

# Shopper Marketing Online

Without a doubt, the two hottest subjects in marketing today are digital media and shopper marketing. The question is, how can we best combine the two to drive awareness, trial and shopper engagement in advance of the retail store visit?

It's really not a new question. In fact, I've been working on answering it for both retailers and packaged-goods brands for more than ten years. My passion for online began in 1998, when consumer packaged-goods companies were building their first brand websites and still deciding whether they should put brand website URLs on their packaging.

## Walmart sets the standard for engaging consumers online.

The problem was, even though we built great websites full of interesting and relevant consumer content, the sites received little traffic. Brands simply did not know how to get shoppers to their sites.

This was about the time that chief marketing officers started questioning the return-on-investment of their early forays into online marketing, and began folding standalone "internet groups" back into core brand-manager responsibilities.

For me, the turning point came in 2001. That's when I began working with leading-edge retailers like HEB.com and Walmart.com to syndicate branded content (recipes, health tips/tools, seasonal articles, and so forth), sponsored by packaged-goods companies, onto their sites.

Retailers liked this because it made their websites "stickier" and added functionality. Brands liked it

because it placed a quality, online brand message, along with related content, in front of consumers at exactly the right time. In many ways, these were the first online shopper-marketing executions—circa 2001.

It was powerful stuff, because it gave the packaged-goods brands a leg up in the online shopper marketing space when nobody else was sharing digital content with channel partners. For example, perhaps a consumer might not click a link to a box of cereal, but they certainly would click a link for useful recipes and content about how to be a great parent and give your kids a fast, nutritious breakfast—sponsored by General Mills' Box Tops for Education.

When it comes to online media, even the world's most powerful brands must wrap themselves around relevant insights and contextual content. Maybe consumers aren't interested in having a "relationship" with dry cereal, but when Mills added the Box Tops for Education wrapper, it shifted that perspective.

### WALMART: "IN STORES NOW"

Since those early days, I've worked with retailers all across the country to develop this concept to its maximum potential for them and their packaged-goods partners. My first big client, starting about five years ago, was Walmart.

Walmart.com's goal was to reach their customers *before* they got to the store. This made sense for two reasons: 1) Shoppers were visiting the Walmart website to do research before their shopping trip—yes, even for CPG brands; and 2) Walmart saw their site as a shopper marketing and communication vehicle as well as an e-commerce site. They are smart multi-channel marketers and turned consumer insight into action.

Today, Walmart.com has evolved into a leading e-commerce site that offers all the necessary features for media agencies to consider it as a true media property.

They have set the gold standard by acting like a publisher, and making it worthwhile for a brand or media agency to invest real marketing dollars in retail media (*see sidebar*).

The Walmart site offers brands an opportunity to reach consumers with video, interactivity, downloads, links back to their websites, free samples and sponsored content. This content is featured on the homepage, via a link called “In Stores Now,” and promoted in every email. Brand banners are targeted by department and by category.

Pages are also optimized for search-engine visibility: Try Googling “free samples”—the Walmart.com online sampling program comes up number two or three in the organic listings.

As a result, click-through rates are five- to 20-times the national display advertising average. Brand message engagement time as measured by time spent on the brand experience pages measures more than 1.3 minutes. That kind of brand engagement would be hard to match in the store.

With some creative thinking, new possibilities emerge. Why not feature laundry tips next to major appliances, sponsored by a laundry detergent brand? That’s actually already happening: See the Tide partnership in the washer and dryer department on BestBuy.com.

You can also find “how to video” libraries on CVS.com’s “CVS Today” hub—engaging consumers on topics from beauty to health to holiday decorating. It all comes down to a clear definition of your shopper and what is likely to be most helpful or engaging.

The future for retail online media certainly is bright. A recent study by comScore, in partnership with dunhumbyUSA, on the effectiveness of online advertising in building retail sales of consumer packaged-goods brands, highlights the opportunity.

According to this study, which was conducted over a 12-week period, “online ad campaigns with an average reach of 40 percent of their target segment grew retail sales of advertised brands by an average of nine percent. This compares to an average lift of eight percent for TV advertising as measured by Information Resources, Inc.”

Bill Pearce, senior vice-president and chief marketing officer of Del Monte Foods, is optimistic about these findings: “These are precisely the types of persuasive studies we are looking for at Del Monte as digital plays an increasing role in our marketing strategy,” he says.

## Retailers as Publishers

*To deliver a quality media experience, retailers need to act like publishers.*

- Use IAB standard ad placements.
- Allow use of national campaign creative.
- Use Rich Media options (Flash and video).
- Feature brand ads above the fold.
- Execute ads via a mainstream ad-serving tool (e.g., 24/7).
- Provide as much ability to target as possible.
- Provide the advertiser data on site consumer demographics and behavior.
- Deliver a full metrics report after each campaign.
- Price options competitively.
- Provide sponsorship opportunities where brands can “wrap” themselves around an activity (e.g., home decorating), a recurring event (e.g., Back To School), a health issue (e.g., diabetes) or a seasonal hub (e.g., Halloween).

Shopper marketing, brand marketing and media teams need to create multi-channel, online media experiences that can extend their national brand campaigns onto their channel partners’ sites with impact, efficiency and metrics reporting.

Retailers are just beginning to understand what they need to do to offer a high quality shopper marketing experience online. They are making the commitment and getting great results. Said another way, it’s the promise of shopper marketing—a better shopping experience—online. ■



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