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MarketingWeek

The long tail: keeping the conversation going

Alan Thorpe, director of business solutions at G2 Data Dynamics, says that if you begin a successful dialogue with your customers then don't let it peter out and explore all the ways to maintain its impetus



Coronation Street, EastEnders, The Archers, Neighbours: relentlessly popular shows that break out from their channels into conversation pieces at offices up and down the country. Comparethemarket's Aleksandr Orlov has done the same, giving rise to poorly delivered workplace impressions, transforming into a cuddly toy, topping the YouTube charts with an ad outtakes campaign and even finishing high up the rankings in ITV's recent 'ad of the decade' poll.

Incredibly, the cheeky meerkat is also listed in online directory www.123people.co.uk. The fact that Aleksandr has been so popular in social networks means that consumers are constantly breathing new life into the brand campaign and extending its longevity.

I love this new 'let's discuss' world, and so do the best marketing departments. This era of multiplying touchpoints, effective integration between all online, above- and below-the-line channels is releasing opportunities to keep the customer conversation going. If managed properly, joining up a memorable brand campaign with the long tail of social media chatter looks like the holy grail of marketing: feeding the social media engine has kept the soaps in business for years and Aleksandr in bubble bath.

The historic approach has tended to be 'devise and run famous brand campaign' (not that the consumer always agrees with the marketer or agency about the success or longevity of the work); wait a while; and measure success (if you can). Even the most memorable ATL and BTL campaigns have had a clearly identifiable lifespan, after which they've run out of steam, wilted and died. But does this really have to be the case now? Sure, we still need to create initial 'fame' for a brand and calls to action remain essential, but does the opportunity exist to stretch the window of effectiveness?

In its recent paper Adaptive Brand Marketing, research consultancy Forrester pointed out that consumer understanding must be elevated to the 'molten core' of the marketing organisation - and to me this seems to be the crucial requirement. Understanding how and having the capabilities to leverage insights captured from any source - research, transactional data, behavioural, social, response, econometrics, etc - is the basis upon which it is possible to construct a campaign that can play across multiple channels over a longer time frame. It's also the bedrock of personalised communications and services and can deliver the essential management dashboards that can drive sales, marketing and operational decisions.

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Constant listening, learning and delivery of appropriate responses; gleaning exactly what people are talking about and mapping out what they want takes us beyond the traditional ad campaign and into the world of true channel integration. This is the way to imbue a short-lived campaign with longevity and drive long-lasting customer value by creating a relationship.

If a campaign is genuinely successful and the client marketer is happy with both the creative and the results, why would you want to change the theme? If your creative agency is happy to run with an idea and has plenty more executions in the locker, it's worth investing the time, effort and budget in making the most of your customer data to keep the conversation going.

