

Marketers know they need to employ digital marketing as part of their media mix, but many still wrestle with the questions of when, which and how much. Discovering these elusive answers and getting the most out of any digital marketing effort requires a melding of the left brain and right brain, a marriage of art and science.

Marketers using the best of both divergent worlds in digital media understand that the accountability of direct response media and the creativity of online branding programs no longer have to be mutually exclusive. The artistic becomes measurable; the accountable becomes creative.

Looking left, to the accountability side of the brain, we find tools for the most sophisticated, transaction-based e-commerce program: search engine marketing, contextual advertising, email marketing and other trackable, accountable media among them. In pay-per-click (PPC) search engine marketing, for example, many advertisers track portfolios with tens of thousands of keywords. They track click costs, click volume, conversion rates and other relevant data, often using sophisticated analytics tools to better understand user behavior.

A marketer's dream? In many ways, yes. Accountability enables advertisers to test ideas and see what happens, bringing experimentation to new heights. This not only alerts advertisers to opportunities, but also enables them to measure progress in overcoming problems. Facing lower than average conversion rates, for example, advertisers can optimize landing pages for increased relevance and track any resulting change in conversion rates by keyword.

As advantageous as trackability, accountability and data-based answers are, we have a left side and a right side for good reason. The right side generates creativity, art, passion, intuitive thinking, etc.

Right brained thinkers try new things and find unique ways to engage. They embrace podcasting, online video, multimedia in its many forms and other emerging technologies and will often trade accountability for an engaging and interactive user experience. In the offline world, they might purchase a Super Bowl ad to reach a specific demographic, build the most compelling creative its team can muster, and place it with few plans to track success, counting instead on the compelling interactive content to provide significant brand engagement. Just look at how many Super Bowl ads opted not to include a URL this past year. Why?

The best digital marketers insist on a whole-brained approach. Their teams meld right brained creativity and the desire to engage with left brained accountability and the desire to track, analyze and improve performance. In this scenario, the consumer is more visible and increasingly engaged. Relevance rules, and when marketers combine accountability and creativity with targeted communications, they can be certain customers receive a relevant, engaging experience. Examples of this whole-brained approach are becoming more common, but let's take a look at one shining example to better understand what to expect moving forward.

Losing viewers from one season to the next is a major problem for television network executives. Moving schedules and cliff hanger season finales are just a couple tactics used to address the problem, but these are not easily trackable. Comparing ratings from one season to the next was the best option, but isolating the effects of network advertising, online advertising and other promotional efforts is practically impossible.

Hats off to NBC. The network will produce ten standalone Webisodes of its hit comedy The Office through the summer months. Fans can download the short form clips which build a story line about the latest tragedy at Dunder Mifflin. Keep them engaged with original content ... very creative.

While the strategy just might keep loyal fans engaged, the real value of this approach lies beyond success or failure, in the combination of art and science. This creative solution can be tracked for effectiveness each step of the way. So while NBC engages consumers with a new, cost effective method for minimizing off season viewer loss, they also get a detailed analytical breakdown of when and how a percentage of the show's fan base becomes disengaged.

Most importantly and regardless of the strategy's success or failure, NBC has created a right brained creative strategy to address the problem with a corresponding left brained scheme to better understand the core problem at hand, the underlying consumer behavior and actionable ways to overcome the challenge.

When marketers integrate creativity and trackability, digital media can reach new heights.

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About Avenue A | Razorfish

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operates three regions in the U.S. – East, West and Central – with offices located in major markets. In addition, the firm’s first international presence was established through the acquisition of U.K.-based full-service interactive agency DNA. Clients include AstraZeneca, Best Buy, Ford Motor Company, Kraft, Microsoft, Nike and Verizon. aQuantive, Inc. and all of its operating units are committed to Internet privacy.

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