



## Harnessing the New Niche Nation

### A REVAMPED STRATEGIC MODEL TO DELIVER BRAND PREFERENCE AND SALES

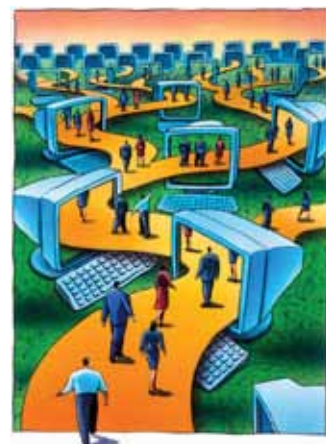
It's time for a time out. You may be on a path that could potentially waste more than a few percentage points of your precious marketing assets. If you're expecting to deliver on brand marketing objectives by continuing to push communication AT consumers then you may be operating from a strategic foundation that no longer works as effectively to secure brand preference.

Imagine a marketplace controlled by consumer self-interest. The "Channel Me" world we live in is an outcome of the consumer's ability to pick and choose the manner, timing and content of brand engagement at will. Are you in their wheelhouse working alongside the consumer as a partner in their lifestyle choices? It is harder than ever to win consumer hearts and minds employing tactics that fall strategically from the "mass marketing" model. The new approach to engagement requires an entirely different platform, one that will align your brand with consumer interests and earn their willingness to listen.

### Relevance before brand preference

We are witnessing the niche-ification of product marketing in America. Says brand strategist and consultant Marsha Lindsay of Stone & Briggs: "The evolution of our mature marketplace, along with the technology that allows consumers to be in control has created a seismic shift from one-size-fits-all mass markets to millions of markets of self interest." Inevitably a new go-to-market approach is required.

Arrayed before you is evidence of the full-bore splintering of mass media communication. In its place is emergence of the Web as a vast collection of laser-focused subject matter boutiques that has ushered in a new era founded almost entirely on self-guided tours of personal preference. With the ability to select what they want to know, from whom and when, consumers are controlling the engagement joystick to interact with brands they deem relevant. This behavior is teaching millions to pursue more precisely what they want in the context of how they see themselves and their lifestyles. Relevance rules.



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The tools you will need to be relevant...

**1. Commitment to insight:** you must talk face to face with those you wish to reach, in their home environment preferably.

**2. Sacrifice:** a willingness to check behaviors that attempt to "be all things to all people," and thus relevant to no one. Focus your positioning.

**3. Build a strategic mission:** find a higher purpose that helps align your brand with core consumer passions, such as a –

- Fashion brand that understands what the expression of personal style and creativity means to the fashion-ista and help those desires blossom;
- Adult beverage brand that constructs experiences to help forge social interaction, relationships and personal adventure;
- Infant products brand that selflessly works to provide credible information, guidance, advice and community to new parents;
- Food brand that helps enable the home cook's desire for experimentation, learning and family interaction in the kitchen.

**4. New media strategy:** one that springs more from conversation and experience and less from carpet-bombing tactics. Earned (editorial), digital (blog) and social media (Facebook, Twitter) fit perfectly with the objective of activating a strategic mission built around lifestyle relevance.

The ultimate brand goal is to earn a place in the consumer's life. Preference is an outcome of this approach and preference delivers sales.

Narrowcasting to self-interest is the price of admission

If we are to win consumer allegiance based on connections to these personal desires then it is incumbent upon brand stewards to dial the communications aperture in closer to identify and engage unique tribes of like-minded people. These tighter corridors of relevance are only built off a visceral understanding of consumer lifestyle aspirations and wants.

In the by-gone days of control and brand imprint communication, the consumer sought out consistency, reliability and predictability. In the Channel Me age the paradigm operating around brand preference has shifted to authenticity, uniqueness and craft. Thus, communications in this arena by definition must center on distinction, specialization and experience. This automatically requires a more human, conversational touch. The question to answer: how can we impart our brand with greater meaning that moves beyond features and benefits to encompass activities and interests our core consumer is attracted to?

Big springs from narrow...

Narrowing your focus should not be seen as effective only for small brands and businesses. Niche does not mean small, low volume and erratic. A niche means millions of potential customers. "Narrow" as we understand it today is about aligning brand behaviors and outreach to target a group of passionate users who have a stake in what you're delivering. Word of mouth and brand evangelism spring only from those who care, and never from those who could care less.

