



SATURATION, OVERLOAD AND UBIQUITY

We're drowning here.
More clutter is just not the answer . . .

New York Times writer Louise Story brought us a wonderful take on media saturation and excess. She takes on the increasing use of so-called "alternative media" or perhaps better put — **urban spam** — (crazy places for a product message). In an effort to be distinctive in a world rapidly being commoditized by sameness in every form of communications execution, the answer from many corners in the persuasion game is literally to secure brand exposure on any available two-dimensional surface. Shopping carts, floors in supermarkets, airline tray table liners, men's urinal wall-scapes, doctor examination table paper liners. To the point of conducting a form of sensory invasion, an absurd kind of siege on consumer eyeballs.

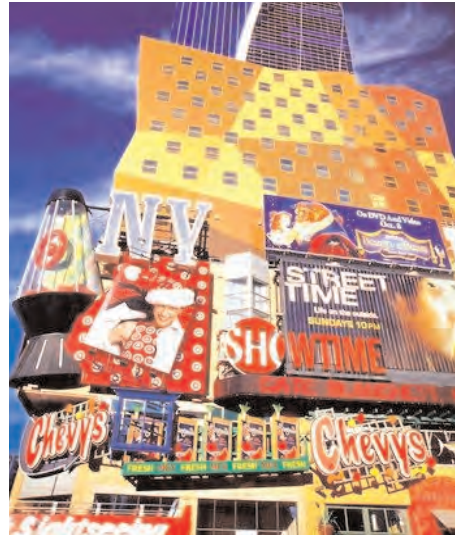
The answer, it appears, to ad and communications clutter? Yes — it is producing more clutter. One ad exec quoted in Story's article said, "ubiquity is the new exclusivity," be it an ad, promotion, online channel or any other turn in the media space. Media is now re-defined to mean anything, anytime, everywhere including but not limited to, foreheads. Yes there's even an agency touting forehead marketing as the new buzz generating concept du jour.

This occurs despite mounting evidence about what consumers are doing in reaction to the senseless sensory overload. They are just working harder than ever to tune out, to ignore, to pass over and eliminate one-way push style messages from sources that by definition lack relevance and engagement — let alone credibility.



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Fighting fire with gasoline

Faced with more messages in more venues coming from more products in more categories that clamor for limited mental attention — often in the same media vehicles — the temptation is to raise the brand voice even louder in an effort to be heard above the din. Worried about the decline of audience numbers in conventional media outlets, concerned about the splintering of media generally as special interests siphon off audiences, looking for an answer with TIVO-ing that anoints the so-called “target audience” with a sinister form of avoidance control? The answer, as in gas on a fire, is not to fight the problem with more of the same.

In his excellent book on brand strategy entitled ZAG, author Marty Neumeier maps the clutter calculus — in 1960 there were 8,400 magazine titles, 440 radio stations, and six TV networks. Today there are 12,000 magazines, 13,500 radio stations, 85 TV channels (probably conservative), and 25,000 Internet broadcast channels. In 1965 there were an average 20,000 items in supermarkets to choose from — now it's more than 40,000. In 2005 195,000 book titles were published. That same year 40 billion product catalogs were published. More financial transactions are conducted in a day now than occurred over the course of a year in 1965.

The point is: product clutter, ad clutter, message clutter, media clutter are all occurring at once. The human answer to this media saturation tsunami is simple: erect mental barriers and ignore most of it.

Engagement and relevance the new paradigm for “Permission to Enter”

The answer may not be toilet seat messaging or other forms of invasion, rather it's about relevance to the lifestyles of the consumer you're trying to reach. Effective engagement is about educational forms of communication that can carry information and ideas of inherent value to the audience. For P&G it was parenting information and advice at their overhauled web site for Pampers. This is by definition an unselfish kind of outreach intended to establish a relationship and a conversation -- not just polish a sales message. Marketers spend money on communications with a purpose in mind: to affect changes in behavior, to cause an action most often described as a purchase. Yet we're now operating in a world where the consumer is in charge and votes daily on what will be let in and what will be kept out.

Doesn't it make sense then that understanding the lifestyles interests and concerns of a brand's audience and looking for ways to help consumers realize their personal passions is a better idea than chasing them around the room with an ever bigger media gong. More than at any other time in the history of marketing, our challenge as experts in the field is strategy. Looking for the unique coalescence of brand and consumer interests. Our job is to serve these interests and in doing so to earn our way in. Into their confidence and trust. Securing permission to conduct a conversation. One thing is for sure, you can no longer buy your way in through sheer tonnage and ubiquity in media.