

MARKETING IN THE SCREEN AGE

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Let go of that brand!

Gone are the days of the consumer as an obedient servant. The clever, creative use of screens is the key to communication with this critical, filming, blogging and social-networking generation. The key to advertising is daring to let go.

A short video shows a 1980s Sony stereo system shape-shifting its way, like the Transformers cartoon, into a Sony flatscreen, laptop and digital camera. Another clip shows a young woman's lips and love life become more colourful when she puts on L'Oreal lip gloss. On the face of it, all straightforward commercials, but with one key difference: they have been made not by Sony or L'Oreal or their advertising agencies, but by consumers using their own PCs.

The Sony film was created by 18-year old Tyson Ibele as a demo for the visual effects studio he works for. The clip was viewed by executives at Current TV, a television network based around viewer-created content and whose chairman is presidential candidate Al Gore. Current TV asked Ibele to submit his film, which is to be used as a pilot for a brand new service, launched in February 2006: the *viewer-created ad message* (V-Cam). Viewers are encouraged to create V-Cams for Current sponsors. The maker of the winning spot is paid one thousand Dollars.

The lip gloss film for L'Oreal was produced for the "You Make the Commercial" contest on the entertainment site Varsity.com, sponsored by the cosmetics firm. The French have certainly acquired a taste for user-generated advertising. L'Oreal executives are now asking viewers to make a V-Cam for its high-intensity-pigments line of cosmetics. The cosmetics giant is also seeking a video testimonial for its Women of Worth campaign. Sony meanwhile is running two campaigns, and Toyota has asked consumers to create a V-Cam commercial about what they would do with the new Toyota Yaris.

Not risk-free

L'Oreal, Sony and Toyota have mastered a rare art amongst giant brands: the art of letting go. This is an indispensable skill for any brand that wants to survive the Web 2.0 era. For decades, sheep-like consumers blindly followed the advertising messages of advertisers. Thanks to new technologies, the roles are reversed.

"The consumer now holds all the power", explains Kevin Roberts, CEO Worldwide of the advertising giant Saatchi & Saatchi. "This new generation of consumers isn't passively willing to be told what to do. They want to text, to interact, to share; they want to make their voice heard. This is exactly what we tried to achieve in the 1960s when we coined the phrase Power to the People...until we started tripping on LSD and forgot all about what we wanted. Forty years on, and we're finally here. Technology has made it all possible."

Roberts paid a flying visit to the Netherlands in early April to give a presentation coinciding with the launch his latest book *Sisomo*, in which he poses that the best way to reach this demanding generation is through *sight, sound and motion on screen*.

We are surrounded by screens, from TV screens to text and PDA screens, laptops, gaming PCs and of course plasma screens for public display in shopping malls, sports stadiums and city squares. "We are living in the Screen Age", poses Roberts. The clever and creative use of all those screens holds the key to communicating with this critical and dedicated target group.

Screen Age marketing, embraced by giants such as Toyota, L'Oreal and Sony is not without its risks. By and large, it is the committed user who is most likely to use the PC to pay tribute to his or her favourite brand. Relinquishing power to the consumer can be a little like trusting the cat to keep the cream. There's a fine line between love and hate. Anti-brand consumers will also seize the opportunity to vent their spleen. The creation rebels against its creator....

The American car giant General Motors experienced this first hand when it invited consumers to submit their home-made ad for Tahoe, the latest sports utility vehicle of Chevrolet. Unfortunately for GM, a group of anti-SUV campaigners decided to accept the challenge, and produced a spot depicting the new SUV amidst beautiful forests, snow-white glaciers and high mountain ranges, complete with the text: "Forget Iraq's missing weapons. Here is the real weapon of mass destruction: Tahoe, an American Revolution." The film was accompanied by a message encouraging people to vote Democratic. Open and vulnerable.

According to Roberts, this ongoing power shift will encourage some consumers to abuse their powers. 'It's inevitable. We live in a democracy, so everyone is entitled to their opinion.' Confrontation with consumers is part and parcel of Screen Age marketing. 'You should always expect criticism. Under no circumstance should you put the brakes on this positive development because of a negligible number of negative responses.

Remember: *fail fast, learn fast and fix fast*. That means don't deny what is happening, but don't go on the defensive either. Consumers will forgive you if you are honest, authentic, if you admit that you messed up. I'm a firm believer that something good comes out of everything.'

GM were criticised for not monitoring and screening their ads better. "Bullshit", comments Roberts. 'We don't live in a police state. The openness and vulnerability of the campaign was good, but I believe they should have been a little more "human" in their response, rather than pretending that nothing had happened. A missed opportunity, in my opinion. If they had openly said to the anti-SUV lobby "*Wow, what are you doing man? Jesus guys! Come on, let's play this game together*", the rest of the world would have reacted with outrage and accused the protestors of not playing ball.'

Roberts believes that brands should not be deterred by these anti-brand campaigners. They should accept that these things happen. In fact, "they should actively encourage it!" Only then do you create an emotional bond. You could compare it to a parent-child relationship. I have four children, aged 21 to 37. The first time they come home with a tattoo, a piercing or to tell you that they have taken drugs, you are angry, sad, disappointed, but you love and support your

children unconditionally. Each time, your relationship grows stronger. You are creating what we call a Lovemark: loyalty beyond reason.”

A growing number of advertisers are beginning to realise this and are willing to jump in at the deep end. The gym shoe brand Converse, part of Nike, invited amateur advertisers to create films centred on the themes Chuck Taylor All Stars or Imagination. “You decide whether to feature the shoes or not. All we ask is that you keep it apolitical, positive, original and inspiring.”

Even MasterCard is joining in, although the credit card provider hasn’t gone as far as to invite consumers to submit their films for the famous Priceless campaign. It draws the line at asking consumers to select one of two pre-made video clips and fill in the blanks that go along with the scenes.

The safest option of course is to give consumers the *impression* that they are the puppet master, while in fact you are still the one pulling the strings. During its launch of the new Lexus IS, Toyota invited consumers to submit photographs via www.thenewis.com. The common-or-garden pictures were merged into a mega-sized Lexus IS, presented as a giant photo-mosaic on the Reuters screen on Broadway. All participants whose photograph had been accepted received an e-mail to locate their photograph in that mosaic. The new Toyota Lexus IS, literally based on the everyday life of the average American. But then the average American as perceived by Toyota...

Nine questions for Kevin Roberts

Consumers can now make their own commercials. So why do advertisers need agencies such as Saatchi & Saatchi?

KR: 99.9% of consumer advertising is crap. Good news for us. Haha”.

Why do brands have such difficulty relinquishing power?

KR: “They are scared. An added complication, in particular in Holland, is the lack of management continuity. I have spoken to clients who in the space of three years had managed to hire and fire four brand managers. Brand managers who know nothing about the brand’s past can’t generate trust; they can’t take risks. The biggest problem however is this ongoing obsession with return on investment. The only ‘ROI’ that’s worth mentioning is *return on involvement*. When you relinquish power to the new media, you have no way of measuring or pre-testing. You just need to do it.”

You can measure sales.

KR: “Yes, and I support that wholeheartedly. It’s still the best measurement technique around. Toyota and I have a good relationship. They told me: “Kevin, you’ll never know as much about cars as us. And we’ll never know as much about the people that buy our cars as you. So you do the commercials, and we’ll make the cars. But if we fail to sell more cars in thirty days, we’ll stop the campaign. OK, it’s a deal.”

Apart from sales, are there any other measuring methods?

KR: "The only thing you need to ask consumers is: Do you want to see that ad again?" That's all. If they say no, you get rid of the commercial, because it isn't going to work."

In your book, you claim that games have tremendous potential as advertising platform in this Screen Age.

KR: "Ooh yeah!"

How come then that hardly any advertisers have embraced the gaming technology?

KR: "As I've said before: they are scared. You can't measure it, you can't pre-test it. It's like TV, the first commercials were terrible. From a creative point of view, we haven't yet understood how to use and link up all these screens. We know how to create ONE good mobile phone campaign or how to produce ONE good games idea, but we haven't yet cracked the code. Consumers want to be emotionally involved, and that's what we want to achieve: making emotional connections and working together, that's the future. But marketing hasn't progressed enough yet to make those connections."

How long before advertisers have overcome that fear?

KR: "It'll happen at the speed of light. Twelve months, 24 months. We are developing at a speed that is inconceivable to my generation, the baby boomers."

In your book Sisomo, you state that in-store screens have huge potential

KR: "Yes, and in practice they are rubbish. What do retailers do? They hang their TV screens so high that you can't hear anything and then play a dumb commercial. They use those screens solely to generate a little extra cash. Wal-Mart TV reaches 100 million people; they sell their database on for \$500,000 to P&G, who produce a commercial that nobody watches. And those who *do*, are irritated by it."

So what *should* retailers show?

KR: "What's the first thing you grab when you walk into a supermarket? Exactly, a basket or a shopping trolley. So you stick a screen onto that. A touch screen to operate the trolley, which recognises your fingerprints. Just think of the possibilities! Your favourite music while you walk along the aisles, the screen knows that you haven't bought Pepsi for two weeks, so it prompts: "There's a special offer on Pepsi this week". The screen can also show a map of all the aisles, and plays the latest clip of Pepsi personality Britney Spears. It then prompts again: "You've bought Pepsi, but no crisps. Did you know that Frito-lay is manufactured in Brazil? The screen now fires up a travel clip about Brazil. When you've finished shopping, you don't need to queue, as your purchases are automatically scanned. One touch of the button and you've paid. You leave the store and say "bye bye screen!"