



IF YOU WANT TO HUNT FOLLOW THE DUCKS



Understanding Web 2.0 and social media is becoming more and more vital in any marketing campaign. MARK BAINBRIDGE, renowned marketer of 'difficult' brands, explains how to shoot straight when hunting for customers. Ready, aim...

SINCE THE MID-80s, by coincidence rather than design, I have specialised in brands with major reputation difficulties. Having spent the best part of a decade with the British Army as Marketing Director, I joined the Royal Bank of Scotland as Head of Recruitment Marketing, just days before the official start of the global recession. Admittedly, I've had simpler tasks.

But while those 25 years have seen an astounding amount of change in marketing technology, it's nothing in comparison to the last 18 months, which have redefined brand territories and consumer relationships in more ways than is wise to list.

You could argue that this has simply accelerated behaviours, particularly online, which were almost

inevitable anyway. Nonetheless, the period has seen massive growth in online participation and a continued shift of media investment pursuing ever-migrating custom.

They want YOU!

Let's take recruitment advertising as an example: this now constitutes over 30 per cent of UK online advertising spend (Source Mediacom 2009/2010). And why wouldn't it, with LinkedIn boasting 55m members and Facebook 400m. The contention – if you believe the segmentation of these audiences – is that every possible hiring you could be looking for is operational in one of these spaces. Or, as one of my former Army colleagues use to say: "If you want to hunt, follow the ducks"

In the recruitment market, organisations are becoming fixated on efficiency and low-cost solutions, particularly as the in-sourced versus outsourced delivery debate gains momentum. As a result, the corporate radar inevitably alights on social media, with dim light bulbs flickering into life somewhere with a little sign hanging underneath it with the words: 'I see an opportunity; but I don't understand it.'

Understanding the Web 2.0 online opportunity has become significantly more important to brands in these environments – detailed analytics of responsiveness and requirement are needed and the terms of engagement are very much levelled, if not driven by consumers in this environment.

This all has a very particular effect for brands with more challenging propositions or reputation issues. In turn, this has created a new set of responsibilities for their marketers. First you have to win licence to operate from potentially risk-averse organisations, then table strategies in the unfamiliar territory of social media. This all tends to come before thinking about the consumer who effectively populates the frameworks created by the social network – and they are very much there on their own terms.

Get it, digit, or don't get it?

Some potentially good news then: explosion of the social media phenomenon equals access to millions of consumers.

BRANDS, EVEN TRADITIONAL ONES, NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE THEMSELVES AND MOVE THEIR THINKING AWAY FROM THE TRADITIONAL LINEAR MODEL OF CONVERSION – TARGET UNIVERSE TO RESPONSE TO CONSUMER TRANSACTION.

And because it's frighteningly addictive, it's got to be a major opportunity. For the majority, it's also grown up in recent years, from the domain of the techno geek to the normal routine of life. Trouble is that it's now creating its own rules and there isn't a rule book.

In most organisations, there's a genuine yearning for simplicity, particularly with online and social media concepts. Everyone will have their own version of how the online universe fits together. Added to this, there's a more significant strategic gap about how businesses plan to capitalise on new online behaviours – in some cases within the executive leadership communities responsible for driving these strategies.

There's a great website called www.vimeo.com, in which I stumbled across a short Web 2.0 advocacy film, which segmented global relationships with Web 2.0 into three audience definitions:

1. Those who 'get it' and have commoditised and monetised the web.
2. Those who 'digit' (most of us) who recognise it is the gateway to something important but might not have the technological skills to achieve No.1
3. Those who simply 'don't get it'.

I rank myself slap bang in the middle, but mercifully I've had the benefit of working with some highly intelligent agencies who have helped me to deliver a lot into the 'get it' webspace.

Community is key

My first insights into web-based communities came from contact with a small business. The CEO had simply 'got it' and had built a community of a couple of million online users who were undertaking hundreds of micro

transactions which rolled up into a very tidy business proposition. Since gaining this insight, I've been attempting to build and nurture online communities ever since.

The first of which was a youth engagement community for the Army in 2000 (www.camouflage.mod.uk). Within 36 months, the programme had built a community in excess of 370,000 under-16s – a perfect pre-eligible audience for the Army's recruitment proposition.

From this I learned much about the value exchange with members of a community, specifically that a trade-off of information and assets is essential, and that one shouldn't necessarily measure level of online or CRM membership activity as an indicator of propensity.

Online behaviour is extremely hard to drive – particularly in social networks as behaviours are, by their very nature, personal and built around personal networks, with the weirdest ideas and concepts capturing the viral imagination.

But brands, even traditional ones, need to differentiate themselves and move their thinking away from the traditional linear model of conversion – target universe to response to consumer transaction.

Instead, we are now seeing more circular models developed in which brands connect into existing communities within the online landscape or build their own.

It can however, be difficult establishing the right tone. Certainly, talking down to audiences about brands and values will fail, but nurturing individuals on the basis of the most important word in any language – their name – is complex to manage.

Separating professional from personal

But it's not just about the assets you can trade in exchange for data. The other dimension, particularly for employer and recruitment brands, is how to support and manage the online activities of employees and third parties representing the brand and its values through direct engagement in these arenas.

We are currently applying significant thought to developing enabling policies that allow us to enter into the online space without providing risk to our brand

reputation. Wrapped up in this is some complex thought, as we attempt to separate personal social media engagement from professional engagement.

However you look at it, whether as a feature of lean budgets and a real focus on cost per response/hire and ROI, or simply because of the consumer volumes, I would be hard pressed to bring myself to start any campaign planning these days from anywhere but a digital epicentre.

The new question we have to start asking ourselves is how do we create a web 'channel' rather than a website? It's simpler to regard this as an interactive digital broadcast space offering rich content, digital asset and data exchanges with potential customers and learning from them – when the channel is open, the challenge is how to make it famous.

The added benefit is that when a brand has been through a difficult time, online and digital marketing is a marketer's dream, as targeting helps to deliver a proposition 'under the radar'.

So why bother?

Simple answer: Because the rewards are enormous. Whether capitalising on bundling up remuneration from managing hundreds of clicks, to virally dispersing your brand, the aim is the same: to reach the ultimate goal of owning your online market. As an example, think what the iPlayer has done for the BBC.

It's also practical, making your brand marketing budget stretch further and creating a dynamic and exciting online dialogue and basis for real insight – opt-in online communities provide a huge base for research and insight.

With the Army, we commissioned an online visual psychometric tool as part of the web experience which allowed web users to undertake a battery of affiliation questions in the form of a visual test. Within a few months, we had thousands of online profiles of candidates which could be attached to their enquiry records so individual outbound and CRM could be tailored to perfection.

They also rolled up to give us research insights into audiences that we had not previously been able to define – giving us precision targeting information, as well as

HOWEVER YOU LOOK AT IT ... I WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO BRING MYSELF TO START ANY CAMPAIGN PLANNING THESE DAYS FROM ANYWHERE BUT A DIGITAL EPICENTRE.

a daily insight into reaction to our brand and values and prevailing media conditions.

You're as good as the people you work with

I've had the benefit of working in some really great collaborative agency networks (Publicis, Haymarket, Biss, Tequilla, Mediacom to name but a few). With such a large talent pool, it's clear that no one person has a monopoly on ideas and if your marcomms suppliers genuinely understand your brand planning workshops should be a real inspiration and create a fantastically rich set of ideas.

Ultimately however, it's the marketer who has to learn to extract the nuggets and decode these ideas to create a viable and achievable social marketing framework. Research is key, as is the creative execution – the most critical part of the brand experience. When others are able to articulate your strategy, you have achieved the required 'buy-in'.

And finally...

Within the next six months, I hope to have operationalised one of the most contemporary global online recruitment processes. It's destined to deliver a cultural change to the way we operate in the recruitment space and will hopefully act as a catalyst for others to follow.

There is no doubt that the coming year will see a host of forward-thinking marketers building on and generating some groundbreaking work – creative, highly efficient, targeted, business case-focused and fully cognisant of the social media opportunity. As a wise marketer once said, 'Out of the ashes comes forth sweetness'.

FILL ONE LINE

CARE OF THE COMMUNITY

Mark's 10 Commandments of Marketing

1. **If you're building a community, work through the plan end-to-end to establish your ongoing strategy for maintaining the relationship.**
2. **Define digital brand assets and information that you can trade online.**
3. **Network with other marketers and watch carefully what they are doing.**
4. **Calculate your risks but don't let them outweigh your initiatives.**
5. **Work with great suppliers, work to generate ideas from all of them and take a lead in synthesising the best.**
6. **Watch online behaviour, study all available research listen to industry experts and work out how to share external knowledge.**
7. **Whip up some real enthusiasm for your online strategies and sell upwards what they can do for business growth. And don't forget to deliver.**
8. **Think about integration of the consumers experience – not just the thought or the brand but a seamless consumer experience of real, honest authenticity at each of the key brand touch points.**
9. **Online communities are a huge captive brand research sample waiting to happen.**
10. **Enter awards with your work. It does great things for your brand, both personally and corporately.**