

Moving from Ads to Experiences

Mike Reeder and Joe Mele, January 2009

On a recent commute between our Seattle and Portland offices, our team had some insightful discussions about business and the future. It all started after listening to a speech by an ad industry executive who referred to his media department as "distribution." In his speech, he emphasized that it fit his analog model well because the creative, not media, did the heavy lifting in his communication strategy. Media needed to simply find ways to get that message to the right consumers.

But in the digital space, media is decidedly not distribution. In fact, we believe digital media should be as creative as anything we run on it. It should be viewed as an interaction point with consumers.

The problem is that many agencies still by and large treat the digital space the same as any other distribution channel. The formula is as follows: banner ads that lead to microsites should be pasted everywhere. But digital is more than this past distribution mentality.

Today, the best websites provide more than just content. They provide the opportunity to comment, review, post, friend, send and personalize. There is no clear delineation between the content, message and interaction. To succeed, we must embrace this paradigm shift.

We're not saying ads and microsites are dead. Not by a long-shot. But their use is changing. Increasingly, we see them as important support points to experience-based communication. Brands and agencies that succeed in this new environment will provide something of value to the consumer, not just an offer or disruption. And we believe that actual experiences will begin to take place with the brand.

Experiences are happening now. Just as the blog, profile page and inbox have become the new portals; we must find new ways to tell our story across more natural, efficient and elegant platforms. Simply put, consumers expect more. Guiding users to click and find the "big idea" is not the main goal anymore.

So how do we define an "experience?"

First, experiences are not the "big idea." These large brand concepts, which are often focused on static messaging, lack the ability to morph to meet changing consumer desires. However, experiences can jump curves across platforms to evolve with the needs of the audience. As a result, experiences have the power to change behaviors and expectations.

Second, great experiences are a lot like innovative products or design. That is, they fulfill an unmet need; make a meaningful connection with the consumer, offer utility and drive revenue.

For example, Virgin America's RED Interactive system and Mini-Cooper's relationship selling are both great examples of cross platform experiences because they both leverage digital and physical elements to fundamentally change the in-flight and car buying experience.

In addition, think about the way NBC's HULU.com aggregates premium video content for viewers, how Microsoft Surface Technology allows consumers to physically connect with digital data and images.

Moving from "ads to experiences" isn't something the industry started. The consumer did.

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About the Authors



As Director of Account Planning, Mike is tasked with integrating qualitative insights into the media, strategic and creative product of Razorfish. He has 9 years of brand, direct and digital marketing experience across a diverse client roster, including NIKE, Best Buy, Xbox, Levi's, and Coors. Before this he spent time with sister companies Atlas Solutions and was a founding member of Drive Performance Media. Mike also worked at DDB Seattle and Stax Media Group. When not in the office Mike enjoys being outwitted by his 2 sons while watching

Thomas the Tank Engine, the occasional soccer match and kayaking with his wife. Mike is also author an infrequently updated blog: <http://virtualreeder.blogspot.com/> and is a graduate of the School of Business Administration, University of Washington.



A Razorfish veteran since 1999, Joe, VP Client Partner, has helped numerous Fortune 500 companies realize their digital marketing goals. Currently, Joe directs the client accounts for Best Buy and Nike, and has provided digital marketing leadership for MSN, Disney, eBay and Northwest Airlines. Prior to his career in marketing, Joe was a teacher and professional singer. He holds a BA from the University of Washington, a Master's Degree from Seattle University, and an MBA from the University of Washington.

About Razorfish™

Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology companies in the world, and also one of the largest buyers of digital advertising space. With a demonstrated commitment to innovation, Razorfish counsels its clients on how to leverage digital channels such as the Web, mobile devices, in-store technologies and other emerging media to engage people, build brand loyalty and provide excellent customer service. The company is increasingly advising marketers on Social Influence Marketing™, its approach for employing social media and social influencers to achieve the marketing and business needs of an organization. Its award-winning client teams provide solutions through their strategic counsel, digital advertising and content creation, media buying, analytics, technology and user experience. Razorfish has offices in markets across the United States, and in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Clients--many of them served in multiple markets--include Carnival Cruise Lines, Coors Brewing Company, Levi's, McDonald's and Starwood Hotels. Visit <http://www.razorfish.com> for more information.

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