U.S. carbonated soft drink market has grown by a point. This is promising data, but it does not tell the whole story. Dr Pepper’s per-capita consumption in its top five states — Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas and New Mexico — is 173 servings per year, compared with a national average of just 62. Keeping in mind that one loyal consumer is nearly 20 times more valuable than a potential consumer, Trebilcock had to determine the cost of developing underpenetrated markets in order to increase Dr Pepper’s average national per-capita consumption. Would marketing dollars be better spent on highly loyal consumers in key states, or would a national campaign serve the brand more effectively?

Dr Pepper saw a valuable opportunity to target and engage its Kroger consumers in select regions of the United States with highly relevant offers. Using data collected by dunnhumbyUSA, the company launched a direct-mail campaign in the summer of 2008. The primary goal was to identify light and moderate Dr Pepper buyers, selected by share of requirements, and to determine an effective way to grow that SOR. The brand was expecting these consumers to continue to increase consumption and purchase frequencies and, using data insights, Dr Pepper realized these consumers have a higher propensity to buy 2-liter bottles of the product. The strategy morphed into a two-pronged effort: Consumers received both a placement message and an offer for the 2-liter product via direct mail. Two
coupons, with consecutive expiration dates, were later sent to drive repeat purchase. The results were clear. There was a 12 percent coupon-redemption rate, as well as a sales uplift of 76 percent, versus the Kroger customer control group. In addition, multiple purchases over time that extended past both coupons’ redemption periods, generated strong incremental sales. With such strong results, Dr Pepper has committed itself to a specific consumer and, in turn, the consumers will likely be loyal to the brand.

Again, the question a brand should never stop the simple question “So what?” Does what a brand chooses to do with consumer data matter? Based on the steps in the dunnhumby/Kroger/Dr Pepper case, we can create five steps that describe shopper marketing:

- **Identify** the most important consumer by defining what “important” means to the brand
- **Quantify** that consumer’s importance
- **Understand** who they are and why they buy
- **Engage** them through direct contact and act upon

This Dr Pepper marketing campaign is just one example of the kind of brand work that’s being done as a result of the dunnhumbyUSA-Kroger joint venture. It’s critical for brands to view and treat loyal customer marketing like the commitment of entering into a serious relationship — while times may be trying and results may not be achieved overnight, showing dedication to loyal consumers has proven payout.
A brand’s ability to determine what marketing investment will yield the greatest return is an intricate assessment, but this difficulty can be minimized by adopting a fresh mentality. Brand marketers typically ask questions that center around acquisition strategies and growing market share; however, it’s really the shopper-centric questions that will give the most rewarding answers and yield a greater return on investments.

The fact that 275 new carbonated soft drinks are introduced each year is just one example of innovation that can threaten a brand’s consumer loyalty. Dr Pepper is a brand that understands the strategy of a customer-first approach. Its commitment to implementing a targeted communication program with Kroger’s best customers—who are also Dr Pepper’s best consumers—demonstrates how data insights can lead to a customer-first strategy. Brands in other shopping categories are eager to continue developing their relationships with Kroger and dunnhumbyUSA, to test and learn methods for delivering meaningful customer communication and product offers. Armed with the arsenal of consumer data insights, brands cannot blame tough economic conditions as being exclusively responsible for customer churn and defection. Likewise, now is not the time for any brand to fail to value the consumers that clearly value it most.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michelle Ehlert is a strategic planner with dunnhumbyUSA’s Communication and Media team. After graduating with a masters in integrated marketing communications from Northwestern University in 2007, she joined dunnhumby to develop and support Kroger’s loyal customer communication strategy. Her responsibilities were recently transferred to Macy’s, one of dunnhumby’s newest retail partners, to develop key client relationships and help transform the way that Macy’s executes its direct communication strategy. Michelle’s experience with consumer packaged goods began with her role in supply chain management at Pepsico, after earning a bachelor of science in industrial engineering.

Nicholas A. Ziegler is the director of communications at a Chicago-area nonprofit. He graduated from Loyola University Chicago in 2003 with a bachelor’s in psychology and finished his master of science degree in integrated marketing communications from Northwestern University in 2008. He specializes in digital and visual marketing, with an emphasis on creative messaging and photography. His work has earned him multiple industry awards for promotional packaging and targeted publications. Ziegler previously worked for a Chicago-area magazine as editor-in-chief.
B2B BUYER BEHAVIOR ON THE DIGITAL FRONTIER

by Mark McMaster

ABSTRACT

As business buyers abandon traditional media for online sources of information, the staunchly conservative world of B2B marketing has been challenged to understand the relevance of new media formats such as search, online video, rich media advertising, and social networks. Drawing on proprietary research to be released in May 2009 conducted by Google and Forbes, this article demonstrates how even the C-Suite engage in unexpected activities online, and how forward-thinking marketers such as GE, Siemens, IBM and Xerox are using new touchpoints to make B2B more accountable, more efficient, and most notably, more fun and engaging. Should IBM be on Twitter? Should GE aim for million-view counts on YouTube? The answer is yes, and in fact, they already are. Case studies and actionable advice based on Google campaigns and other emerging media initiatives show that B2B marketing is ready for a new approach.

Business-to-business (B2B) advertisers face inordinate challenges in demonstrating the value of their efforts. With long sales cycles, substantial parts of the customer experience driven by field sales teams, and multiple decision-makers at each customer’s organization, it is tempting to attribute the majority of sales wins to direct sales efforts rather than media investments and other top-of-funnel marketing activity. As a result, B2B companies tend to invest less in advertising than their consumer-focused peers, and many B2B marketers have expressed common frustrations: The vice president of sales is often considered the primary generator of revenue, and creating an integrated marketing plan that effectively links marketing and direct sales is a challenge.

There is reason to believe this paradigm is changing. Recent economic constraints have forced business customers to scrutinize their vendor relationships more closely and more vendor choices are considered prior to engagement with a salesperson. Technological advancements are an even bigger change factor. New digital media, ranging from search as a research tool to rich online experiences including video, interactive forums and mobile advertising, combine to allow virtual connections with customers that come closer to the information exchange occurring in a traditional face-to-face meeting between a salesperson and client.

Most important, though, is the measurability of new digital channels. Whereas traditional modes of advertising such as TV and print ads in trade publications offered no direct way to attribute influence over a customer base, digital media interactions can be measured to demonstrate meaningful engagement with customers. By collecting customer information online, leads generated through digital channels can be evaluated based on the likelihood they will convert to a sale after being passed on to direct sales teams, allowing better integration between sales and marketing, and clearer attribution of value to marketing efforts.

PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT B2B BUYER BEHAVIOR

Before these benefits can be realized several preconceptions about the role of marketing, and digital channels must be disproven. First, it is often assumed that B2B buyers, particularly senior executives who are able to allocate significant purchasing budgets, do not give attention to advertising messages in a meaningful way, whether in traditional or online formats. In fact, it is often assumed that these final decision-makers respond primarily to inputs from within their organizations, and do not research vendors personally. The only way to reach a chief financial officer, one would say, is by cultivating a personal relationship through high-level sales relationships. Peer-to-peer and
face-to-face interactions trump any media messaging.

Second, it’s often believed that senior executives consume media much as they did 25 years ago. That is, they don’t heavily consume information online, they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with participating in social media, video or other emerging formats, and if they use a Blackberry or other smart device, it is most likely only to make phone calls. Before B2B organizations are comfortable with investing significantly in digital media, it must be proven that business buyers - from the day-to-day users of products and services up to the chief executive officer - not only come into contact with these media, but actually use information from online sources in making business decisions. Further, marketers must have an understanding of the relative value of different traditional and digital marketing channels so that the marketing mix can be adjusted accordingly.

There is a clear need for research that can dig deeper into business buyers’ media consumption and uncover how buyers go about researching needs for products and solutions. With that goal in mind, Google partnered with researchers over the past year including Forbes Insights, Slack Barshinger, OTX and LinkedIn to gain an objective view of the changing habits of B2B buyers. Asking detailed questions of more than 3,000 decision-makers ranging from small business owners to government officials and CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies, the team uncovered surprising insights about how business decisions are made and where individuals within companies go to find useful information.

The majority of the findings shared here are the result of the collaboration with Forbes Insights, which surveyed 354 executives at U.S. companies with annual sales exceeding $1 billion.(1) Nearly half of the respondents (47 percent) held C-level titles (CEO/President/Managing Director, CMO, CIO/CTO, CFO). The remaining 53 percent held senior-level titles including executive vice president, vice president, or director.

THE EXECUTIVE AS RESEARCHER

The most basic questions to resolve are, “What role do senior executives play in the decision-making process?” and “Are they involved enough in the information-gathering phase that we can assume marketing efforts may reach them?” Most often, senior executives are involved in the decision-making and information-gathering processes as shown in Figure 1 (left).

The majority of both C-Suite and non-C-Suite executive groups played a direct role in research, and the C-Suite was more likely to fully own the research process than their lower-level peers, which may speak to the increased pressure for accountability placed on today’s C-Suite. Fifty-three percent of C-Suite executives said they prefer to gather information for decision-making on their own, and only 17 percent of non-C-Suite executives fully delegate the task to others.
When gathering information independently, how do these executives locate the sources they need? Clearly, colleagues both inside and outside the organization are trusted sources, and indeed, 77 percent and 65 percent rated these person-to-person contacts, respectively, as very valuable when it comes to locating information. (See Figure 2, above.)

More surprisingly general search engines ranked the highest with a significant majority (87 percent) attributing a high value to search. Guidance from offline outside advisors, such as consultants and analysts, was considered highly valuable by only half the sample, suggesting that the cost and infrequency of use weighed into the lower value attribution.

When asked how frequently they used online search engines to locate information, 60 percent of respondents said they searched six or more times a day. This volume of search is significant assuming executives are faced with time constraints. It seems the quick access of information via online search may be a key factor encouraging senior businesspeople to take on research tasks independently.

Recognition of search engines as a primary information-seeking tool among executives is visible in many large companies’ approaches to search marketing. In October 2008, few ads appeared on a Google search for “renewable energy,” and those that did were non-governmental and activist groups aiming at a consumer audience. Nearly a year later, in September 2009, ads for GE, Siemens and Ingersoll Rand led the paid search results (See Figure 3, next page), aimed at a business-decision maker audience researching issue areas and solutions. Take for example, the Siemens ad text:

“Cut your emissions and energy costs...”
A 2009 Forrester/MarketingProfs study of B2B marketers’ investment by tactic confirms this observation. Forty-seven percent of the B2B marketers surveyed said they planned to increase investment in search marketing in the upcoming year. When asked which marketing tactics had increased in effectiveness over the past year, search was ranked highest.

**ONLINE VS. OFFLINE: INFLUENCE AND INTEGRATION**

Knowing that online search is a primary tactic for locating business information, how much time are business decision-makers spending with online versus offline media, and do actions in the offline sphere affect online behavior?

**FIGURE 3: B2B-Focused Ads on “Renewable Energy” SERP**


**FIGURE 4: Sources of Business Information**

To answer the first question, the study asked simply, which sources do you go to daily, specifically for business information? (The latter is a crucial distinction, as many media usage studies ask only about general behavior, not media consumption specifically for business value.) The results appear in Figure 4 (opposite page).

The Internet was by far the most frequently accessed source, with 74 percent of executives using it daily for business information. Next most commonly used sources were newspapers (38 percent), and TV (33 percent), with trade publications, radio and mainstream magazines consumed daily by fewer than one-third of respondents.

While these data should certainly underscore the importance of online touch points, it is not cause for abandoning an integrated media plan reaching across online and offline media channels. Indeed, a portion of the search activity noted among business decision-makers can be attributed to offline stimuli, as shown in Figure 5 (above).

Not surprisingly, online content is the most likely to prompt a search, given the easy access to search engines while browsing online. More than half of respondents said they were prompted to search by traditional media, including TV and print. Radio and even airport ads affected search behavior, suggesting an opportunity for advertisers to drive online behaviors through traditional as well as online channels.

An illustration of an integrated approach can be found in campaigns run by GE in January and February 2009. These campaigns highlighted Smart Grid technologies to increase energy efficiency, part of the infrastructure investment outlined in the federal stimulus plan. While customers and policy influencers’ interest in stimulus-related technologies was high, familiarity with the term “Smart Grid” and GE’s involvement was lower.

In January, GE ran its first-ever Super Bowl ad aimed at popularizing the term “Smart Grid” and driving interest while associating the GE brand with the technology. The creative took a light-hearted approach, using the Scarecrow character from The Wizard of Oz to show the opportunity cost of inefficient power networks. But only so much technical understanding can be communicated in a 30-second spot, so ensuing efforts focused more directly on driving traffic to a GE microsite, PlugIntoTheSmartGrid.com.

In February, GE took exclusive ad placement on the home page of YouTube with an innovative video for a full day, driving more than 1 million views.

Both the TV and online video campaigns were integrated with search advertising to ensure interest in GE’s Smart Grid technologies was funneled...
FIGURE 6: Search Interest Surrounding the Smart Grid


FIGURE 7: The Effect of TV and Online Video on Blog Coverage

to the in-depth content available on GE.com and PlugIntoThe SmartGrid.com. This was particularly effective because searches on “GE Smart Grid” and related terms increased more than 5000 percent as the result of integrated campaigns, as seen in Figure 6 (next page).

Blog coverage, a useful metric to assess how online and offline campaigns have sparked industry dialogue, is shown for “GE Smart Grid” in Figure 7 (opposite page). Again, both the Super Bowl and online video campaigns demonstrated significant lift in blog coverage. Despite a much lower media investment, Feburary’s video campaign was able to produce even greater effects on online conversation.

WEB 2.0 AND THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

GE’s use of online video to reach business audiences prompts an important question: how often are executives going beyond text-based sources online to emerging media such as video, social networks, microblogging sites like Twitter, and the mobile web? The answer varies, and the most predictive indicator of executive behavior here turns out to be the age of the executive.

Figure 8 (above) splits the business audience into three generations – those under 40, between 40 and 49, and those 50-plus – and considers the technologies each were exposed to during their introduction to the workplace. These generational splits highly correlate to each group’s predisposition to engage in emerging formats online, as is demonstrate in usage for each type of format.

ONLINE VIDEO

Online video has already reached high penetration to business customers, as shown in Figure 9 (below). Nearly all executives view work-related video at least monthly and the majority of executives watch business videos at least once a week. Those under 50 are less likely to be heavy users, though, and are less likely to view work-related video on a specialized video site such as YouTube.
ONLINE COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

When considering executive behavior on social networks, remember that the online social grid is not limited to mainstream sites such as Facebook and MySpace, but also includes many specialty business networks such as LinkedIn, and industry-specific networks such as GlobalSpec’s engineering community, IT Toolbox and TechTarget. These networks are growing rapidly and often outpacing their consumer-focused peers, as shown in Figure 10 (opposite page).

Most executives (80 percent) have had some exposure to social networks in a business context (see Figure 11, right), but there is generational variance in usage. Those under 50 tend to go online for business networking at least weekly, while the majority of those over 50 are occasional users, going on social networks once a month or less for business purposes.

FIGURE 9: Frequency of Viewing Work-Related Online Video by Executives


FIGURE 10: Growth of LinkedIn vs. Facebook (Indexed)

Source (7): Complete Pro site traffic measurement tool, June 2009.
B2B marketers are exploring diverse methods of connecting with business social communities online, including presence on business and mainstream networks in the form of groups, “fan” pages and viral campaigns, as well as establishing their own communities among user bases and affinity groups. American Express’ Open Network, targeted at small business owners, has engaged a healthy community of businesspeople with similar interests, as have user groups hosted by Dell and many other technology marketers.

These exchanges are no doubt valuable to marketers and customers alike, but there isn’t yet reason to assume they will supplant traditional peer-to-peer interactions. As shown in Figure 12 (right), guidance directly from peers is still more highly valued than online connections within social communities.

FIGURE 11: Frequency of Executive Networking in Online Communities


BLOGS, TWITTER, AND RSS FEEDS

Executives under 40 demonstrate high usage rates across these platforms, showing openness to new forms of receiving information and versatility in gathering information from multiple sources. The majority of under-40s reported maintaining a blog of their own, reading or contributing on Twitter, and subscribing to RSS feeds. (Note that respondents were in senior positions at director-level or above, so these results do not necessarily indicate that all employees under 40 mirror their behavior.)

Usage was more moderate among those age 40 to 49. The majority of this group indicated exposure to each of these platforms, although they were less likely to engage on a weekly or more frequent basis.

For those over 50, usage drops off considerably, with less than 10 percent of those surveyed blogging or participating on Twitter on a weekly basis.

What insights can marketers
draw from this data? First, there is already value in participating in these channels, given the large number of younger executives engaged regularly on blogs, feeds, and Twitter. These are particularly useful channels for listening to customer feedback and reading the “pulse” of the buyer community.

Evidence of substantive business dialogue can be found easily with tools such as ExecTweets (www.exectweets.com), an aggregation of Twitter feeds from business executives that can be browsed by industry. ExecTweets is a notable example of marketing using the Twitter platform, as it was developed by Microsoft and is subtly branded with Microsoft’s “Because it’s everybody’s business” tagline aimed at B2B customers, demonstrating the company’s interest in not only hearing what businesspeople have to say on Twitter, but also facilitating the conversation. Another worthwhile exercise is using Google Blog Search (blogsearch.google.com) or the Twitter-based trend mapper Trendistic (www.trendistic.com) to discover how users comment on a company’s brand and product terms over time.

The future implication of the generational divide across these emerging platforms is clear: In coming years, the majority of executives will mirror today’s under-40 behavior, making these platforms not just interesting experimental tools, but crucial touchpoints in maintaining B2B brands.

**THE MOBILE WEB**

The mobile Web is perhaps most nascent B2B marketing platform. Usage of mobile devices to access Web-based business content is already high, but marketers are still developing strategies around what format and subject matter of mobile content will be most useful to business buyers.

Because mobile web use often originates in search, some B2B advertisers are using mobile search ads as a means of driving traffic to specialized mobile sites. For example, Siemens is using mobile ads to highlight its solutions for infrastructure in the U.S. amidst interest in the stimulus package while IBM is using mobile ads to drive attention to upcoming events and trade shows where the company is participating.

Online display ad networks are emerging simultaneously, and offer a useful opportunity to test engagement on mobile platforms, however, at the moment the scale of these networks’ reach to B2B audiences is limited compared to conventional online sites.

**THE DIGITAL WAY: TEST, MEASURE AND ITERATE**

Recognizing that business audiences are engaged across digital channels, and that pioneering B2B companies are participating in innovative ways is only the first step in understanding the value digital channels can provide for a particular business market. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary benefits of digital channels is the ability to measure each interaction and adjust marketing accordingly to better meet objectives.

A simple example of this can be found in an AMD online campaign from back in 2007. Prior to the launch of a new processor, AMD tested various text ads served on sites relevant to its buyer audience, each offering different value propositions including greater portability, compatibility across digital formats, and quiet operation. With less than $5,000 investment in media, AMD could note a 35 percent greater interest in “quieter” versus “enjoyment from anywhere.” This informed future messaging strategy (3).

A more complex goal is to reach not only qualitative insights but quantifiable return in sales revenues from investment in digital marketing. IBM has conducted rigorous analysis of the revenue contribution of search (both paid ads and organic results), investigating how the experience on IBM’s site affects the quality of leads provided to the sales force (8).

**IMPLICATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF B2B MARKETING**

Although few if any B2B companies can claim a full, quantifiable understanding of digital media’s contribution to acquiring and nurturing sales leads before they reach traditional sales teams, the metrics available to CMOs demonstrating the value of marketing have vastly improved thanks to digital
As marketers better understand the online behavior of B2B buyers, it’s likely that budgets devoted to online media and measurement will increase. This trend is highlighted by the most recent outlook study conducted by BtoB Magazine, which found that despite overall marketing decreases due to the economy, marketers were most likely to be increasing spend in their websites, e-mail and search campaigns (9).

As the economy improves, this shift will likely continue. This bodes well not only for increasing marketing effectiveness but also in illustrating the core value of B2B marketers’ efforts. Armed with better information about B2B buyer behavior, and rich data from increased marketing activity through digital channels, B2B marketers can further elevate their status as a primary driver of new business.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Mark McMaster is Senior Planner for Google in business-to-business markets. He develops Google’s understanding of industry trends and customer behavior among business buyers, and works with many of Google’s largest clients to develop integrated digital media strategies. He is a graduate of the University of Kansas and the Medill School’s IMC program at Northwestern University.
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2010 STAFF BIOGRAPHIES

The staff of the 2010 edition of the Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications is comprised of graduate students in Medill’s Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) program at Northwestern University.

JESSICA AGUILAR
Originally from Chicago, Illinois, Jessica received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She entered the public relations industry representing clients in the consumer products industry and secured millions of impressions in both print and radio. Jessica reentered academia at Northwestern University as a graduate student to further develop her skills in consumer insights and strategy development.

GEETIKA BHANDARI
Since graduating in 2006 with a B.A. in Professional Writing and Psychology, Geetika has been working as a pharmaceutical sales representative for Johnson & Johnson. This position has allowed her to interact with a variety of customers across Ohio and West Virginia. In addition to J&J, Geetika worked for the Communications Consortium Media Center in Washington, D.C. where she tracked the media and edited publications for non-profit organizations. Geetika also served as a mentor and freelance writer for Asian American Community Services.

NEALA BROWN
After earning her bachelor’s degree from Notre Dame in 2004, Neala worked for McKinney|Chicago, a B2B marketing communications agency in Chicago. Starting with the company as an intern, she worked in several of the firm’s departments, including copywriting and public relations, before settling into her most recent position as the firm’s media buyer.

SARAH B. BROWN
Sarah is a graduate of DePaul University, with B.A. degrees in English and American Studies. She has five year’s experience in health care non-profits managing projects and editing articles and books. Sarah recently joined the marketing team at Trustwave, an information security and compliance managed service company, as the manager of marketing communications. She joined the IMC program in 2009 to help her refocus her career on marketing and management.

ELIZABETH CANCIAN
Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Liz graduated from The University of Toledo with a communication degree and spent a year as an account strategist at a recruitment advertising agency. Her clients included National City, HCR ManorCare and Dana Corporation, where she helped launch new branding campaigns and developed country-wide media plans. Liz’ time in IMC has helped her expand her knowledge of both traditional and digital marketing, while increasing her interest in brand management.
BRYAN CHAUEL
Bryan comes to Northwestern after working on the optimization team at Google in Mountain View, Calif., consulting web media, publishing, and music clients on their online advertising initiatives. His clients included Daily Candy, Wiley Publishing, and Pandora Media. Prior to Google, he worked as a financial analyst at a major semiconductor company in Silicon Valley supporting a product line that included the display chips present in many iPod products. He is also an avid cyclist and recently rode 550 miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles in June of 2008.

PATRICK GRIFFITH
After graduating with his bachelor’s degree in Business Marketing and Advertising from Florida State University, Patrick decided to be the first of four generations of his family to leave Florida. He immediately entered Northwestern University’s IMC program. With experiences ranging from graphic design to image management to strategic planning for multiple agencies and clients, Patrick came to IMC looking to further develop his understanding of marketing analytics and branding.

ERIK JOHNS
Erik is originally from Massillon, Ohio. After graduating with a journalism degree from Ohio State in 2003, he spent five years as a newspaper reporter in central Ohio covering everything from crime and government to science and sports. During his time as a reporter, Erik won multiple awards from the Associated Press Society and Society of Professional Journalists. He came to IMC to expand his understanding of communications as a tool to solve business problems.

MICHAEL KURBJEWEIT
Michael came to Medill IMC from Lynchburg, Virginia. In 2007, Michael graduated with honors from Christopher Newport University with a degree in communications studies. From a young age, Michael learned key business foundations while helping operate and grow his family’s restaurant. After graduating from CNU, Michael opened a second location, which he ran up until coming to Medill. The IMC experience has offered Michael the knowledge and skills to better recognize and deliver upon the needs of a business’ lifeblood – its customers.

ERICK LASECA
Erick Laseca is a media relations specialist with Burson-Marsteller working on consumer goods and issues management accounts. Before joining Burson, Erick worked as Media Credentials Manager for the NASDAQ-100 Open Tennis Tournament in Key Biscayne, Florida, listed as the 4th largest tennis tournament in the world. Prior to that, Erick was the Spokesperson for the Miami International Boat Show. Erick is involved in leadership roles with two contextually-diverse junior boards in the Chicago area. He is the marketing committee co-chair for the American Red Cross of Greater Chicago and contributes to the publicity efforts of the Chicago International Film Festival. Erick is also a founding member of both B-M’s U.S. Diversity & Inclusion Council and B-M’s Marketing Committee.

ZHENG “MATTY” LIN
Matty is from Zhejiang, China. Before he came to U.S., he earned his bachelor’s degree in financial management from Zhejiang Gongshang University in 2007. His experiences as a marketing assistant with a German company in Shanghai upon graduation and as a digital marketing intern with an ad agency in Chicago have greatly enhanced his marketing and management potential. He is passionate about what he learned at IMC and wants to start his own business in the future.
SAM MADAN
Throughout his career, Sam has been involved in several facets of the media world. His professional portfolio includes writing for Tribune Media Services, serving as marketing director for an international business-outsourcing firm, directing marketing efforts for a leading real estate corporation, and currently serving Northwestern University’s Medill School as director of marketing.

COLLEEN MALEY
A Louisiana native, Colleen returned to her roots after graduating from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota with a degree in English Literature. She spent two years helping a restaurant company in New Orleans rebuild its business after Hurricane Katrina, and managed the design and production of all marketing collateral for four restaurant properties. Colleen intends to apply her passion for design and her academic focus in digital and interactive marketing to help food and hospitality brands stay at the leading edge of marketing communications.

JASON METHNER
Jason hails from Houston, Texas. His departure from the Lone Star State culminated with a double tour of Northwestern. After graduating from Northwestern in 2005 with an undergraduate degree in communications and art history, he joined IBM as an IT consultant. His desire to utilize technology to improve the customer experience helped him to succeed within the consulting role. He returned to Northwestern to participate in the IMC program in an effort to study the customer and to bring them to the forefront of the business mindset.

JASON MILLER
Jason is a lifelong resident of the Chicagoland area. He graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 2002 and went on to serve as the Director of Admissions for a Chicago-based not-for-profit private college for four years. He is currently the Director of Public Relations for the Village of Park Forest, a southern suburb of Chicago, where he oversees communication efforts/public information for the municipality. Jason is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (Chicago Chapter).

MELISSA MORGAN
A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Melissa spent two years working for the Alabama Humanities Foundation as public relations manager. Prior to that, she worked in marketing and promotions for Southern Living magazine. Her communications background brings writing and editing experience to this year’s JIMC.

ADAM PERI
Born in Chicago, Adam formerly worked for Tribune Co., which owns his hometown newspaper, the Chicago Tribune. As an Account Executive, Adam managed print and interactive advertising accounts for about 30 clients. His approach to revenue generation revolved around understanding client needs and the ways that they relate to their customers. Outside of work Adam’s interests include baseball, music (live/recorded), cooking and farmer’s markets.

JESSICA REDLER
Originally from Montreal, QC, Jessica Redler graduated from McGill University in 2008 with a bachelor of Commerce and came to Medill IMC to further specialize in marketing and communication studies. She has completed several internships in the media industry and has always been extremely active in event planning for her school communities. Aside from marketing and event planning, Jessica’s interests include music, improvisational theater and history. When Jessica graduates from the IMC program, she hopes to pursue a career in media marketing.
ARIANNA SHAREI
Arianna is originally from Sebastopol, Calif. After graduating with an economics degree from Occidental College in 2008, she decided to pursue her graduate degree right away. Arianna has a passion for market dynamics and chose to study IMC to gain a deeper understanding of consumption. Beyond economic factors, Arianna wanted to understand the effects that marketing and communications have on purchase decisions. Arianna is specifically interested in the retail, fashion, beauty and luxury industries.

LYNETTE VILLALOBOS
During the past two years, Lynette worked in Prague, Czech Republic. She moved to Europe to start her career in 2006. She had always wanted to work abroad. Shortly after moving to Prague, Lynette worked on a due diligence project for GE Money Bank. After GE, she worked for Marcus Evans, an information services company. As a Senior Conference Producer at Marcus Evans, she was responsible for developing business conferences for the European retail banking sector. She also organized cross-industry events for the Spanish market. With her international experience and with the IMC education, Lynette hopes to become a leader in developing global marketing campaigns.

ALEXANDRA WALFORD
A Florida native and a (proud) recent graduate of the Florida State University College of Business, Alex spent the last eight months working for LearnSomething Inc., a Tallahassee-based e-learning company, where she served as the planner for online marketing strategy. In that position, Alex was responsible for increasing traffic to the company’s new online consumer education website. She also worked on the development of affinity partnerships to grow the site’s content. Prior to her move toward online, she worked as a regional makeup artist for Estee Lauder for six years. She’s still pretty good at it.

HANNA WIHODO
Hanna received her Bachelor of Arts in advertising with honors from Michigan State University in 2008. During her undergraduate years, she was an account management and account planner intern in Bates 141, an Asia Pacific advertising agency in Indonesia, and a promotion intern, designer and communication assistant in 21 HOM-TV, a government access station in Michigan. This summer she interned at Corbett Accel Healthcare Group, a healthcare marketing agency in Chicago, where she completed several projects on internal branding and new business development. She was drawn to IMC because of her interest in marketing research, brand management and consumer insights.

LIU “LORETTA” YANG
Loretta gained her bachelor degree in journalism and media studies from the University of Hong Kong. She did several internships in TV station and magazine during the undergraduate study. With a keen interest in marketing communications she pursued the graduate study in IMC program. She delved herself into online marketing field in this summer by doing an internship in an interactive marketing agency in Chicago.

WILLIAM ZEIDLER
William is from Naperville, Illinois. He received his bachelor’s degree in advertising from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2008. While there, he worked at a university owned business incubator for startup companies within the research park and served as an editorial assistant for an academic journal in the field of psychological anthropology. He choose Medill’s IMC program because of the school’s unique customer-centric and data intensive approach to communications.
CALL FOR ARTICLES

Articles are solicited annually from professionals and the academic community. At the beginning of each calendar year, the JIMC staff issues a call for abstracts. Interested authors should develop their article idea into an abstract and submit it to the double-blind review selection process. A double-blind review process ensures that each submission is judged on its merits and ability to further the marketing communications profession.

EXAMPLES OF SUITABLE ARTICLES

- Case studies: An overview of an IMC plan, problem or opportunity
- Point/counterpoint: Two articles from different authors expressing opposing viewpoints
- Theoretical or conceptual: An introduction of new concepts, explanations or viewpoints
- Reviews: A critique of published IMC material
- Research: A presentation of original research and methodology

BASIS FOR SELECTING ARTICLES

- Potential impact on marketing communications practices or on an individual industry
- Identification of an emerging trend
- Ability to provoke thought and discussion
- Timeliness

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Provide a concise overview of the article’s main points and conclusion regarding IMC trends, tools, research, etc.
- As appropriate, authors should mention new research findings and/or methodologies used to arrive at the conclusion
- Typed, double-spaced on 8½” x 11” paper
- Approximately 250-500 words
- Separate cover page should include: contributor’s name, title, company/school/affiliation, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address

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