

THE WEB'S UNSEEMLY FLIGHT TO BRANDING

**How a Genuine Response Medium Fled Response
Instead of Learning to Use It.**



Is it just me? Or do you also find the New Media people a bit distracted when they talk about branding?

There's a bit of "chickens coming home to roost" in their situation. Remember

they set themselves up by cleverly dividing all media into two parts, Online and Offline. Now they're obliged to pretend they're really Offline like all the other media.

That's what their preoccupation with Branding amounts to. They want us to focus on awareness and persuasion, the soft non-transactional benefits of Web advertising. But that's like Playboy trying to hide the Bunnies. What's the sense of being interactive if you don't want clients to look at response?

Online gives greater control

Name me an advertiser who wouldn't like to be Online with his buyers and prospects? Online gives greater control over the entire advertising process. You can target based on behavior, evaluate creative in real time,

specify frequency and measure response. Sounds pretty good to a media guy. The terror for the Internet sellers is it also sounds like direct mail.

Why terror? Direct Mail is a \$45 billion business, so there's plenty to go around. The problem is the Internet can't usually compete for direct response. The "lists" aren't as good. The creative isn't as disciplined. The offers aren't as well tested. The units aren't as flexible.

And there's the big downside. Nothing in advertising is as obvious as direct response with no one responding. It's like a Wedding where nobody came.

Today a short history of the Web would be titled "The Unseemly Flight To Branding." It would tell how a genuine response medium fled from response, instead of learning to use it.

Response versus branding

The Web people have it right. You can't be both a direct response and a branding medium. Branding media don't target well, which is why the two jobs are incompatible. Direct Response focuses in. It looks only for high probability buyers. Branding reaches out. It targets all potential purchasers. "All" is an ill-defined target group.

TV is the branding medium, which is why targeted TV is a misnomer. Women 18-to-49 is not a target, it is a mass market, which reflects the demographic tendency of purchasers of the product. Many older and younger women are also reached by an 18-to-49 TV schedule, just as many who are not 18-to-49 also buy the product.

Targeting for direct response is usually far more precise and restrictive than targeting for TV, because otherwise it won't pay out. The Web is

somewhere between the two. “Profiling” consumers based upon registration information or site usage patterns may target better than demographics, but it’s not good enough for response and privacy concerns may keep it from getting better. Because techniques like profiling restrict message delivery, they seriously reduce reach and that’s fatal for branding.

Sure there is a conflict between branding and direct response, but there is no conflict between branding and selling. Today’s advertiser assumes advertising should be doing both.

The Recency planning model divides potential purchasers into those who are ready to buy (a small group) and those who are not (a much larger group). Advertising sells by nudging the brand choice of the buyers and advertising brands by building awareness with all the others. The process snowballs over time, because higher brand awareness makes it easier for advertising to sell the brand.

Information to kill for

Seems to me the Web shouldn’t be running away from click-throughs. They give it the best measurement options in the business. The advertiser can measure exposures and the advertiser can also measure response. Click-throughs signal interest, which is a precondition to advertising making the sale.

Sure, many buyers will not click-through. So that can’t be the ultimate test of Internet advertising anymore than short-term sales can be the ultimate test for TV. But a differential click-through rate may tell the advertiser, in real time, how well the campaign is working. And that is information to kill for.

As to those low click-through levels. When and if TV becomes a response medium, what do you think its click-through rates will be?

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