

Putting Media Front and Centre

I am often struck by the following thought: if Marketing didn't exist and we were inventing it today, it would bear little resemblance to our modern-day customs and practices. One aspect which always brings this to mind is the huge mismatch of the average marketers time and effort which gets put into developing the creative, compared to that put into media.

Like many of the mysteries of modern marketing, the reasons for this lie in the fact that the industry remains wedded to ways of doing business that were developed in the 1950's and 60's; ways which have not then evolved to match the profound changes in consumer attitudes and behaviours since that time.

Back in those halcyon days, the ratio of around 95% of one's time devoted to developing the message versus 5% to the media plan was actually about right.

If the advertising process can be considered in the context of the five W's;

Who are we talking to?

What do we want to say?

Why would they believe us?

When should we tell them?

Where should we tell them?

The easiest bits were Where and When, since everyone was sat in front of their TV's watching the ad breaks in I Love Lucy. The Who, while important for message tonality, was actually quite irrelevant for media as, it being so cheap in those days, marketers could broadcast to the many while talking only to the few. So that being the case, all the focus went on the relatively hard bits of the advertising process - the What and the Why – which drove the time allocation of

how Marketers spent their time. 10 minutes at the end of the presentation for media was fine when we all knew what the plan was going to look like anyway.

Fast forward to today's hyper-stressed, time-starved, me-me-me consumer and it becomes clear that the situation has been totally reversed. By far the hardest elements of generating a return from one's adspend today are the Who, Where and When; because the average consumer now makes a big effort to avoid any and all advertising which is not immediately relevant to them and them alone at that precise moment.

So that being the case, why don't all clients spend at least twice as long on nailing the perfect media strategy and plans as they do on the crafting of the message? A couple of reasons spring to mind:

- Clients can have spontaneous opinions on creative, validated by the fact that "Hey, I'm a consumer too", whereas any client opinion on media is immediately crushed by an avalanche of factual data.
- Media is profoundly dull for the non-numerate

While these may play a role, the main reason is that it was always thus; it's what we did when we were keen young ABM's and haven't thought to question it since.

But all is not lost, because these are the exact circumstances in which advantage can be gained; by doing the complete opposite to your competitors:

- Book a half day to meet with the head bananas at your media agency
- Don't cancel said meeting the day before
- Stay awake while you're in there

- Ask them what are the capabilities that are least utilized by their other clients

You will be amazed at what you learn. Media agencies are bursting at the seams with intelligent, knowledgeable individuals who want nothing more than the chance to help their clients get a better return on their adspend. You might need to spend more than 2% if you're going to take it seriously, but since when were you confident that at least 2% of your adspend wasn't being wasted?