

## Marketing.ie Article Getting the most out Media Long Tail

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There is a lot of focus today on what is often termed the Media Long Tail. The phrase 'long tail' entered the marketing lexicon in 2004 when it was used by Chris Anderson, editor-in-chief of *Wired* magazine, to express the idea that the demand for all niche products combined is larger than the demand for mass market products. (The term 'long tail' is borrowed from statistics where it is used to describe a feature of certain distributions.)

Applied to the media context, the long tail is often used to refer to small potentially highly engaging contexts such as social networking sites, blogs and games. Each of these contexts individually has low reach but, when combined, the theory is that these vehicles may have an impact that rivals traditional TV campaigns.

In Ireland, focus on realising value from the Media Long Tail is as relevant as elsewhere. Newer digital and social media have impressive statistics. We know, for example, that there are well over 1.5 million Facebook users in Ireland. Statistics show that, on average, a user has 124 friends, spends 22 minutes per day on Facebook and 85% return to Facebook weekly. Twitter is also growing in popularity here and initial indications are that Ireland is punching above its weight in terms of Twitter usage.

Global research also backs up the notion that social media, a newer form of earned media, has the potential to effectively build brands. Data from AdIndex® (Millward Brown's digital advertising measurement tool) show that social media advertising certainly has an impact on those exposed.

AdIndex uses a control-exposed methodology that measures the branding value of online ad campaigns as they run live across a site or set of sites. Data collected from a Facebook case study shows that the Facebook fan page resulted in much stronger brand engagement and consideration among visitors than those who only saw the Traffic Drivers for the same page.

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All this focus on media however can obscure the key role of media and that is to advance the brand agenda. The 'brand idea' must come first. The contributions from the various specialised media must flow together so that at the moment of purchase people have strong brand memories to call upon. Advertisers need to set a clear brand task that is not lead by media or creative agenda. The question is not what you should be doing with one of the new media, rather what if anything they should be doing for you?

Dynamic Logic's AdReaction 2009 study found that while 59 percent of Internet users are actively engaged with social networking sites, only 13 percent of those people use the networks to keep up with brands. Those following brands do so in an average of three categories - and they do so to gain access to information, discounts and giveaways. This presents an obvious challenge for a brand. To pander to a small percentage of your target with discounts and added value giveaways can undermine overall brand status and profitability.

New media evangelists also talk a lot about the engagement possible using interactive digital vehicles. No one will argue that an in-depth interactive experience will lay down brand learning more effectively than a fleeting exposure to a broadcast message. However, the engagement paradigm seems to assume that people are ready and waiting to engage with brands in a highly involved way. In reality few people want to do that. The question to be asked is 'If we build it, will they come?' There is no point building a circus on someone's lawn if there is no one home. In addition we need to ask: "if we build it, who will come?" There's a chance that the people who respond to an engagement activity are already engaged with the brand - this is fine for reinforcing loyalty but a waste of money if that is not who were hoping to speak to.

The chief global analyst at Millward Brown recently undertook an analysis of 12 brands across five categories that have been identified as effective users of social media (including McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Coca Cola and Red Bull) and related the number of fans these brands had on Facebook with data from the Millward Brown BrandZ database. He made a number of observations:

- The five product categories attracted very different numbers of fans. On average the soft drink brands had over 16,000 fans, while the airlines had less than 1,000. This would seem to suggest that the fan base is directly proportional to the number of people who are actively involved in the category on a regular basis. It may therefore be more challenging

to create fans for brands from some categories than others.

Interestingly, a ranking of the most popular Irish brands on Facebook is dominated by alcohol brands

- The level of satisfaction with brands in the category was positively correlated to the number of fans attracted.
- It seemed that brands that are already big and successful start with a major advantage as the more loyal customers you have the more fans you tend to have on face book. Therefore, big brands can get the most out of Facebook – not just the new and trendy ones.

It seems self-evident that a strong presence in social media is a good vehicle for confirming a brand's benefits and validating its commitment to its users.

Some questions to ask yourself in advance of constructing a social media strategy that will build buzz, saliency, and a deeper engagement with brand loyals however are:

- Do people care enough about my brand and category to engage with it? If not, maybe social media is not for you?
- What types of social media sites offer most potential? An active presence on multiple sites may be necessary to engage even a small proportion of existing customers? While Facebook is the biggest social media network, it is not a homogenous community, nor is it the only channel through which consumers can connect with consumers. Among the pure –plays a low reach, high engagement medium such as Twitter offers the chance to make that all important ongoing personal connection.
- What value can you offer beyond freebies and discounts? Games, puzzles and competitions were popular means for engaging people long before the advent of social media.
- How do you sustain the initial engagement beyond a simple sign of affinity? Even large and successful brands must continually find new ways to engage fans that are consistent with their basic appeal: otherwise the novelty and 'fandom' will quickly wear off.

Social Media are just one element of the burgeoning Media Long Tail. We have no choice but to engage with these new media. We just need to make sure it's a not case of the long tail wagging the whole dog!