

Opinion

Maximize media's potential to reach consumers

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A merger of traditional and virtual tools aimed at bringing the shopping or dining experience to life from home, phone or in-store is emerging with the potential to dramatically expand the scope and impact of consumer marketing.

The "paths to purchase" are multiplying with consumer touch points expanding tenfold. Access to engage and get reactions from consumers is much more cost effective than it used to be.

No matter how you slice it, success is about reaching audiences important to you by integrating a mix of new and traditional tactics.

How well are you leveraging this new source of influence?

Recommendations by personal acquaintances and opinions posted online are the most trusted forms of communication globally, according to trendwatching.com, citing a Nielsen survey showing that 90% of online conversations worldwide trust recommendations from people they know, while 70% trust consumer opinions posted online.

You'd have to live in a cave (with no Internet) not to recognize the new tools becoming commonplace, from Web communities and blogs to Facebook, You Tube, mobile applications, quick-response codes and even in-store texting.

In one retail scenario, a customer enters the store and checks in on her smartphone only to receive a welcome message and an invitation to come to aisle seven for a promotion.

She sees signs offering real-time answers to questions about P&G teeth whitening products. She texts and asks which product will show the quickest results. She asks a friend at home for a dinner idea via Facebook.

She checks out the promotion in aisle seven, scans the QR code on a bag of clementines and gets a video on her phone showing her the farmer and the grove in which her clementines were grown. She also sees a product rating and an offer to buy a bag of Cuties for 10% off.

Upon departing the store, she receives a survey seeking her views on the shopping experience with a coupon incentive to come back soon.

Most retailers have stuck their toes in the water with social media, but are struggling to figure out where and how to play. Quantifying results, especially in this economy, is a huge challenge, but so is building shopper loyalty.

Digitizing the in-store shopping experience to match the convenience of the Web is either part of a current strategy or in planning for the next



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one to two years for 75% of retailers surveyed by Retail Touchpoint.

Most of those retailers have product reviews, recommendations and sharing products via social media in their sights.

Most also have plans in the works for a formal company-wide social media strategy encouraging employees to interact with consumers.

Retail chains ShopRite, Save-A-Lot and Wegmans have online product review blogs already in place.

Savvy suppliers are learning to combine touch points in-store, online and through traditional sources. Ocean Mist Farms, a grower of artichokes and 30 other fresh vegetables, hosts an online affinity club called the Artichoke Aficionados.

The company recently implemented a sweepstakes employing online, in-store and mobile components. Its newly created mobile website — featuring recipes, cooking videos and an “Ask the Chef” feature — serves as the centerpiece of the contest, allowing people to enter and join the Artichoke Aficionados club. The sweepstakes is also promoted on the company’s website and social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

In-store point-of-purchase assets and packaging equipped with QR codes draw people to the website, where they can easily enter the sweepstakes.

Chicken of the Sea is another example of a company implementing an integrated mix of new and traditional media.

This year, the company, which has its own affinity club called the Mermaid Club, will be reaching consumers with tried and true radio advertising, combined with online video advertising, which forgoes TV buys on network and cable television for online video that will air on CBS Interactive and ABC Digital’s family of websites.

The company will also implement in-store point-of-purchase displays. All the efforts will drive people online to its affinity club and Twitter and Facebook profiles, where consumers can interact with the brand (and its iconic Mermaid) in a way that has never been possible before.

Visitors to the Chicken of the Sea Facebook page can not only get the Mermaid’s favorite recipes and ask her questions, but they can also engage in interactive games and mobile applications.

These efforts combined leave Chicken of the Sea with numerous consumer touch points, many of which were unavailable just a few years ago.

Now’s the time to ramp up your digital presence. At this point it’s still a grand experiment for not only the practice of marketing, but also the design of marketing channels (e.g., the way companies connect to consumers).

But it won’t be for long. Retailers, major supplier brands and promotion boards are engaged at one level or another with plans to expand.

Ocean Mist Farms is among a few grower-shippers at the forefront. Where are you?

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