

Convergence: It's Back

insight

Jeremy Lockhorn | June 2008



As most of you know, last month, Avenue A | Razorfish held our annual Client Summit in New York City. Now in its 8th year, the 2008 event was themed "Rock the Digital World." One of the key themes was that convergence is back, and in a big way. Convergence is, by internet standards, a dinosaur of a buzzword. Like "engagement," it has meant different things to different people at different times. Everyone has his or her own interpretation, and it likely changes & evolves over time.

Convergence roared onto the buzzword scene in the late nineties – as several companies began to push a vision of the web getting hitched with the TV. It manifested itself in things like WebTV and then later TiVo, slingbox, AppleTV, Windows Media Center, and so on. It quickly became clear, however, that convergence didn't just mean some kind of mash-up between TV and the web. Rather, it foretold the long-projected (but not yet realized) era of ubiquitous computing – a world where computing devices are everywhere and all connected to the same network. That world doesn't seem quite so far away these days.

Digital technologies are breaking out of the confines of the PC and invading the real world. The functional implications on retail environment are perhaps the most obvious; things like price comparison engines, user reviews, RFID for inventory management, guided selling via digital solutions, and so on.

The web has taught people to expect information at their fingertips. E-commerce has forever changed the way people shop and the way that they make purchase decisions. And demand is clearly already there for e-tailing to make the leap to brick 'n mortar retail. Business Week last year reported (http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/toc/07_51/B4063magazine.htm) that 61% of people want to be able to scan a product bar code with their camera phone to receive information on other stores' prices. They want transparency. A recently published TNS report captures significant consumer enthusiasm for all manner of shopping innovations (<http://www.retailforward.com/pressroom/pressreleases/tns050708.asp>).

The web has become so pervasive, so ubiquitous, that it is fading into the background. It's becoming invisible. It just powers everything that we do and is almost completely transparent in that we often don't even realize that we're getting data or information from the web. It's just how we do things. We just expect it to be there and to work. Flawlessly. At all times. It cripples us when we are disconnected. For many, the web has become the most trusted source of information, making things like phone books seem archaic. For some, not being able to find something on the web means it simply doesn't exist.

The implications for retail marketers are only the tip of the iceberg. These new emerging digital out-of-home experiences are, yet again, redefining how we tell stories to our audience. It means

that the power of the web and the power of those branded experiences we create online are no longer tethered to a keyboard and mouse. They can exist outside of the PC; they become part of the physical space. They become a new generation of broadcast in many ways, reaching a larger simultaneous audience than a banner ad or even an immersive site that impacts usually just the one person looking at the screen. Digital experiences are shared experiences, drawing attention from the crowd and encouraging a new level of interaction not only with our brands but also with other people – even strangers – who happen to be sharing the experience. They're inherently social. David Polinchock, who spoke at the Client Summit, calls this the socialization of place.

To demonstrate all of this, we created a series of hands-on technology demonstrations, mostly under the umbrella of an expo we called InStore: Where e-tail meets retail. In collaboration with a wide variety of technology partners, we assembled an immersive, interactive experience for employees and clients. People were able to interact with touchscreen windows from i-Gotcha (<http://www.i-gotcha.com>), mobile couponing from bCODE (<http://www.bcode.com>), Akoo's mobile-activated media system (<http://www.akoo.com>), self-service scan & bag solutions from Modiv Media (<http://www.modivmedia.com>), Reactrix's (<http://www.reactrix.com>) StepScape interactive gaming system, and augmented reality from Polinchock's Brand Experience Lab (<http://brandexperiencelab.org/>).

The energy and tone of the conversations in that room made it clear that convergence is back, and it's not just the web/TV mashup. It's the complete and utter obliteration of the line between digital and analog. Perhaps more importantly, convergence means the gigantic opportunity created by that swiftly crumbling wall that used to separate the real from the virtual.

How does your brand manifest itself at the nexus of this new convergence?

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About the Author



Jeremy is an emerging media expert at Avenue A | Razorfish where he is also a key leader of the agency's emerging media practice. The team functions as both a think-tank on next-generation media and an extension of current client teams and is focused on driving innovative marketing solutions for clients. As the marketing landscape continues to fragment and new channels emerge, Jeremy functions as a filter and consultant – helping clients and internal teams to understand, evaluate and roll out strategic pilot programs and analyze the results in an effort to fuel future efforts and broader campaigns. He helps teams take a core idea and extend it to new digital environments, building connections with target audiences in unexpected, yet efficient, ways. This approach goes beyond campaigns; it translates to powerful digital solutions that can transform businesses. While his expertise covers numerous emerging media technologies, his primary focus is on video across all platforms. Jeremy's efforts to research and assess the landscape

ultimately feed global strategy development and uncover unique opportunities for innovative campaigns.

Jeremy is a 15-year advertising industry veteran, having spent time at offline and direct marketing agencies before joining Philadelphia-based digital agency startup i-FRONTIER in 1997 as it's first employee. He teamed with founder Brad Aronson to grow the business and ultimately join forces with Avenue A | Razorfish. During his tenure at the agency, he has served many roles, but they all meet at the intersection of media, creative insights and technology.

He is a frequent speaker on emerging media, having presented at OMMA Video, Digital Hollywood, Streaming Media East and West, CES, Internet Retailer, the AAAA Media Conference and several others. Jeremy also writes a monthly column for online magazine ClickZ (<http://clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3622705>) and regularly publishes whitepapers on a broad range of emerging media topics (<http://www.avenuea-razorfish.com/points>).

Jeremy holds a BSJ in Advertising Management from Ohio University's Scripps School of Journalism, and is currently based at agency headquarters in Seattle, WA.

About Avenue A | Razorfish™

Avenue A | Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology companies in the world. With a demonstrated commitment to innovation, Avenue A | Razorfish counsels its clients on how to leverage digital channels such as the Web, mobile devices, in-store technologies—and other emerging media—to engage people, build brand loyalty and provide excellent customer service. The company is increasingly advising marketers on Social Influence Marketing™, its approach for employing social media and social influencers to achieve the marketing and business needs of an organization. Its award-winning client teams have a great understanding of customer needs and provide solutions through distinct business disciplines, including analytics, strategy, technology, media, creative design and user experience. Avenue A | Razorfish has offices in markets across the United States, and in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Clients—many of them served in multiple markets—include BMW, Carnival Cruise Lines, Coors Brewing Company, Kraft, Levi's, McDonald's and Starwood Hotels. Visit www.avenuea-razorfish.com for more information.

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