

WHAT IF CONSUMERS TOOK OVER THE BUSINESS OF BUILDING BRANDS?

Should campaigns change their game?

Does it still make sense to launch a new product or service with traditional media? Or can brands now dispense with billboards, print, TV... and rely exclusively on digital channels to conduct a successful launch? One thing our strategists agree on: it's a subject for debate.



CAN A BRAND LAUNCH A NEW PRODUCT WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF OFFLINE MEDIA?

Our experts weigh in:



Christian QUENNEVILLE

Nurun Montreal
Vice President, Strategy

Yes!

In our digital world of instant awareness, we don't need offline campaigns to launch new products and services.

For the sake of debate, I'm going to be as black and white as possible. Now understand: I'm not saying that a well-orchestrated cross-media campaign doesn't have merit. After all, I've recently come across the first [TV spot](#) in 5 or 10 years that I haven't automatically skipped on my PVR. But in simple terms, I believe that we do not need off-line media to launch new products or services given:

- the reach (for you media folks out there) of online channels
- the impact of the social Web (for the FB crowd) and the real-time nature (I'm looking at you, RT nuts) of the Web and
- recent examples that prove that online-only campaigns do result in increased sales (you guessed it - for my beloved clients)

In pure media terms, at least in North America, online channels have the ability to reach the greatest number of potential consumers. According to [Statistics Canada](#) in 2007, 96% of persons aged 16 to 24 went online, more than three times the 29% of seniors aged 65 and older. Keep in mind that this is 2007 data. According to eMarketer, Canada has more than 28.4 million users, which is 69.2% of the total population. In the U.S. the numbers are 199.2 million users (64.8% of the population). I know, I know, as our media colleagues and Jean Pascal will tell you, it all depends on the audience. For some groups (18-34), the numbers are much higher and for others, significantly lower.

Let consumers do the launching

Secondly, in a world where blogs are created every second, where 13 hours of content are uploaded to YouTube every minute, where thousands re-tweet anything noteworthy on Twitter and upload photos of their new boats on Flickr, Facebook and Twitpic – I argue that a “launch” campaign can be significantly more efficient and have more impact simply by identifying, talking to and sharing with influential consumers. But don't take my word for it (or that of the thousands of bloggers or so-called social media experts out there). Instead, look at these examples:

- [Uniqlo](#)
- [Ford Fiesta Movement](#)
- [Cisco ASR 100 Router](#)
- [McDonald's Southern Style Chicken](#)
- [NIN Year Zero](#)
- [Audi A3 Art of the Heist](#)
- [Huge success of Etsy](#)
- [Even fake products have been successfully launched online, see the Porsche Cayman Shooting Brake](#)

The results are in

Last and perhaps more important: these campaigns work. We've known that for at least 10 years, whether the aim is to raise awareness, change perception, lower CPA or even increase sales – they work. But a recent study confirms it: Online advertising is on par with TV advertising in growing retail sales of consumer packaged goods (source: com-Score/dunnhumbyUSA, August 2009).

In their words: “These early results confirm the ability of online advertising to successfully build retail sales of CPG brands on par with the impact of television advertising,” Point. Match.

In a world of instant awareness, driven by consumers, I argue that we don't need to rely on offline campaigns to “launch” new products or services.

I would even argue that we don't need any paid media at all... but that's another debate.

What do you think?



Jean Pascal MATHIEU

Nurun Paris

Vice President, Strategy

No!

Online media just can't deliver the massive, carefully timed firepower needed to launch a new product or brand. What does Steve Jobs do when Apple has a new release? He talks to the press, to industry analysts, he buys ad space and display. Digital media turn up the volume, but the original event, the founding act, if you will, rarely occurs online. Need convincing? Think about the noise that new ads make in the blogosphere. [Evian's recent Roller Babies campaign](#) was designed for multichannel: a heavy wave of TV got the buzz started, then everybody piled online to view (and review) the spots. It's great, it stinks, it works, it... whatever. Bloggers got all exercised in reaction to the new ad.

To say a brand can launch successfully via digital alone is like saying that you can release a feature film elsewhere than at the movies. Do you really think Disney will be launching Toy Story 12 on YouTube?

Blogger insults: not part of a good media plan

Another good reason not to short traditional media is the way we now approach digital. Fewer people go online without a reason.* Plus, it's virtually impossible for a brand to stand out by display alone (vs. a response to a request or keyword). Unless, of course, the ad is presented in a highly intrusive—highly annoying – format. And if that's the case, a marketer had better have a star like Jerry Seinfeld to count on. Otherwise, the campaign runs the risk of massive rejection by the public and contempt from the blogosphere. (To those who say that insults from bloggers are better than no notice at all, I say that our clients are not after that kind of attention.)

If we applied Morgensztern's theory to banner ads, we'd surely find that recall rates have been in decline since the dawn of the Internet. No, in the end I believe it would be virtually impossible for an unknown brand to break through without the support of what are (still) mass media. (Yes, "still": even if the numbers are falling, 65% of Americans regularly watch network TV news, compared to 59% who use a search engine.) Personally, I prefer billboards: they let marketers reach a vast audience in a relatively unobtrusive way, unlike TV, print or other "content" media, which are increasingly fragmented and ignored.

Beware the pitiless pillory!

A final note: now more than ever, and whatever the channel, it's a waste of money to even bother advertising an inferior product or service. One of the best things about digital is that it forces companies to do their marketing homework. A brand that brings ill-conceived or poor-quality products to market will be instantly, pitilessly pilloried on the Web (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvVp7b5gzqU> for a great example). Come to think of it, digital is the best way to launch some products and brands—really, really bad ones. Otherwise, a solid multichannel strategy with great content and compelling digital components is the way to go.

* According to a study released on June 29 by Ruder Finn, cited by eMarketer, the top 8 reasons people go online: pass time, educate self, connect with others, research, share, be entertained, keep informed, discuss. Looking at ads didn't even make it into the top 20.

IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF EITHER/OR

While Nurun strategists Jean Pascal Mathieu and Christian Quenneville adopted radical positions on the issue (in part to inspire a lively debate), most participants expressed nuanced opinions about the roles of digital and traditional media. Ultimately it is not a question of either/or; rather, the choice of channels is a matter of relevance, balance and synergy.

1. Know your target

As many of our contributors hastened to state, a well-crafted media plan requires a deep, detailed, even visceral understanding of the target audience. This is no easy task in the current context, which is increasingly fragmented and complex. What's more, marketers must seek insights beyond mere demographics. How do your targets use the Web? Are they active on social media networks? Are they content creators or do they simply consume media? What kind of content appeals to them? (To find out, start by seeking out your brand on YouTube or Flickr). Take both quantitative (media usage) and qualitative (preference) factors into account to determine the most effective media channels for your target. But to give digital its due, the proportion of people who can't be reached online is dwindling fast.

2. Interact with consumers on a full panel of channels

Admit it: only marketers ever actually think in terms of channels. Consumers are more self-centered: "If you want to connect with me, just be where I am, period." They live in a multichannel world filled with all manner of screens and media. In terms of perception, online and offline flow together and become indistinguishable. That's why a wise marketer will occupy all the spaces that his target inhabits.

3. Think about the synergy of media to transform visibility into influence

Studies indicate (and our experience shows) that online integration considerably strengthens the performance of offline campaigns. Considering the off without the on is simply counterproductive.

4. Evaluate campaigns not only in terms of GRP but also in terms of involvement and influence

The effectiveness and contribution of each channel is important to make informed decisions concerning media investments. In a fast-paced world that is growing increasingly unstable, it is also important to be open to new opportunities. Some of the greatest opportunities now lie in the brand conversations taking place in social media.

5. Online or off, creativity and content make all the difference

When you provide your core influencers with great creative content to comment on and share, you win wider reach for your message. And that is true no matter which communication channel you choose.

José Llinares Andreu sums up our POV in his post, one of more than 50 contributed to the Forum:

"Probably both points of view are valid. It is true you can get a huge reach without the offline, and for some targets that's all you need... but it is equally important to consider whether you are maximizing your efforts. Online media adds buzz, reinforces the message, is able to reach some specific targets in a more powerful way and therefore it maximizes investment. In the end it is about creating integrated campaigns; make offline and online work together, that is the best value investment."