

## Brave New World

20 years ago when Strategy first hit the streets, I had risen to the dizzy heights of Marketing Manager, responsible for venerable brands like Cadbury's Crème Eggs. At the time we thought we were living through an era of unprecedented change, but I have since realised every marketer throughout history has thought that.

But we weren't. Looking back at how I used to spend my working day, in truth it differed little from twenty years before. In 1989, as in 1969, the 30-second television commercial was the fulcrum of our efforts, and if you did a good one, your results for the year were in the bag. Retailers had barely awoken from their prolonged slumber and had little to no idea who was buying what in their stores. Equally, I had little idea who was buying Crème Eggs.

Of course, I mean 'who' specifically; I had a general idea but then I didn't need to know much more because I had no means of engaging with people on a one-to-one basis. As long as I had a media budget sufficient to put my ad in front of a huge chunk of the docile masses, I was on easy street. Since I couldn't target the message specifically to the person/place/time-of-day, I had to spend plenty of time coming up with something that would appeal to the many. The deal then was, if I entertained the public in a way relevant to the brand, they would reward me with their slavish brand loyalty. Entertaining and relevant was the hard bit, whereas the who/when/where to show it was a given: everyone, evening, in front of the tv. Which explains why, in meetings with my agency, the creative took up 98% of the time and media got their 10 minutes at the end when the brandies were appearing.

Today, of course, things really have changed, big time. Shoppers Drug Mart has my wife and me in their vice-like grip of perfect knowledge as to our buying behaviour. They know what I'm going to buy next before I do. I really do believe that every time one of my Gillette Fusion 6-blade wonders hits the waste bin, a buzzer sounds somewhere in SDM Towers to prompt my next email of a 10,000 points for \$50 voucher. Even the manufacturers are able to talk to me as a member of a reasonably-sized sub-sub-segment.

The world I was trained in exists no more. There has been a complete reversal in that catching the consumer at the right moment has become more important than crafting precisely the right message. The consumer has also changed in that entertaining them is nice and sometimes even appreciated, but the ungrateful wretches guarantee you nothing in return. Even if they can be bothered to click on your Youtube video, half a second later they'll be thinking about something else.

All of which leaves me mystified as to why marketers still seem to spend their day largely as I did way back when. If I was starting out today, I would spend 90% of my agency time with media. There are so many opportunities to genuinely engage with identifiable consumers; get that bit right and the messages will largely write themselves. A.C.Nielsen would have gone bust years ago: don't tell me what I sold 7 weeks ago, I want to know what sold to who while I was typing this email! Focus groups would have been confined to folklore with today's Brand Managers unable to believe that we actually made decisions based on what a handful of social misfits, who we bribed with the promise of a free bottle of Scotch, claimed to remember about a brand they last bought 5 months ago.

Personally, I blame the 30-second ad and business schools. The 30-second ad was simply too effective from the mid-1950s until about the turn of the Millennium. It made us lazy. This was then compounded by the business schools who began teaching Marketing *en masse*. Needing to fit in with the rest of academia where constancy is king - neither the laws of physics nor Shakespeare's canon of work have changed much recently, nor are likely to - Marketing has been taught as a series of unchanging truths rather than as a dynamic response to a rapidly-changing world, which is how it evolved in the first place.

So here's what I would do. Talk to the oldest marketer or agency person you can find and ask them how things were done when they were young. Then do exactly the opposite.