



Multi-Channel: How To Get It Right

Nigel Vaz, managing director, SapientNitro, explains why successful multi-channel marketing requires holistic thinking and outlines the best way to integrate emerging channels into a long-term marketing strategy.

Bandied around all over the place, multi-channel marketing is at risk of becoming one of the most hyped terms of 2010. Yet despite the buzz, it's a serious discipline and one that when done well, can help brands build long-lasting and meaningful relationships with consumers. Doing it well means seeing multi-channel marketing as a service that offers real value to consumers, not simply a tool to promote a product. Although many talk the talk when it comes to multi-channel marketing, the reality is that most are merely engaging with consumers via multiple channels rather than adopting an integrated approach. This may have been acceptable a few years back, but consumers today want to interact with brands in new ways and aren't afraid to hop between channels at a moment's notice. Brands that fail to play ball and meet the needs of today's consumer risk losing out.

The technology-empowered consumer

Developments in technology continue to evolve at an incredible pace, impacting the day-to-day lives of consumers across the globe. For brands these developments are happening so fast that often half the battle is keeping up with the change. Take for instance the huge rise in popularity of smartphones that's led to a rise in mobile web usage. According to recent predictions from Deloitte, smartphone sales could reach half a billion units a year worldwide by 2010 as demand for mobile internet rises. Think back two years and this would have been hard to predict, yet here we are today constantly online and connected, thanks to devices such as Apple's iPhone and the BlackBerry smartphone. Whether it's accessing information, connecting with friends on social networking sites or ordering cinema tickets on the way home from work, technology has empowered the consumer to do what they want, when they want and how they want.

Why consistency is king

For brands, the implications are that consumers are more demanding than before and expect consistent interactions. They want to be in-store one day, asking a helpful sales assistant for advice and support, and online the next day, enjoying exactly the same level of service. If they don't receive this, or feel like they're being treated in different ways through various channels, they won't hesitate to go to a competitor to meet their needs.

As it stands, too many brands have this challenge because they fail to adopt a holistic approach and think about channels independently of each other. This is often the result of organisational structure. As new channels have emerged, individuals have been assigned to look after them and tasked with developing an appropriate strategy. This approach worked well in the past when the type of consumers that shopped online were different to those that shopped in-store, but today it's no longer relevant since it's impossible to put consumers in neat boxes. Adopting a holistic approach was a key reason our "Best Job in the World" campaign created for Tourism Queensland was so successful. The campaign, which leveraged social marketing and traditional print advertising, generated 8,000,000 website visits and generated \$80 million in media value.

Keeping consumers 'appy

One emerging area of multi-channel marketing is mobile apps. UK analyst house, Wireless Expertise, predicts that the app market will be worth \$4.66 billion by 2013 as smartphone adoption rates rise. Given such figures, the potential for mobile apps can't be ignored, which is why many brands have started to dip their toe in the water. But if an app is to be successful, it needs to fit in as part of a brand's overall multi-channel marketing strategy and not be simply a bolt-on offering. Before developing and launching an app, brands should ask themselves the simple question: Why?



For some brands it's about raising awareness, for others it's about building sales. SapientNitro recently worked with AutoTrader to launch a hugely popular app that does just that. Developed for the iPhone, the app allows users to search for real-time information relating to cars for sale – even those parked in front of them, via intelligent image recognition technology. Although users can't actually buy a car using the app, they can do pretty much everything else, ensuring they have everything they need to buy with confidence.

Keeping consumers happy isn't all about apps, however. There are plenty of other new ways in which brands can reach out and engage with consumers, thanks to developments in technology. Take augmented reality, for example. The technology gives consumers the opportunity to experience products or services virtually in the comfort of their own home. It's something that's particularly good for big-ticket items such as televisions that involve a longer decision making process, which is why we worked with Samsung on an augmented reality campaign. The campaign gave consumers the opportunity to make use of augmented reality technology to see virtually how a new type of flat screen LED TV would look in their homes. Providing consumers with this opportunity wouldn't have been possible a few months ago, which goes to show why it's crucial brands constantly ask themselves how they can best deliver an excellent customer experience.

Focusing on the consumer experience

Multi-channel marketing, when done well, offers brands huge potential to build relationships with consumers and ultimately drive sales, but requires brands to think holistically. Today, the customer experience is king, which is why marketers need to play the role of 'idea engineers' – observing, interpreting and influencing behaviour to create rich, mutually beneficial consumer relationships. Viewing the customer experience as a collection of disparate elements won't cut it – these elements need to be linked by a concept across channels consistently. And doing this doesn't just mean ensuring consistency of design. It means taking an overarching idea and deploying it through whatever channel in the most appropriate way.

A brand is an experience

A brand is not a logo or product. A brand is a person's gut feeling about a product, service or organisation. This gut feeling is informed through every interaction and every experience a consumer has, whether that's online or face-to-face. Making the most of every experience is crucial, if brands are to establish long-lasting and meaningful relationships with consumers, who have more control than ever. Developments in technology have given consumers this control, but also offer organisations the chance to engage with individuals in more meaningful ways.

Mobile apps and augmented reality are just some examples of the new ways in which brands can do this, but as with any channel, success depends upon integrating it as part of a long-term strategy that's focused 100 per cent on the customer experience. Some brands are doing this well, but there's still plenty more that can be done. Given the fact consumers are less loyal and more demanding than ever, it's crucial brands take action now. Marketers must rise to this challenge, focus on engineering interactions through any way possible and create highly relevant moments to accelerate business growth and fuel brand advocacy.

This article first appeared in Figaro Digital on April 1st, 2010.



Nigel Vaz *Managing Director SapientNitro*

In his role as Managing Director, Nigel is responsible for driving forward SapientNitro's vision of delivering excellent customer experiences by working closely with SapientNitro's clients and global teams. In addition, Nigel oversees SapientNitro's media, telecommunications, travel, retail and utilities clients across Europe and is a member of Sapient's global leadership team.

Since joining SapientNitro in 2000, Nigel has held a number of key management positions,

including leading key engagements for SapientNitro's clients across North America, Europe and India.

Prior to SapientNitro, Nigel was the co-founder and Managing Director of a public company with interests in telecoms consulting and connectivity solutions. He has also consulted to and worked with a number of companies including AT&T/Cingular, McKinsey and Company, Orange, Siemens, Telkom SA, Verizon Wireless and Vodafone.

➤ For more information, please phone **+44 (0) 207 786 4500**, email **info@sapientnitro.com** or visit **www.sapientnitro.com**