



The Gravitational Pull of Push

WHERE ARE YOU EXACTLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Old habits die hard – even harder, at times, for brand communications. Not a day goes by that at least one or two articles appear in marketing and PR literature about the importance of social media platforms alongside the calls for brands to get out there and participate.

However, while some more adventurous businesses have authentically made the leap, in many instances brands attempt to sneak in the back door by employing traditional “push” communications techniques that are re-tooled for the digital media space.

While certainly clever in some cases, this kind of communication remains true to itself -- interruptive and one-way – and does not work as effectively in a media environment meant to be about conversation. Still it’s hard to break with the past when there’s so much momentum to produce forms of communication that retains the vestiges of rigid control.

It may be the control thing that lies at the root of a reluctance to dive in. It simply feels more like we’re running the railroad when we create and supply brand communication that pushes messages outward. Participating in the

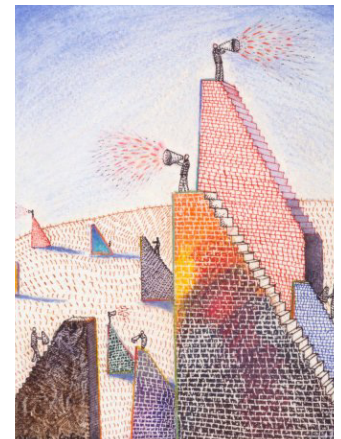
uncontrolled virtual communities of people who share common interests and passions requires we admit the consumer is both conductor and engineer.

“Scalejacking” – the quest for size at all costs

Additionally, for some marketers there is an equally compelling tradition to routinely hunt for the scale of mass media (TV, radio, print). In a recent blog column, Seth Godin describes it as a sort of “churn and burn mentality” that sees consumer relationships as entirely transactional. Ironically the Internet functions to turn this on its head. Rather than aim for millions who aren’t listening, Web communities aggregate smaller tribes of those who are engaged. The entire proposition can feel counter-intuitive to those who only see consumers as masses to be persuaded.

Inevitable change...

One way or the other, brands will play in the social media arena. Some will go there with the right unselfish (not treating consumers simply as



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objects to sell to) approach. Others will arrive through the sheer inertia of an unstoppable media evolution. According to Netpop Research LLC, of the 136 million US broadband users over the age of 13 years, 76 percent of them (105 million) are now contributing to social media through a variety of activities ranging from uploading photos and videos to blogging, tweeting as well as rating and reviewing products. Communication is evolving to become a form of entertainment.

Social media is no longer a horizon opportunity employed by a hand full of risk-taker brands. New research recently released by Aberdeen Group profiles the new era of social media as a core element of brand marketing communications strategy:

- 58% of companies have dedicated resources devoted to social media marketing.
- 61% of companies have online community platforms (e.g., discussion forums, ratings and reviews, etc.).

While it may feel more comfortable to push at rather than participate in, these sacrifices in the present can get you to a better place. It can happen by acquiring a zealous resolve and commitment to “humanize” the relationship between your brand and its user. It is this dynamic that drives brand preference in the age of consumer control.

What does this media environment look like?

As defined by the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, here are the general categories of social media communication and their basic functions:

1. Viral Marketing

Messages and communication designed deliberately to achieve pass-along distribution.

2. Community Marketing

Create and support special interest communities (user groups, fan clubs, discussion forums) by providing interactive tools, content and information.

3. Evangelist Marketing

Coalescing and cultivating brand ambassadors, advocates and volunteers to help spread brand messages.

4. Influencer Marketing

Engaging experts, opinion leaders, people in positions of respect and authority to help educate and influence the views and attitudes of others.

5. Referral Programs

Tools intended to help enable current happy brand fans to recommend and refer brands to their social circles and family.

These categories ladder up to new ways of interacting with current and potential customers. Rather than wait another year, maybe now is the time to sit down and plan how these tools can be put to use in helping build brand relevance and a relationship with consumers.

People expect a tangible, meaningful connection between their lifestyle interests and brands that will matter to them. Brands should be actively participating in the same environment where consumers are engaging each other. It's time to pull away from total devotion to push.

