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## The Intersection Of Digital And Brand

by Amy Shea, Tuesday, June 19, 2012 9 AM

One side effect of the rate of change that brand teams experience today is that looking back can seem foolish. "Forward" is the brand mantra, repeated silently, as time takes on a contemporary pace -- each idea considered to "engage" consumers who are vying to get through. However, there can be some good in reflecting on life a decade ago.

Ten years ago the Winter Olympics were on in Salt Lake City. United Airlines declared bankruptcy. Bill Blass left us. And something called "infrastructure" was the topic of one of the world's biggest advertisers. So why was IBM conducting a media assault about infrastructure, and winning an Ogilvy Award in the process? Because its customers -- chief information officers -- were coming up against a serious problem as they tried to integrate computing systems that were never built to work together, to function in the new e-business culture.

That matters because today's CMOs find themselves where CIOs were in the day. Now, CMOs are taking measurement systems built to keep the brand on track and trying to fit those with measurement systems built to track consumers in digital space. Using these clumsy connections, they are attempting to sharpen the brand's response time to the ever-evolving digital landscape as Web listening tools flood new information continually.

This state of e-affairs calls for the same paradigm shift that information systems teams had to make: moving *connectivity of systems* to the short list of essentials when it comes to running a relevant brand.

The expiration date on brand strategy may well have changed -- the sell-by date shifting due to the consumer feedback loop that digital provides -- but having a strategy still matters. A lot, it turns out -- as consumer expectations have not eased up one byte. Today's imperative is to locate the crosshairs of engagement with brand and engagement with digital communication platforms, where brands and consumers can connect.

### **Engagement is product/service category-specific**

As national research has revealed, measuring engagement is a category-specific business. In looking at 80+ categories and surveying 49,000 consumers, it's clear that consumers do not engage with digital communication in one category the same way they do in another. Consumers engage with digital channels depending on how they engage in that category space. Many brands already understand this, but continue to

lack that integration feature mentioned earlier. Other brand teams understand what is *happening* digitally, but are not sure what that *means* strategically (or categorically), thus missing that key intersection point.

When we look at the intersection of technology and brand -- what we call the Digital Platform GPS -- we see remarkable stories of how technology and strategy connect. And those stories become more interesting when seen through the lens of those in categories at the deep end of the technology pool. Those with high digital usage, or 'Digitals,' generally see category and digital engagement very differently from the general population, or 'Gen Pop.'

### **Tablets tell the tale of engagement**

The tablet category provides a compelling example. This exploding category demonstrates a wide divide between Digitals and Gen Pop and the role brand plays. For Gen Pop, the brand shall lead and is the most important driver of engagement and loyalty -- as being unsure of their footing in this new terrain, Gen Pops seek guidance from trusted brands.

Digitals, however, vote for a brand only after product aspects such as design and features are delivered, by whatever brand does that best. Exhibiting confidence in their knowledge of technology, they call it when it comes to what brands make their short list. Consistent with that, Customer Service and Warranty are twice as important to General Pop as to Digitals, occupying the importance that Innovation has to Digital tablet buyers -- demonstrating this difference in stark relief.

The intersection of digital and category engagement demonstrates the same pattern. While Gen Pop turns to paid media such as shopping portals, Digitals are all about earned media. If the brand isn't talked about in the blogosphere -- highest in importance to brand engagement -- Digital engagement drops like Nokia's stock price.

This story demonstrates that a new kind of marketing infrastructure solution has arrived. And the power of the findings makes the point better than we could. As Orson Wells said: "If you want a happy ending, of course, that depends on where you stop your story." In the case of brands today, it depends on where you take it.