

MARKETING

Below-the-line marketing may be key to new brand experience

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As the marketplace and media increasingly intertwine, it was only a matter of time before one would start changing the other.

The marketplace took the first blow, with media making it much easier for brands and consumers to connect in more ways than ever before.

A shift then began to occur in how people consume media, and above-the-line brand agencies found themselves in a tight spot. No longer could they reliably reach millions of consumers through a broadcast television commercial.

With media consumption habits being so fractured due to the proliferation of channels, it is nearly impossible for most brands to justify the costs of a big TV ad spend. This presents quite an opportunity for below the line agencies.

There is more room to prove the ROI for targeting and engaging with consumers through channels that lend themselves to greater personalization, not to mention more accurate measurements of effectiveness.

Really experiencing a brand

Greater personalization, as all know, often translates into better customer experiences.

With the addition of data, some smart decisioning and behavior-driven messaging, brands can create even more relevant, responsive interactions going so far as to personalize not just offers or services but the product itself for a target audience.

Of course, data has become a sticky subject these days, and its use has the potential for consumer backlash.

New privacy regulations, such as the California Consumer Privacy Act, temper a brand's ability to market in such a targeted fashion. It has also made it possible for consumers in California to request that their personal data be deleted by a brand as well as opt out of data collection altogether.

The ad industry was quick to respond.

The Association of National Advertisers, American Association of Advertising Agencies and the American Advertising Federation were just a few of the trade groups to cite concerns over the legislation, feeling certain provisions would have negative consequences on both businesses and consumers.

How this all plays out is still in question. But one thing is for certain: personalization is not going away. For every rule, a loophole is just waiting to be found.

In fact, as mobile technologies continue to improve in speed and effectiveness, chances are good that customer experience will be heading the way of the Tom Cruise movie, *Minority Report*.

Consumers already opt in to get push notifications when in the vicinity of certain stores, after all.

Where we go from here

As the opt-in nature of marketing continues to increase, brands will need to offer the consumer more reasons to interact with them.

Part of this will come by way of branded content. Think "stories" via Instagram or Facebook that are interwoven within user-generated posts.

While paid initiatives, they still have the look and feel of what is already there. This native content does nothing to interrupt the user experience, thereby keeping the consumer open to your messaging.

I also expect to see more brands allowing relationship marketing agencies to take on the coveted role of "lead agency" within their mix of marketing partners.

Once a brand has established a relationship with a customer, it is often easier and much more cost-effective to get that person to come back for a second, third or fourth visit than it is to convert someone new.

But that is not to say that new prospects are ignored.

Today's evolving relationship marketing discipline works hard in two ways: first, by keeping existing customers happy to increase their lifetime values and to encourage a little word-of-mouth marketing in the process and, second, by gathering hand raisers and nurturing them into paying customers.

QUESTIONS WILL still linger for brands on how exactly to spend their marketing dollars, and it will likely take a little trial and error to arrive at the right mix. What works for one brand rarely works the same way for another.

But brands will continue to have unprecedented opportunities to create more interesting and holistic customer experiences. All it takes is finding an agency that is used to thinking, planning and working in this data-driven, personalized space.

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