iMEDIA CONNECTION

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The Mobile Economy

Without question the current economic climate is a marketer's nightmare, with more being expected from less. Much less.

In difficult times, new ideas are often born. And it isn't long before they challenge the incumbent practices. For example, right now I would guess that there are thousands of marketers dropping some of their online advertisements and exploring the possibilities of a social media campaign, with thousands more already moving ahead full-throttle. The why is obvious—social media offers a low-cost opportunity to try something different with potentially big payoffs. On top of that, according to a new study from Razorfish, four in 10 online consumers have made a purchase based on advertising they saw on a social media site. That being said, the marriage of social media and marketing is still relatively new, and since a proven best-practices model has yet to be formed, the possibility that the effort goes up in a puff of smoke remains. On top of that, with so many marketers already targeting sites like Facebook, the challenges of cutting through the noise have grown considerably more difficult in just a short amount of time.

While I am not here to dissuade your social media aspirations, I do want to point out the power and possibility that 160 characters can bring to the table. 160 characters is "geek-speak" for SMS or text messaging. At the beginning of 2007, there were more than 252 million active mobile phones in the U.S. and, according to CTIA, 96% of them could be reached using text-messaging. CTIA also reports that more than 360 billion text messages were sent in the United States last year. Now consider the fact that 70% of consumers say they've responded to a marketing text message, compared with just 41% who've responded to a survey and 30% who've responded to email offers (DMA). The numbers don't lie.

Text messaging is *the* fastest growing communications channels going, and the texting community is actually responsive to the messages that marketers are sending them. Before you go and tell me how I am not telling you anything you don't know already (i.e. these numbers and many others have been well reported to-date), let me share some points that you might not new. There is a synergy that exists between mobile and marketing frugality. First off, mobile is significantly less costly than many other channels. This fact alone has to make it part of the discussion when you are putting together your new marketing plan.

Second, mobile delivers benefits than many of the other channels do not, including measurement. Even the thrifty marketer has to demonstrate that the money he or she is spending is being used most wisely. After all, saving money means nothing if you cannot deliver results. With mobile campaigns, marketers can quickly evaluate the performance of their campaigns, identify which are working (i.e. in-store versus on package promotion), what messaging and offers are resonating best and much more. With that information in hand, changes can be made almost immediately to ensure that the elements which are driving the successful programs are being used across the board.

Another mobile benefit that has been widely underreported is the opportunity this medium presents to re-market to a captive audience time and again. Essentially with any mobile marketing campaign, a vital step is getting consumers to opt-in. The mobile phone is a hugely private device, so spamming your targets is not an option. By giving the recipient the option to opt-in—and believe me, many will do just that—their information is then added to a customer database, which the marketer can use over and over and continue to grow and refine after the conclusion of each campaign. Having a database of targets, all which have signed up willingly, is a hugely powerful tool that will allow you to create significant brand recognition – and trial and sales -- that could not have otherwise been achieved.

Like I said earlier, tough economic times tend to give birth to new marketing paradigms. While mobile is hardly new, it is certainly an idea that many marketers have yet to give much consideration. I believe that is all about to change.