Media Planner
January 10, 2005

Managing the Multimedia Message

Effective Coordination Can Unleash the Full Power of Synergy, Delivering Both Short-Term and Long-Term Gains

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Special to TelevisionWeek

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Messaging across multiple media channels is a focus of discussion in many marketing planning meetings. Marketers realize that the complex dynamic that occurs when consumers experience messages across multiple media channels serves to generate potent marketplace results. The trouble is that discussions of this sort tend to focus on what allocations will deliver short-term marketplace sales and lack an understanding of the complex message dynamics that generate the results.

Lure of Short-Term ROI

Wall Street's rewarding of short-term return on investment is a powerful snare. Econometric modeling has provided marketers with insight they believe maximizes return for their investment. In short, advertising performance models predict sales results.

Marketers develop allocations mirroring models, believing that allocation is the critical factor in generating sales increases. Execution of messaging in all channels follows the model and is pursued with ROI-enhancing scale in mind.

In chasing profitability, agencies and vendors take advantage of marketers' ROI pursuits. An attractive result of agency consolidation is the ability to bring in-house or sister companies to the table that provide services across the spectrum of allocated message channels. That means one-stop shopping for marketers looking to leverage economies of scale.

Vendors have provided further economies of allocation scale to marketers, merging with others or expanding offerings to ensure they have properties available at all points along the messaging channel. Agencies and vendors use their depth of offering to capture larger portions of marketers' allocations.

A deeper look at complex communication dynamics shows that allocation by itself does not deliver the best results possible. Deliberate coordination of multiple media messages unleashes the power of synergy and delivers ROI over short and longer terms.

Inside the Black Box

Human brains process information using a parallel system: the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Each has its specialty. The right brain is visual, intuitive and random. The left is verbal, logical and linear. When the brain assesses data, the left brain absorbs information as a series of aspects while the right brain assesses information holistically.

One half of our mind turns over bits of info and pieces together details, while the other half considers the whole. At the end of the process, learning is merged and "meaning" is assigned to the information.

Messages delivered in a medium stimulate particular portions of a consumer's brain. For example, a marketer delivering a message in radio will give the left brain verbal information to absorb, but deliver little stimulus to the right brain. Not only does radio fail to provide visual imagery but limited unit length will not be ample to convey many brand details.

Some consumers may absorb enough meaning from the radio message to take market action, but more likely, the brain will hunger for deeper information-more details for the sequential left brain to piece together and a less fuzzy whole for the right brain to process.

Increased frequency won't help the brain obtain meaning because more radio messages can't feed right-brain hunger. Any individual medium will strongly stimulate some portion of the brain's information processing system but fail at stimulating the rest.

Synergy

The obvious implication is that messages need to be developed for and delivered in many media channels. But it is not enough to simply deliver messages in many channels. Allocation without coordination leaves many consumers with incomplete stimulus to their cognitive process. Coordinated allocation is needed to ensure that as many consumers as possible fully experience brand messages in multiple channels to engage their decision-making process.

Coordinated messaging efforts maximize the chance that messages are received across a more complete spectrum of processing capability, enabling better understanding of marketer offerings and increasing odds of favorable consumer action in the marketplace.

This is the essence of the concept of synergy; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And there is evidence of this principle in action in a number of industry studies, past and present.

Studies by the Magazine Publishers of America, going as far back as 1990 in its joint study with J. Walter Thompson and more recently in collaborations with Millward Brown and Nielsen, have shown interesting results. The Interactive Advertising Bureau's ongoing effort with its Cross Media Optimization Study also suggests corroboration of synergy in action.

As one might expect, both groups use the learning as a platform to lobby for an increased or "optimum" allocation for their medium. But it's not a particular allocation by medium that is the answer. The answer is allocation with coordination.

Market Impact

Consumers experiencing brand messages across many media types give their brains a much more robust spectrum of information on the brand and its offering. They are better able to assign meaning to the brand and make a marketplace decision. In the short term, the result is a greater likelihood of a sales transaction.

In the long term, better-informed consumers bond with the brand in a deeper way. If they've actually purchased the brand and it delivers as expected, consumer loyalty will increase. Moving consumers up the value chain to a more bonded relationship is a good thing. Bonded consumers don't just provide short-term sales bumps, they provide lifetime value.

Practical Implications

Achieving the best results possible means thinking beyond merely including many media types. Chiefly, recency by medium makes powerful sense. The goal is as much reach as practical, with minimal frequency, delivered in as many sales periods as possible.

Finally, recency efforts in each medium must be integrated to maximize consumer exposure to each planned medium. Conceptually, a utopian five-medium plan would have a 100 reach and a 5.0 frequency-1 frequency point for each medium. That's impractical in the marketplace, but useful as a paradigm.

Delivering messages in multiple media types is an important principle to ply in media planning. But the key to powerful implementation of the principle does not lie in allocation only.

The key is deliberate, coordinated allocation to ensure that as many consumers as possible experience messaging across a broader spectrum of their cognitive ability. This process prompts more complete information processing in consumer brains, dramatically increasing potential market response.

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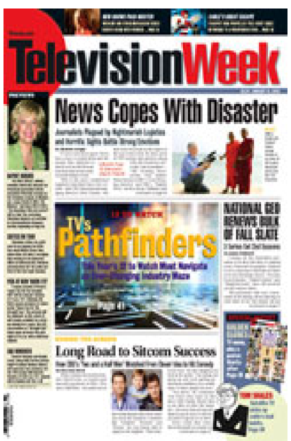

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