

For Online Promotions, It's Time to Grow Up



by Bill Carmody

I can't wait until the day when online promotions are no longer treated as "new and different." Soon, the vast majority of Internet campaigns will be truly integrated into traditional promotional efforts, and when that happens, online promotions will grow up and stop being referred to as "new media."

You can see it happening all around you. There is a movement towards using print, radio, television, and direct mail to promote online sweepstakes, contests, and games. Banner ads are no longer the dominant media used to drive traffic to online promotions. Web sites are being used more often to check promotional codes on packaged goods products. URLs from print ads are used to track effectiveness. And key-punching BRCs, once an expensive part of the direct-mail world, is on the decline as more consumers do the keying themselves online.

There's really nothing new about the Internet. While technology continues to make the Internet faster, better, and easier to use, truth is the Internet is simply a tool to accomplish the same marketing objectives you've had all along. There are just more strategies and tactics now to help you accomplish those objectives. Historically, every medium – television, radio, magazines, direct mail – has gone through the "new and different" phase, until enough marketers understood how to use it effectively. Some of the first TV shows were simply radio programs that added a visual element. The first broadcast advertising came in the form of sponsorships, until pro-

gram managers decided to change the format to distinguish content from commercials.

What the Internet has truly done is put fun back into the promotions industry by providing marketers with new tools of the trade. Think about it: Clients are now demanding that promotions be completed faster and cheaper, while simultaneously taking on objectives that, on the surface, seem insurmountable by traditional standards.

Truly integrated promotions allow mass marketers to communicate directly with their consumers, breaking down corporate walls that have existed for many years. Integrated promotions allow real-time measurement of campaigns that was either impossible or extremely expensive before. But most importantly, by combining online efforts with off-line strategies, integrated campaigns grant you the ability to accomplish seemingly paradoxical objectives:

- You can combine the power of the Internet with traditional promotion marketing strategies to appeal to a mass market on *an individual basis*.
- You can segment your database with multiple offers and test your marketing strategies, and still keep the costs way below those of your traditional direct-mail efforts.
- You can distribute more gamepieces than ever before, but with the highest degree of security.

It's not the technology that gives you the ability to accomplish these things, it's a new way of thinking. The

Internet essentially destroys that "box" you've been told to think outside of all along.

This is an exciting time, because everything you thought you knew about promotions is up for debate. If you're the type of person who is set in your ways, this will be a difficult time. While your approach is still accepted, it may not necessarily be the best solution anymore. Conversely, if you keep an open mind and remember what has worked in the past, you'll come up with some exciting new ideas that will cost less, be more profitable, and totally revolutionize the way you think. What's not exciting about that?

So fire your "Internet guy," unless he's willing to teach you what he knows. If you have an Internet department, then online segregation is still an issue in your company. Start busing the tech people into your marketing meetings and see what happens. Once the fear and novelty fade, you'll find that your tech team – just like your marketing team – wants nothing more than to help the company succeed.

Once they start putting their heads together early in the process, they'll begin to bridge the gap between online and off-line campaigns. Then we'll no longer need to refer to "online promotions," but instead will simply talk about "the promotion" and all of its many elements.

And there's nothing new about that.

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