Looking at the past and drawing a trajectory to the future helps us understand where we are going. But, if we remain stuck in the past, we won’t be able to realise the full potential of what lies before us. From my viewpoint, the top ten marketing trends in 2012 are a blend of both perspectives: we will see the continued growth of emerging practices that open up a whole new world of potential, and we will also see trouble on the horizon by remaining steadfastly committed to thinking and systems that no longer apply.

Integration is sweeping all around us: even if marketers are unprepared or unwilling to let go of the old, channel-centric model. We will see a collusion of currencies where different parts of a marketing organisation will value different things. We will enter into a battle of media, content and other value propositions.

As most media become mobile media, marketers must shift their view of mobile from individual devices and specific forms of content to something much bigger. Mobile brings unprecedented proximity to marketing. Since the days of Erwin Ephron, we have valued Recency – the idea that advertising should reach consumers as close to the point-of-purchase as possible. Now, we can get much closer to the point-of-purchase and brand experience with more forms of content than ever before.

The algorithm vs. the Water

1. Obama’s 08 campaign playbook is no longer his secret weapon

2. IMC may be getting in the way of IMC

3. Everything is now mobile +

4. Social media marketing has quickly evolved from brands’ activities on social media networks, to a much broader paradigm that influences nearly every marketing function: consumer insight, promotions, advertising, customer relationship management and the valuation of return-on-investment. In 2012, we will begin to see a more horizontal integration of social marketing competencies across the entire marketing organisation. The role of the social media strategist will begin to expand from a tactical role to a more foundational role as marketers explore the potential of a truly social marketing plan. A social marketing plan embraces the idea of customer involvement and community engagement at every turn.

5. Media are becoming increasingly co-dependent

6. Media are working together in unprecedented ways to enhance experiences for the most highly engaged audiences. TV has evolved into “Social TV” – a term that supports communication and social interaction in either the context of watching TV or related to TV content. While TV is clearly the early adopter in recognising the potential of multi-media engagement, other media platforms will quickly follow suit.

7. One of the benefits of digital media is a potential danger. When consumers engage in the digital sphere, they leave a vapour trail. And, that vapour trail quickly becomes a predictive algorithm to predict the next behaviour. Thanks to these algorithms, Music Genome projects are popping up and Demand Media serves news stories based upon search/social volume. Will predictive models take the art out of the media business? What will happen when different departments in the same organisation use different metrics to value marketing return on investments? At some point in 2012, the CMO will have to decide whether it is a push or a pull marketing organisation.

8. Today’s kids and teens are growing up in a world of universal access to content thanks to the proliferation of screen devices and cloud computing. The method of distribution is becoming less relevant to them. They can access content anywhere/anytime and not give it much thought. ‘Generation Cloud’ is the first to truly experience the affects of content ubiquity. For this generation, media consumption is broken out not by platform, but by content type and location.

9. There is a growing chasm between advertising and branded content. Who produces it? Who funds it? Do they compete with each other? And, can the media cope with branded content, or will it create the brand as media company? What’s stopping marketers from getting into the media business? Not much. The price of distribution (the media pipeline itself) is relatively small. And, the best content wins. In 2012, more marketers will enter the branded content business, and these endeavours from their ad budgets – the very economic fuel that the media rely upon to develop their own content.

10. What’s fuelling this phenomenon?

The media world is converging and integrating in fascinating ways that will render channel-centric marketing at best, difficult, and possibly even obsolete. Our marketing activities may very well integrate despite the functional barriers of our professions. We will have to come to terms with what we value: functional barriers of our professions. We will also see trouble on the horizon by remaining steadfastly committed to thinking and systems that no longer apply.

1. IMC departments are all the rage. But, these departments may actually thwart the very outcome they set out to achieve: integrated marketing solutions. You need ideas to have a department whose job it is to integrate functions. If you take away the silos, there’s nothing left to integrate. Look at the complexity of Marketing Organisation X (Figure 1). Clearly, the line at the bottom of the chart cannot truly integrate the marketing experience.

2. Meanwhile, media services agencies are bringing creative firepower into the fold. Channel planning resides in both creative and media enterprises. And, we will see more holding company solutions that pull talent from across agencies and disciplines to better serve clients. While marketers may not realise it, the way we work together will begin to see more holisitc and integrated solutions from marketing services agencies in 2012.

3. Mobile was an idea that dealt with smartphones and apps. Now, consumers are cutting the cords on nearly every screen device thanks to WiFi access, and the introduction of smarter and more portable screens. The result nearly every content experience that used to be hard-wired can now be mobile. In 2012, TV will be ‘everywhere’.

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