



Enriching the experience

If marketers can harness the modern individual's sociability and love of sharing by telling a story across various media, brand messages will blossom naturally and take on a whole life of their own

Hopefully we are at a stage where we agree on what integration means: we create a communications idea that we execute through the various media channels, delivering a consistent impression for the person at the other end.

There is a spectrum of methodologies to create the integrated campaign. There's the more visual approach, where the same icon or device is implemented across the board (for example, Direct Line's red telephone); there's the more philosophical approach, where a thought is flexed to use the properties of a particular medium to best advantage (such as our very own brand action campaign, 'Time Well Spent', for the National Trust); and of course there's everything in between, and more. But the same principle applies: Find the core communication idea and drive it home via the appropriate channels.

You will no doubt have read how our industry is in peril; that the media is dying due to broken advertising models, that people are increasingly adept at screening out communications and shamelessly trusting their friends more than ads. So, if people no longer listen to or believe communication messages, where does integration go next?

Let's start with the fact that things aren't that broken, at least not yet.

Creative communication ideas still work. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to address the marketing-cynical culture we find ourselves in. We must become less reliant on traditional media



channels and work out how we can influence the conversation in a more human and interesting way. No one is going to re-tweet a strapline.

Whichever way the future unfolds, the transmedia narrative will be part of it. The terminology was coined by Henry Jenkins to describe storytelling across numerous media, where each channel adds a distinctive contribution to an ultimately richer Gestalt.

The most keenly referenced example of this is *The Matrix*, where a more complete comprehension can be achieved through taking in not only movies, but also comics, animated shorts and much internet tomfoolery. It is worth noting that much of the story is developed from conversations among fan communities. We are social creatures and love sharing this kind of stuff with like-minded people.

The transmedia narrative augments the current integration model as the individual channels complement each other, building a more complex narrative than can be achieved by current methodologies.

The integration is left much more to the brain of the sentient person at the other end. Those who just see the core of the narrative get it and are quite happy, but those who experience the bigger story are enriched as a result. If the story is interesting enough it will blossom in ways you can't control, and this is where the power comes from – letting other people propagate and develop the story.

Recent Sony campaigns have adopted a transmedia approach; a similar methodology has been used across balls, paint, foam and rabbits, among others.

The zoetrope ad for Sony's 'Motionflow' products is a pertinent example. The making of the ad is turned into an event with the back-story being played out across various internet sites, making the whole experience much more interesting.

Isn't this just another catchy phrase, in the same fashion as 360-degree or media-neutral planning? Well no, because those both start from an 'us to them' communication model. The transmedia narrative treats people as sentient and social human beings, recognising their power in this connected world. It starts by building an interesting story that will engage people and develop community, rather than trying to find the best way to interrupt. It creates things for people to participate in rather than simply telling them what to think.

The transmedia narrative is integration for the Twittering classes. It's a methodology to navigate cynical waters and deliver meaningful and effective work, at a time when marketing has become something of a dirty word.

Yes we need big ideas; yes we need to use paid-for media channels; but we do need to be a lot more interesting, too. ■

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