

THE YEAR IN MARKETING 2011

A trend is a trend is a trend,
But the question is, will it bend?
Will it alter its course
Through some unforeseen force
and come to a premature end?

Alex Cairncross, UK government economist.

Has there ever been a more turbulent time for marketing? Probably not, so we wrapped a damp towel around our heads, intently studied the tea leaves, picked over the chicken entrails and have come up with our view of where marketing may be going during the coming year.

Key drivers for 2011

Despite the government's attempts to talk-up growth our bet is that most marketers are still fixated by return on investment. And not just any old return on investment. The larger – and the quicker – the better. Whether the business is owned-by-shareholders or owner-occupied the need for cash flow is paramount. Until the banks start financing cashflow again this will remain the main driver for the coming year.

Marketing tactics for 2011

In order of least cost. **The Internet** is continuing its inexorable march forward and no-one knows quite where it is going and what its full impact will be. In marketing terms, it makes a nonsense of the traditional 4P model of Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Products are more likely to be services on the Internet, price is very often transparent with low prices dominating and little opportunity for added-value, there are constant skirmishes over place with the High Street fighting out-of-town and being out flanked by on-line. And promotion is becoming dominated by on-line which is the only area of growth as the TV audience fragments and newspapers search for a new role. If there is a glimmer of light it is the realisation that the internet is just another channel to market and just another platform for communication. Some commentators see it as a bit like going back to the middle ages but on a big scale. Mass communication, on a one-to-one basis.

Search is becoming more of a battle field as alterna-

tive search engines catch up with Google. Relevance is no longer enough as canny internet marketers use landing pages, blogs, articles and social sites to out-flank conventional web sites. With search engine results becoming increasingly cluttered with videos, pictures, Twitters and blogs new criteria will have to be found so that the cream rises to the top. Inbound links may lose their importance giving way to depth of content – large sites win over small sites – and speed of upload, known to be on Google's radar. Or will new ways of segmenting the searches be introduced? We are in the middle of this revolution and there is plenty more to come. One thing that is certain is that as search produces more and more results of less and less relevance this provides an opportunity to focus on **local marketing**. Dominating local search – niche marketing – is a way of competing with the big boys without their budgets and expertise.

Mobile computing will be the new battlefield in 2011 as the world of work moves more and more into the home, the coffee shop and the commuter train. Work is where you are and not just that place that used to be called the office. "Any time, any place, anywhere" as it says in the Martini advert. How good is your web site on a mobile device?

Web 2 is another battle field. One-to-one communication and consumer feedback is fine but will **social marketing** make the impact on marketing that everyone claims? There are essentially two camps and they both disagree. The line is drawn between B2C and B2B but as B2B migrates more into B2C - B2B2C? - it is likely that its role will become more important. There is also little doubt that social marketing sits uncomfortably with those who demand return on investment. Even those who champion social marketing have difficulty measuring the results so if ROI can't be proven, how will marketers justify the time and effort involved?

Pay-per-click advertising is another area of confusion. Google Adwords used to command the high ground but now other players are becoming significant and not just other search engines. Alternative advertising networks are springing up to rival Google Adwords and Adsense and, at the same time, search is migrating into social with Google known to be launching a social platform on the back of search in

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the New Year. If you were unhappy about Google's dominance but appreciated the certainty of one dominant platform, this could all be about to change.

Market research moves on-line Hardly news but the advantages of speed and cost are difficult to ignore given the state of the economy. And this is where market research meets social marketing with more and more tools available to tap into the Twitter-sphere, the Blogosphere and any other sphere that pops up in the time between this article being written and it being read. Technology can be enlisted to keep a finger on the pulse of your brand across the web be it on web sites, blogs, Twitter, Facebook or the thirty other main social media platforms.

But what about fieldwork? Whilst there is no doubt that data collection has largely migrated on-line there is still a role for face-to-face whether it is on-street, on-the-door-step or in a focus group. The major problem with on-line interviewing is that you can never truly know who is responding. People can pretend to be whoever and whatever they choose. With street interviewing and recruitment it is reasonably easy to identify gender and age, to target specific ethnicities and a good interviewer can spot a C2/DE at 50 paces so there will always be a place for fieldwork that the Internet cannot usurp.

PR moves on-line Again hardly red hot news but the specialist software that is now available to control PR activity in a world where the media is fragmenting is truly impressive. Build contact lists for journalists, monitor press comment across the various platforms, forward schedule press releases, conduct media audits, broadcast press releases and articles to the four winds: still hard work but software makes all these tasks much easier.

Direct mail moves on-line Also not a surprise but it's now relatively easy for even the smallest business to start broadcasting e-mails and newsletters to anyone who will listen. And that is surely the point. Automation plus the ability to communicate directly with a named individual through his personal computer is a great boon but those on the receiving end are bound to become more selective about the voices they will listen to and those that won't get past the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper used to take the form of a fearsome pa or secretary but now she has

morphed into pop up blockers and filtering software which is becoming more sophisticated as well as being more actively employed.

Conventional media should take some comfort from these predictions as it is well positioned to take advantage of this confusion. Highly targeted specialist media will surely thrive as people select what they want to read rather than having it imposed on them willy nilly.

Brave new world? Perhaps not yet, but it is getting there. Enjoy your marketing in 2011!

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