

# The New Next

BY FARIS YAKOB

## Are All Ads Spam?



**How does advertising stop being spam? Simple: It must be solicited, wanted, relevant, and appropriate — all the things that spam isn't.**

**D**EFINITION OF “SPAM,” VIA GOOGLE: TO indiscriminately send unsolicited, unwanted, irrelevant, or inappropriate messages, especially commercial advertising in mass quantities. In the digital mediascape that is rapidly emerging, all interruption advertising will come to be regarded as spam. Unsolicited communication will increasingly be screened out as channels blur into one another, allowing the control that users wield over their online experience to spread across other media.

Broadcast interruption marketing could certainly be described as unsolicited, unwanted commercial advertising in mass quantities — which, in the digital world, would constitute spam. As all channels become digital, consumers will extend the definitions of spam across them all and will have the technology to block it out. Just as digital video recorders enable speedy ad-skipping, a media center can be screened out entirely. Increasingly, consumers have control over how they consume the content they want.

The discrete nature of channels themselves is no longer a useful delineation. Marketers have traditionally thought of each medium as distinct and separate; this is why media agencies are often structured by medium. In the digital age, content can flow freely from one medium to the other. Audio-visual content, for example, can be consumed in innumerable ways: on TVs, computer screens, or personal media players. Radio can be streamed or podcast. Sony announced the launch of its eBook reader, which will enable the fluid transfer of print media.

The boundaries between many of the standard channels are dissolving as we shift to a media consumption model based on content and the devices for consuming it. As IBM pointed out in a “Media Metrics” column in this magazine, the new world will be characterized by “platform-agnostic content and the fluid mobility of media experiences.” What’s more, the majority of this content is pulled by consumers, not pushed to them as in the old broadcast model.

This fluidity of content has given rise to a new kind of media consumer, who rarely gives his full attention to any one channel. Instead, he gives “continuous partial attention” to a number of different streams. These consumers are always “on” but rarely engage fully with any stream, having developed internal “spam filters” to handle the sheer quantity of input they’re exposed to.

So how does advertising stop being spam? Simple: It must be solicited, wanted, relevant, and appropriate — all the things that spam isn’t. Good advertising is already relevant and appropriate, but increasingly that will not be enough — it needs to be solicited. In an on-demand world, advertisers need to deliver value for consumers who elect to engage with them.

There are two kinds of value brands can offer: entertainment and enablement. Entertainment can be desirable content, as Lynx has delivered with branded programs such as “Gamekillers.” It can be an event, like the Red Bull “Flugtag.” It can be a game, from simple advergames to mixed reality narratives like Audi’s “Art of the Heist.” Or it can be an interactive installation, like Motorola’s “Motoglyph” at the Miami Music Summit, where players traced patterns onto interactive screens to “paint” with light, creating images that could then be downloaded to their mobile phones. This delivered further personalized value.

Enablement can be participation and support. Nike’s Run campaigns offered an ideal strategy for the brand that helped invent jogging. Apple came up with the Genius Bar, dispensing tech tips at its retail stores. Hewlett-Packard gave budding artists a promotional platform via its Hype Gallery. Some communication ideas can deliver many kinds of value to different groups of consumers, as in the case of Converse’s short films, which allowed aspiring filmmakers a chance to gain recognition and provided compelling content for everyone else.

The value that you deliver not only earns the consumer’s attention; it’s also a way of bringing the brand to life. Any piece of communication planning must now begin with two questions: What are my communication objectives? And how can I achieve them in a way that delivers value to my audience? **M**

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