

GATHER

Eagle's eyes and dog's hearing:
how some brands are harnessing
the amplification of digital to
make them stronger.

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INTRODUCTION

The best companies are making the most of digital technology and the behaviour it generates to build closer customer bonds and resilient, more positive associations.

Declarations about a digital revolution are as redundant today as the analogue technology it has swept away. Digital is not even the new normal. It is normal.

Of course, the pace of change is remarkable. At the time of writing, it is hard to imagine a world without Twitter. But it's even more extraordinary to think that Twitter, at just 7 years old, is about to float for an estimated \$10 billion (£6.3 billion) or more. The challenge for corporations, other organisations – and ourselves as individuals, is to try to stay ahead of a curve that's hurtling along.

Technology offers marketers more opportunities than ever to market things well. They can now listen in on the millions of conversations taking place online every minute of every day around the world on blogs, on category review sites, on product review sites, within social networks and on any other digital venue in which people can have their say. Lots of venues and lots of people are saying lots and lots of things.

What's more, perceived anonymity means people share everything. As the rising tide of lurid headlines about trolling and inappropriate comment testifies all too well, people don't hold back online. They 'speak with their gut'.

What's magnified in the digital world is not just how people talk, but how they behave, specifically when it comes to their buying habits and activities. Marketers can observe in real time what people are searching for – their buying process, the way they compare and contrast products and services or prices, where they go for advice, the offers they deem relevant and those they don't, the specific features of a product that interest them, and which sites they return to for additional information or purchases. The fact that online is as much about what people do as about what they say is a gift to marketers. Previous generations might well view it as Christmas every day.

Of course, magnification is in itself a kind of distortion. In the digital world, the challenge is not to find information, but to identify the most valuable sources online – and then, of course, to know what to do with that information once it is mined.

In his book, 'BrandDigital: Simple Ways Top Brands Succeed in the Digital World', Allen P. Adamson identifies some key steps to success.

Step 1. Get insights about your digital audience.

Marketers have been gathering information on 'behaviour' for decades, using a range of research tools and techniques. But even for brand powerhouses like P&G and Unilever, research was a distinct, though regular, event. Adamson describes today's digital tools as providing a perpetually ticking meter of people's lives – a better understanding of human thought and behaviour that can not only capture what people are saying, but what they are doing. It's always on.

Technorati is a company that uses its technology and knowledge to monitor over 100 million blogs and one of the main things brands and their agencies use it for is to find out what's being said about them, as well as who's doing the most talking and whose talk is the most credible. (In an article in the Guardian on Saturday 14th September 2013, writer Jonathan Franzen suggested that up to 30% of all product reviews are fake, so at just this level this issue of who to trust is crucial.) But the point is that continuous analysis, properly undertaken, makes consumers stakeholders in the process of making products and services even better. The best companies are hearing what people are saying and are acting on it.

Other companies like Conversation Group and Cymfony are changing the role of agencies, helping them to be more like mediators instead of providers of ideas and production – using technology and expertise to analyse social media conversations to better understand consumer preferences, market dynamics, competitive strengths and weaknesses, and other information critical to a company's reputation and brands.

The fact is every serious brand owner now needs to decide which conversations it listens to and which it takes seriously when evaluating what changes to make to products or services or marketing plans.

Step 2. Discover what makes your brand relevantly different.

Relevant difference is the lodestar of all branding. In the digital world, identifying it and expressing what makes one brand different from another has never been more essential. Stronger brands have high degrees of differentiation and relevance, but there is no contrivance. The difference is genuine and meaningful.

Step 3. Keep your brand's promise.

This is the age of super-scrutiny – where everyone gets to hear about everything. No act goes unnoticed, good or bad. Brands must do what they say and when they don't the world knows about it. Of course, people have always had some recourse when things go wrong: a phone call to the company, or a letter to the managing director or a newspaper. But because the digital world magnifies, the fury trickles everywhere in moments. This puts brands, and especially corporate brands, under the most intense pressure to deliver.

Corporations, by their very nature, have positive and negative effects – and their scale means those effects are magnified – and magnified further online. Colin Mayer, Professor of Management Studies at Saïd Business School says in his book 'Firm Commitment', "At the same time... (as the corporation) is feeding, housing, educating and transporting us, it is also exploiting, polluting, poisoning and impoverishing us."

Because millions can observe actions and ferret out slip-ups, not only must brands do what they say and deliver on what they stand for – they must do more to earn people's trust.

Faith Popcorn, futurist, author and CEO of Brain Reserve senses a cultural shift. She says that after 9/11, many people, especially in the West, now expect the establishment to lie, to cheat and to abuse the environment. An increasing number of people are starting to think of themselves as citizens, not consumers. So rather than just buy a product, it's about whether the company, as an entity, performs as expected. Consumers look at the entire system of beliefs about an organisation along with the judgements of millions of others to determine whether the behaviour is genuine or smacks of hypocrisy. As a result, the best companies are moving beyond CSR and weaving the 'goodness factor' into their brand promise.

Step 4. Start with a simple idea.

It is not enough simply to identify relevant difference. It must be expressed as a powerful brand idea or brand driver.

When an organisation really works well, all the bits that make up what it is make sense to whoever might be looking at it – and from whatever angle: customers, partners, investors, employees, even competitors. They may only see certain bits of it: they may receive different messages, and have different experiences, but all of it adds up to tell a coherent, credible, consistent story.

At Carnegie Orr we call the idea that drives this story a Single Organising Idea – a simple, direct call to action that captures the positive spirit of the positioning. What you end up with is an idea at the heart your business, expressed in just two or three words.

It must be big enough to reach right across an organisation, but sharp enough to mean something. It must be articulated in a way that is motivating and meaningful to all the audiences that matter. And, above all, whilst being ambitious and forward looking, it must be based on the truth.

In a situation where consumers are pulling in content they want and pushing back on content they don't, they are actively seeking out what they want to be engaged in at the time and in the way that's most comfortable for them. The Single Organising Idea is the platform upon which everything is built – enabling what an organisation says and what it does to join up from the start.

Step 5. Establish a clear brand voice.

The digital world is personal, portable, talkative and transparent. How a brand behaves in social networks is key to carrying weight in global conversations. People must be able to perceive a brand as a living, breathing individual with well-defined characteristics and behavioural traits. Brands must imagine themselves as a who and not just as a what. And then behave accordingly, consistently.

Step 6. Identify where you can play to win.

The customer journey is more important than ever. Brands must decide the places they can play where competitors can't or won't go and then use the digital world to amplify that message.

Some brands that have harnessed the power of digital.

GE: Putting search at the heart of a positioning strategy.

Over the last few years, GE has successfully repositioned itself from being a manufacturing company to a knowledge company. Part of the journey involved reducing the GE.com website from 3,000 pages to 500. Before the redesign had even started, it was thought that identifying the right code words for search was so important it should be thought about as part of the positioning strategy, rather than left as an afterthought. What the team concentrated on was evaluating the level of authority or credibility that specific content had among people searching for answers on a particular subject. There were no vague words or plays on words. The entire site was written to give people what they want in the best order.

Asos: Building success in retail on the power of social media.

Asos (the name comes from As Seen On Screen) is Britain's largest online fashion retailer. It pioneered the idea of using online social networking to build a retail brand. Asos started by selling copies of clothes worn by celebrities, but has progressed to providing information about new brands, what to wear and how to style. It provides 'inspiration galleries' for users where the ability to purchase is just one or two clicks away. Customers gather online and share ideas about products, brands and deals before they buy. Through Twitter and Facebook, the number of customers the brand can reach is almost unlimited. Asos has gone international – and in a remarkable way. It has become the biggest online clothing retailer in Australia without investing in any significant marketing.

NYSE: A traditional exchange embracing digital technologies.

Last year, The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) announced it would be using Facebook and Twitter for finding buyers and sellers to close day trading. This followed a technical glitch that saw its usual method of email fail.

At the end of trading in September 2012, an email notification was meant to alert investors to a stock with an outsize number of unfilled buy orders, according to the Wall Street Journal. However, this email was delayed by seven minutes.

Such delays at close could have caused the stock to leap higher or drop lower than its final trading level. NYSE then gave notification that if email alerts failed again it would use social media distribution channels to help address buy and sell imbalances.

Kleenex: Using digital tools to bring higher-level brand benefit to life around a shared need.

Kleenex 'Let it out' campaign (launched in the US, but also seen in the UK) was all about the tissue's ability to control sneezes and germs better than any other. But the campaign did this in a highly emotional way. It showed how tissues were helpful at times when people express themselves really emotionally. It showed the ability of a Kleenex tissue to staunch tears of laughter or wipe tears away at a wedding or a funeral, for example.

A 'Let it out' tour was created, during which a very good 'listener' and his comfortable blue couch travelled around stopping in cities to post emotionally provocative questions to passers by.

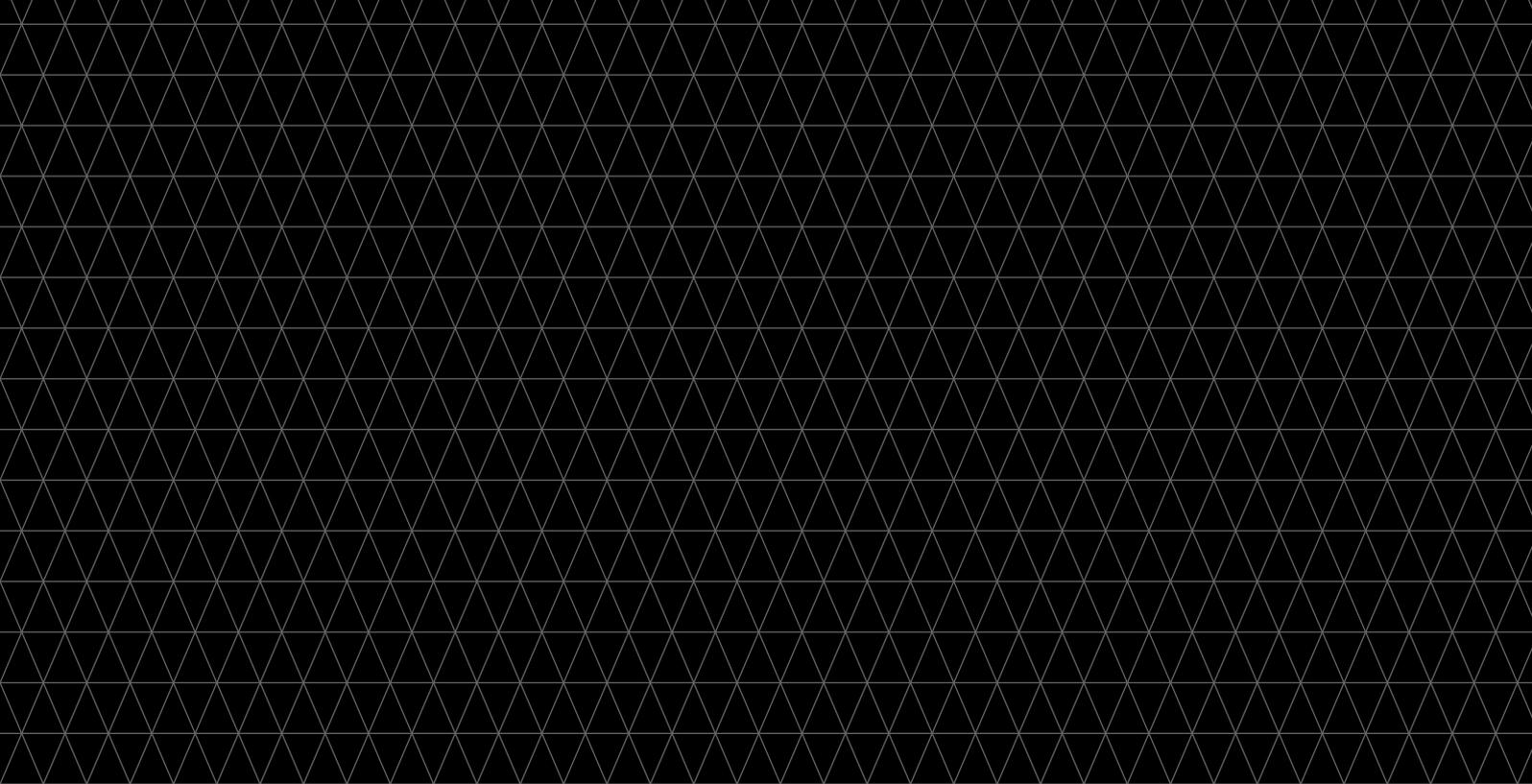
The responses were videotaped and used as TV spots and also on a website – which gave people the chance to create and upload their own videos in which they 'let it out' about their lives. The videos were genuinely funny and sad and expressive. Some were sent to YouTube and Myspace and Facebook. People could also design their own tissue boxes.

Adidas: Developing real new products in a virtual environment.

Adidas is one of a number of companies using Second Life's world of avatars to see how people interact with new products – gaining insights and understanding from stakeholders as a natural part of their new product development process.

RNLI: Raising awareness through dramatic storytelling.

The idea behind the SaveWave campaign was to create 'waves' of awareness to help promote the work of Dorset RNLI by sharing rescue stories of the RNLI lifeboat and beach lifeguards through social media like Facebook and Twitter. Once signed up on the RNLI's website, two rescue stories a week were shared automatically on Facebook and Twitter accounts – stories about volunteers putting themselves in harm's way. The personal stories of involvement in dramatic real life events proved to be a powerful social currency.



We are a strategic communications consultancy. We join up insight and creativity to develop ideas people gather around, helping organisations build relationships and grow reputation.

We do this by digging for insights and driving them through multiple channels. We focus on stakeholder attitudes and behaviours using our skills in brand, digital, sustainability, reporting and video to achieve practical and measurable results.

Contact

Carly Mercer
T: +44 (0)20 3176 6600
E: carly@gather.london

www.carnegieorr.com