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Advertising: The times are a-changing

Across time, we have been witness to big changes in advertising, from merely communicating a product or service, to highly sophisticated multi-dimensional and multi-channel strategies, and always with the same goal. Across time, we have seen a huge evolution of techniques and trends, products, strategies, media...

The authentic “next big thing” comes with the advent of the Internet.

Advertising is a very powerful business. All by itself, advertising powers large industries such as television or print media, huge empires with thousands of employees and billions of dollars in revenues which constantly feed their tummies with money coming from the advertisers. Across time, we have been witness to big changes in advertising, from merely communicating a product or service, to highly sophisticated multi-dimensional and multi-channel strategies, and always with the same goal: to induce someone to buy or use that product or service. To achieve their goal, advertisers use different types of weapons with very different

characteristics, ranging from pure carpet-bombing that guarantees the coverage of a large area, to highly precise snipers that allow them to hit a specific target right between the eyes and in the perfect moment to do so. Across time, we have seen a

huge evolution of those weapons, new techniques and trends, new products, new strategies, new media... However, as in many other industries, the really big change, the authentic “next big thing” comes with the advent of the Internet. And believe it or not, even though the Internet has been among us for quite a significant number of years, the change is yet to come. Let’s review some of the changes that will, in the coming years, turn the world of advertising completely upside down...

The first and fundamental change is related to the so-called “interruption marketing”, and it could be well expressed

accept my conditions. And those conditions are: either you pay for it, or you will accept interruptions. Those interruptions will come any time, in any form or shape, and we will charge advertisers depending on the number of eyeballs that we are able to – theoretically – put in front of your ad. We – the media – can manage the time, the sequence, the primetime... anything. We have the control, and all you can do is to sit down and become “audience”, i.e. shut up and listen. Depending on which side you are at, the idea sounds reasonable; media companies learn how to influence us, how to shape our tastes and habits, and we accept the model because we basically don’t have any other model to compete with.

But all of a sudden, Internet explodes, and offers infinite choice, for free and with a completely different interaction model: now, the user is in control, and things happen only when he or she decides to click. And it is not just the Internet... we also get *TiVO*, we get *Slingbox* (make sure you google

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as “don’t get between my content and me”. Think about it: for a number of years, the media industry has been able to run their business with a very clear and straightforward model - if you want to put your hands in my content, you will have to



those products and stay tuned to the concept if you haven't heard about them yet :-)) and concepts like time-shifting or place-shifting become a true, painful reality. The conclusion is crystal-clear: forget about control. All the control lies now in the hands of the user.

Internet as a medium:
bi-directional interactions

Another big change arises precisely from that locus of control: when the user controls what to do and where to go, the role of the content provider becomes pretty much like in that movie, *Field of dreams* (1989): *if you build it, they'll come*. Suddenly, creating content for a small audience becomes feasible and, more than that, it proves to be profitable. With infinite shelf space, proactive audiences, recommendation engines and other characteristics of the Internet, such as the potential for viral diffusion, many advertisers and content providers realize that the old rules of the Industrial Revolution are not

only untrue, but also completely suboptimal. What's the point in shooting the same ad to a large crowd when you can ask that crowd to self-segment themselves and you know that, by doing so, the ad will be more effective? That's clearly another conclusion, another take-home: forget about best-sellers, forget about blockbusters. The long tail of the distribution, made up of all the teeny tiny segments that were previously impossible to target, can be much larger and profitable than a couple of one-hit wonders.

The third interesting element emerges from another characteristic of the Internet as a medium: bi-directional interactions. As users get the control, they also get two more things: a voice, and a loudspeaker. And they demand to be heard. They want to be able to interact, among them and with you; they actively search for information about other customers who experienced your products, they tell the world the whole thing when things go well, but especially when things go wrong. And we get *prosumers*, and we

get *crowdsourcing* (again, make sure you search those terms in Wikipedia if you haven't previously heard about them), and the competitors that rely on the users as a truly important information channel become well known and are able to build a successful reputation. Which leads us to the third conclusion, again, pretty clear: don't consider your customers "an audience". Audience comes from audio, from listening, and your customers want to do much more than just listening. If you insist in considering them "just an audience", they will sure get upset.

Locus of control: the user controls what to do and where to go

The world of advertising, the world of communication has changed, and the change is not precisely small potatoes. As Bob Dylan says, "the times they are a-changin'"... make sure you bear that in mind when it comes to planning your next move. <http://www.enriquedans.com> (blog in Spanish) ■