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PAGE features news, research and articles of specific relevance to the media agency and magazine publishing communities.
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Rules of Engagement

The Three Cs of Delivering an Engaged Advertising Audience

As media professionals, the level of our collective expertise is being challenged in an increasingly media aware society. The game has changed:

Consumers are more sensitive to advertiser's motives as each adult is hit with hundreds of commercial messages every day. With so much information and skepticism, is it any wonder that a commercial message has difficulty gaining consumer attention?

Increasing confidence with technology has bred a desire to control media consumption, perhaps before it controls us. Hence consumers are now their own editors when it comes to music (iPod), TV (PVRs), film (Box Office), and so on. With so much editorial control, is it any wonder that non-core elements of a media offering, that is the commercials, are increasingly edited away?

Faced with increasing consumer resistance to advertising, advertisers and their agencies are shifting their media focus to maintain an

influence with their intended audiences. It is no! longer enough to just win people's attention. A new approach needs to be adopted: to earn and sustain the active engagement of individuals. And the media community is adapting, concerning themselves less with media reach and more with media connection.

WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

Engaged vb. *-gaging, -gaged* to take part or participate, to involve (a person or his attention) intensely, to bring into operation.

This definition perfectly demonstrates the importance of engagement for us. It inadvertently illustrates the linear process of successful advertising: to gain attention, to retain that attention and to get people to act.

So, how do you achieve engagement? Inattention to media is driven by the 'Three C's' of engagement:

1. Consumer control
2. Increasing choice
3. Commercial cynicism

1. CONTROL

Erwin Ephron addresses the issue of advertising evasion succinctly: "Growing commercial avoidance does not threaten mass media. It threatens intrusive media."

By definition, anything intrusive is not welcome and its presence often resented. It is a criticism aimed at advertising since its birth, but degrees vary among today's media: 38% of adults feel TV commercials are too intrusive, against 7% for magazine advertising.

Much audience irritation centres on the balance of who is in control of the media relationship. With broadcast media, the broadcaster controls the timing and rate of exposure. Consumers have adapted to this control by escaping to the kitchen or bathroom, chatting to family and friends or picking up a magazine when commercials appear. Even relevant ads will be missed as whole commercial pods

are avoided or zapped.

"Commercial avoidance in print is usually selective - skip past the ads I don't want to read.

***Commercial avoidance in TV is more often total - I go look at something else."
- Erwin Ephron***

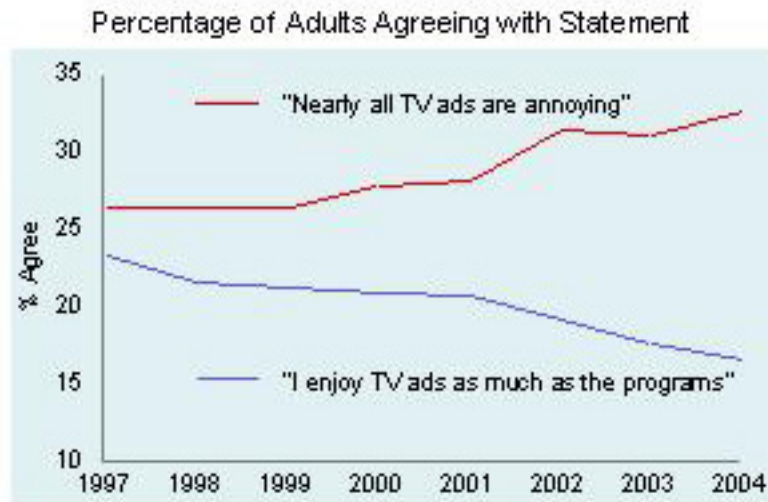
With magazines, control lies with the audience -- the reader can select which ads in an issue to 'consume', based on interest, relevance and appearance. As Ephron surmises: "Commercial avoidance in print is usually selective -- I skip past the ads I don't want to read. Commercial avoidance in TV is more often total -- I go look at something else."

There is another important point to consider with magazines. Advertising can indeed be skipped if the content is not of interest on that reading occasion. However, reader control of the timing of media exposure means the advertising can be revisited when interest arises.

Control: Good for Magazines but Bad for TV?

So, audience control is good news for magazine advertising, but according to early indicators, bad news for TV advertising in the advent of PVRs - eight out of ten ads are skipped.

Targeted, well-executed advertising is not only absorbed as part of the magazine experience, it is viewed as actually enhancing it. Research repeatedly points to magazine advertising being valued content and integral to the media experience. In a study by Starcom MediaVest, women were asked to select ten pages that best exhibited the 'essence of the magazine they were reading'. A third of the pages chosen were ads. TV commercials cannot claim to be so central to the overall offering.



2. CHOICE

As modern consumers, we are drowning in choice. Even the simplest purchase decision involves our little grey cells assessing a frightening array of alternatives. For example, a visitor to Starbucks is faced with an astonishing 6,000 options to fill your coffee cup. It is enough to drive you to something stronger!

This explosion of choice has led to a far greater personalization of media. Magazines have long sold themselves on being able to meet a vast range of reader interests. As such, magazines are particularly good at matching audience moods. The internet and newspapers engage the reader in a mood to gain knowledge. TV, cinema and radio predominantly attract those looking to unwind. In contrast, choice of function and style means magazines play varying roles for their readers, alternatively feeding the desire to learn or to escape. Such mood matching ensures that content is absorbed in a highly receptive mindset, appropriate to the type of advertising in magazines.

3. CYNICISM (The Over-Coming of?)

A cloud of mistrust has gathered over an increasing number of political, commercial and social institutions to which we traditionally turned for guidance. Faced with such a lack of confidence in

elements of 'The World', the weight of trust and belief increasingly lies within what the Henley Centre calls 'My World'.

The Influence of 'My World'

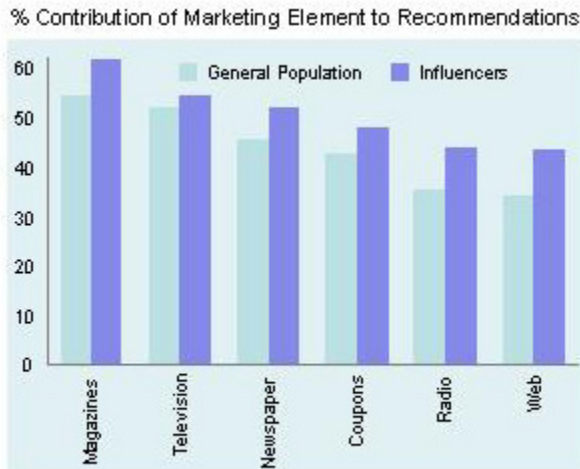


The modern communications challenge exemplifies this. In a society of increasing commercial cynicism, advice from a trusted friend is relied on more than ever before. Personal recommendations influence a growing number of purchase decisions. With an evolving bias towards using a product/service that has been personally recommended, communication experts are falling over themselves to investigate the nuances of word-of-mouth. So the challenge to stakeholders in traditional media everywhere is to maintain audience trust in their offering.

Trust has always been implicit for 'serious' newspapers and TV channels providing news -- so long as the news represents the facts. Magazines, however, go beyond trust. As trusted brands, magazines offer access to a community of common interest, accepted 'know-how' and 'life' advice, anywhere and anytime it is needed.

As with any influential friend, the opinions of the magazine are often

adopted by readers. This brings obvious benefits to magazine advertisers. Not only do they gain influence on the reader's own purchase decision, but also an indirect impact on those in the reader's circle of influence. As Roper Reports shows (below), no other marketing medium contributes more to subsequent personal recommendation than magazines. This effect is strongest among the 10% of the population who influence the other 90%.



FULL ENGAGEMENT

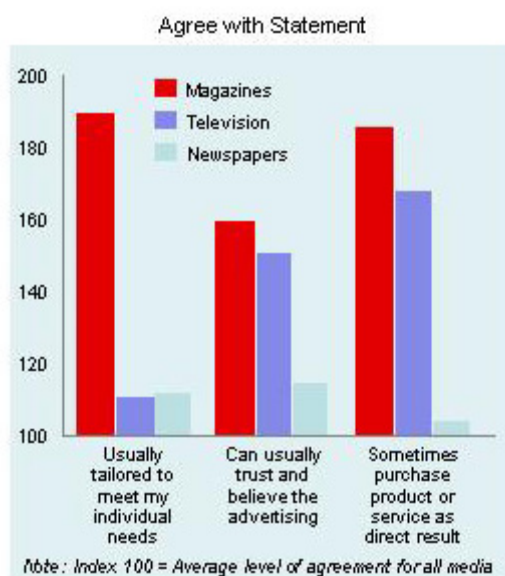
Having had his or her attention gained and retained, the worth of an engaged consumer rockets when he or she enter the final stage of engagement - the transition from a sense of belonging to commitment.

***'Magazines continue to provide a unique personal friend?
and that is precisely why magazines have a special connection
with consumers that translates to the advertising within.'
- Michael Drexler, CEO of Optimedia International***

Such commitment to a media brand clearly strengthens involvement with a central element of it -- advertising. As Michael Drexler, CEO of Optimedia International, points out, "Magazines continue to provide a unique personal friend...and that is precisely why magazines have a special connection with consumers that translates to the advertising within."

Faith in a media environment, born out of intimacy, combats the rising cynicism towards advertising and helps narrow the leap from ad exposure to response. After all, magazines are as much a trusted confidant as a friend. What better way to recommend your brands?

It is the trinity of affinity, trust and action that lies at the heart of true media engagement.



MAGAZINES: THE MEDIUM OF ENGAGEMENT

Faced with an increasing evasion of, and aversion to, advertised messages, the media research and planning communities are searching far and wide to find the most engaging marketing channel. As it turns out, they need look no further than their magazine rack.

***"Magazines are on the cusp of an explosion.
In a PVR world, we are looking at engagement.
A print reader is an engaged reader, and an
engaged reader is one who is more responsive to advertising."
- Andrew Swinand, Sr. Vice President, Starcom Worldwide***

*Sources: Taken from Admap, World Advertising Research Center,
Published by World Advertising Research Center,*

September 2005, Issue 464, written by Darran Snatchfold

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