

COLUMNS

Mobility and the art of contextual relevance

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Effective consumer engagement can no longer be conceived of with a unidirectional mindset.

The digital natives of the wired universe are constantly being presented with a dizzying array of branded digital touch points and are expecting communications of a consistent, yet unique, brand message cross-medium.

Mixing medium metaphors is poor practice, so the challenge that brands now face is to become adept transmedia storytellers, creating messaging patterns, not simply repeating a single universal idea without regard for the medium through which they are communicated.

Medium understanding

Brands must master the art of not simply marketing to people but, instead, master the art of marketing to context.

Indeed, brands must become contextually relevant in their communications with consumers across the engagement continuum, with considered focus specific to the medium they chose to engage with and from.

In today's digital arena, a closer examination of Marshall McLuhan's aphorism, "The medium is the message," is more necessary than ever before.

Is the ever-evolving ecosystem of digital screens – whether television, digital signage, the stationary Web or the mobile Web – simply a uniquely arrayed collective of transitive messengers, serving up calculated content bred from an understanding of their inherent strengths as mediums?

Certainly, given its inherent strengths as a unique medium – location recognition, personalization, immediacy and social connectivity – mobile is positioned as the most contextually relevant medium in a marketer's engagement portfolio.

However, has the medium itself, as McLuhan hypothesized, indeed become the message?

Suiting the messenger

Consider for a moment McLuhan's premise: "The medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology."

To effectively argue for or against this premise we must understand the implications of the mobile medium and how it provides the new scale suggested by McLuhan.

The answer is not in the technology itself but, rather, in the context of the message delivered by the medium – the circumstances that form the setting for engagement in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.

In other words, is the experience relevant based on my current location or my personal preferences? Is it relevant from a timing perspective? Is it interesting enough for me to want to engage in or share with my friends?

The mobile medium, in ways vastly superior any other, addresses the context of these questions through its inherent action-orientation.

It is always connected, location-aware, socially connected, and intensely personal. The medium provides true context and that context is the essence of the message, regardless of its content.

Instantaneous access to information, location-awareness, social connectedness, personalization, immediate accessibility – these characteristics forms the inherent value proposition of mobile devices as natural extensions of our human selves.

Our lives are inextricably tied to these extraordinarily powerful devices – our address book, phone directory, pictures of family and friends, our social graph, our tastes and preferences, our mobile wallet, our identity.

THE MOBILE MEDIUM allows consumers to ingest communications in a manner that is contextually relevant because it is so instantaneous and intensely personal.

The medium becomes the message by the same definition that McLuhan's light bulb example illustrated his premise.

So, the device is a transport mechanism akin to electricity. The Web it is connected to and the applications it natively serves are filament. The medium and the message, and new scale of their associated consequences, are in the context.

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