

Build fans, not audiences

 By Richard Firth

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Gone are the days of the passive audience that is willing to receive marketing messages at the whim of the advertiser. The new, more demanding, generation of consumers, has been exposed to so much advertising that they seem to have developed a natural defence against it, a type of "marketing blindness". Mobile devices are helping us move away from advertising banter.

That's why it's necessary for the method of delivery to change. Consumers no longer want to feel like they're being talked at by companies - they want to take part and interact with brands, which creates far more brand loyalty than just foisting your message on them. Compare the notion of audiences, quietly sitting in the dark of a theatre or cinema, to the dynamism of fans at a sports game - cheering, waving flags, and, sometimes in an ill-advised moment of passion, streaking across the field.

To get the attention of the new breed of consumers and create loyal, active fans, brands have to answer this question: "What does the consumer get out of it?" To get people to listen to your message, you need to sweeten the pot. The advertising guru has to ensure that the advert is dynamically adjusted to the content just watched. For example, a bland and repetitive advert post the halftime whistle versus an interactive advert giving player information on the game just played.

The advent of PVRs and the use of multiple screens while watching a television programme means no-one is forced to pay attention to any unwanted content any more. The average television consumer has access to two and sometimes three screens while viewing a specific television programme, and views them simultaneously.



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In Google's August 2012 study, [The New Multi-Screen World: Understanding Cross-platform Consumer Behaviour](#), researchers found that consumers spend most of their media time today in front of a screen. In the study, it confirmed that 90% of people use multiple screens sequentially to complete a task, for example, researching on a smartphone something they saw on television. Which means many people aren't even focusing on content they enjoy. How many times have you looked up an actor's credentials while watching a specific programme? We can then find other content that has the same actor for future reference!

Piquing the interest of the new generation of consumers also has untold rewards - it's every brand's dream to "go viral", where their message is shared and retweeted to such an extent that they can barely keep up. Which isn't always a good thing... In this age of constant scrutiny, one wrong move could lead to a complaint going viral.

One of the most egregious customer service errors is making the customer feel like they're not being heard. If you're not reacting to your customer's problem, then social media always offers a listening ear.

We're living in an age of information overload, so most messages get lost in the river of content people get bombarded with every day. You have to offer something of value; pushing the same old tired messages won't work any more. Grabbing attention in an age of ADD is not difficult, it can be done with a catchy headline or a picture of a cat, but sustaining it is a challenge when there are millions of things vying for your eyeballs.

However, it's simplistic to assume that only short, flashy, bullet-point content is read. Long reads are thriving in an age of gif lists, which means people are willing to commit their time and focus to something they believe will enrich them.

If you want your message to be heard, you need to create fans, not audiences.

ABOUT RICHARD FIRTH

A stalwart of the South African IT industry, Richard has been involved in the technology arena since 1989. With diplomas in Information Technology and Business Process Re-engineering, his successful career in IT has spanned various roles, including programming, IT implementation, and various management positions culminating in his current responsibilities as Chairman & CEO of MP Holdings. He sits on the Boards of both Iterate and Maytag.

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