

Feeling *the* Media

Most of what we call “emerging media” is still more emerging than it is media. We all understand the potential, but, honestly, most still don’t know exactly where to take it, much less how to measure the return-on-investment.

What we do know is that we can’t advertise in the usual sense on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Flickr. We have to figure out how to be a thinking and feeling part of the social experience, the conversation, and sense of community. That’s very different.

The same is true for media in the retail store. It’s not about using every square inch of a store’s real estate to shout out about our brands. It should be about making the most of the opportunity to become an upstanding member of the community.

A very basic understanding of who those shoppers are, why they’re in the store, what they want and, most of all, how we can help them, is fundamental to success. This is no different than what the most sophisticated marketers say about their approach to social networks online.

However, while consumers go to social networking sites to socialize, shoppers go to stores to shop. They are in the moment of the task, which is not necessarily the best moment to absorb our advertising or promotional messages. It’s critically important to understand that moment from as many vantage points as possible to get measurable results, which of course is the whole point.

In fact, I believe we are on the verge of definitively proving the value of media at retail. We now have a better understanding of how to make that media accomplish our goals, as well as tools that enable us to measure media at retail both in terms of its effect on brand equity as well as sales lift, in a way that

surpasses most other kinds of media.

The enormity of the potential of media at retail is nothing new. Back in 1982 I gave a keynote speech at a POPAI convention. At the time, the great revelation was that 70 percent of shopping decisions were made in the store. It was an exciting moment because it made us realize just how big our industry was and how fast it would grow.

We can save the debate over whether that famous statistic is true or not for another time. What’s important is what we have learned since then, which is that we had our priorities reversed. We fixated on how much we could sell at retail, which is a supply-chain issue.

Yes, selling more stuff is the goal ultimately, but it’s not just about priming the pipeline. It’s more about creating a better shopping experience. Our job is to inform, involve and entertain our shoppers, and drive measurable growth based on that.

This has never been more important than in today’s economic environment, with post-crisis shoppers. They are more invested in a better life and seeking better products than ever before. They are more skeptical and suspicious of brands that seem to charge too much and deliver too little. The advent of online social media has both accentuated and accelerated these changing attitudes towards advertising, in-store, at-home and elsewhere.

The goal now is to transition our focus at retail from “point of sale” to “point of experience.” It’s not only a matter of getting our shoppers to *do* something; we also need to make them *feel* something. And if we want shoppers to feel something, we need to feel the way they do. That shouldn’t be too difficult, since we’re all shoppers too.

Making shoppers feel the love means making the media feel their pain.

BILLIONS OF MOMENTS

Creating a shopping experience with feeling can involve a broad range of activities at retail. Since this issue of the *Hub* is all about emerging media, let's focus on the medium that gets perhaps the most attention at retail these days — screens — specifically the screens in Walmart stores.

Walmart's screens get so much attention because they translate into literally billions of moments-of-truth each and every week. However, it's not just about a bunch of screens at Walmart; that may have been true a few years ago, but it's not true anymore.

Today, Walmart has at least four kinds of screens at its new, next-generation stores that navigate, educate and inspire shoppers: 1) Welcome screens at the front of the store that help shoppers set up their shopping trips; 2) Category screens (like you'll find in grocery and HBA) that direct shoppers to specific destinations and then to featured items nearby; 3) End-cap screens, generally about 45 seconds in length, with messages that say, "Pick up the product and put it in your cart"; and 4) TV Wall screens, featuring digital content that inspires or triggers shoppers to buy.

As a general rule, the farther you are from the product, the more you should build awareness and intent to try. The closer you are, the more "reason to buy now" information you can give shoppers to engage and convert them.

Think of Walmart's media as a "package of screens," with an opportunity to tie in with merchandising along the path to purchase, to inform shoppers in the right stores, with the right products and messages at the right times.

This is a model that other retailers should study and emulate (or improve upon) as a best-practices standard. It is equally important for brand marketers to consider that all screens are not the same at retail — or at least at Walmart — and plan their media strategies accordingly.

Whether at Walmart or any other retailer, certain principles apply to success in creating content for screens in a way that not only sells more stuff, but also improves the shopping experience:

Set the Mood. Shoppers have many moods that vary by time of year. Their frame of mind is very

different during Back to School versus Spring Cleaning, for example. Create content based on these moods.

Stay on Task. Your shoppers are in the store on a mission to shop, not to push a button and watch your beautiful digital art show. They're in a hurry. So you better catch them with a strong introduction, product benefit and call-to-action.

Solve the Problem. Don't sell it; solve it. Show the solution, not the product. Take it up a notch from functional benefits to the emotional side of solving the shopper's problems.

Match the Path. At certain points, shoppers want to be stopped, interrupted and inspired with a unique experience. At other points, they just want to make a decision, and you need to help them review and compare. Understand the difference.

Sense the Change. Post-recession shoppers are different in that their highest value is no longer social recognition so much as it is a sense of responsibility for making good decisions. This requires a very different kind of communication.

See the Shopper. Imagine yourself as your product, looking out at your shoppers from the shelf. Who's coming at me? What are they doing? What should I look like, where should I be and what can I say to get them to take me home?

Feel the Pain. Her screaming kids beat your message every time. So, don't add to the noise. And you've got to make it easy. It's all about keeping it simple.

In short, translate your brand equities to what shoppers are feeling in the store, and understand how those equities can be highlighted based on those feelings. If you approach media at retail that way, your brand will become a respected — if not loved — part of the shopping experience, and healthy, sustainable, measurable growth will result. ■



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