

It's all about me

 By Gillian Rightford

22 Jan 2014

To sum up what I believe we will see more of in the coming year, I look to the most eloquent Bob Garfield: *"Mass is headed for a mass grave. Reach will be ever more out of reach. The future, and the present, requires aggregating individual relationships at scale. Just like, whaddya call it...life."* - Bob Garfield. Journalist. Author. and Broadcaster [@bobosphere](#)

Here are my top trends for 2014:

1. Consumers are more mobile, communication is more mobile

Anyone who still thinks that mobile is a tag-on, an option - "we should do an app" - is missing the point. This year there will be more mobile devices on the planet than people, offering marketers billions of touch points. This is as personal as media gets. This is as close to a consumer media ever gets. This is as close a brand ever gets to a consumer's heart. Literally. So, it has to be a year of 'mobile reimagined'. Mobile as core part of integrated strategy because that's where the consumer is looking for it.

2. Cross screen, cross channel strategies, messaging and agencies

This will require strategies that work across a multitude of screens, platforms and channels. This is happening to a degree at the moment, but it is still being split across specialist agencies. There is a notion that there is a brand agency, and then there are digital/social/mobile agencies. This is a patchwork quilt stitched together by 'newness'. But it's not sustainable. As communication needs to be more integrated so too do the agencies that provide it.

3. Content is everything, everything is content

What is advertising? What is PR? What is activation? What is 'brand' communication and what is not 'brand'? Coca Cola summed it up as [Liquid and Linked](#). And so it is. Traditional definitions have blurred. Activations become advertising. Advertising becomes content. PR becomes activation. Fundamentally it's all content. User generated or agency generated. And what is content? It's back to the wonderful quote by Jeremy Bullmore, former chairman of JWT: "People build brands like birds build nests. From the scraps and straws they chance upon". Content is the provision of those scraps and straws, and strategy is placing them in the places they will be chanced upon.



4. Big Data becomes Big Consumer Insights

Which leads me neatly into Big Data. Hmmm. Big Data. Kirk Chartier (@kikr), SVP of Marketing, [Enova International](#) says it best: "Strategic creative ideas that address customer behavioral needs will help marketers make sense of the endless stream of trivial data points."

Insight departments need to become insightful. Great communication needs more than data, it needs interpretation of data that is meaningful and allows brands to be innovative, meaningful and relevant.

5. The consumer is a person, and an audience

The 'consumer' is a word that ad legend Sir John Heggarty despises. He feels that it is somehow rather presumptive of us. Sir John describes the consumer as an audience. That word places the responsibility on us to ensure that what we deliver is appealing and engaging. We are talking to someone that has the choice to ignore or the choice to engage. And as brands that's our choice too. Be boring or be interesting. The consumer is a person. Oh, and people like conversation - not one-way communication.

6. Creativity is the key

Using data usefully will lead us to understand what, when and where. We need to mine that to discover the how. Creativity has to be the key that allows our brand to break through the 4000 odd messages a person may be exposed to that day.

Here's what Sir John says about mobile advertising, emphasising that we should put the consumer first, not the technology:

"Our work isn't as good as it used to be, and consumers value it less and less. Our solution is to constantly think how we can interrupt consumers more, how we can shove a message in their face that they don't want to see. We're becoming more aggravating, when surely we should engage consumers and give them something they want to watch and respond to...Instead we talk about what we can do on this platform or that platform...The only space I want to occupy is the one between people's ears. That's where I want my message to go and how I get there is an irrelevance." (Source: [AdAge](#))

So brands need engagement, storytelling, relevance, and entertainment. We want people to love our content so much that they share it, and that they buy our brand. Storytelling is what creative advertising has been about since forever. It went away. And now it's back.

7. Creativity can come from anywhere

The traditional model of briefing ideas and campaigns is going to be challenged. As some specialisations will collapse, so some new ones will arise. Simply, there may be ideas that are crowd-sourced, or consumer generated, or sourced from one place and implemented by another. Two key drivers here - skills, and speed.

8. Brands need to do good

The growing eco, social, environmental, lifestyle and health consciousness is only going to increase. Brands have to be seen to be authentic, and true. And good. Unilever has made 'purpose' into a business strategy and is making its marketing objectives 'saving lives' rather than 'selling soap' - watch this [Lifebuoy](#) example if you haven't seen it already.

9. Social media becomes social business becomes true accountability

People have always warned that consumers can 'vote with their feet', in that if they didn't approve or like something they could take their custom elsewhere. Well now, it's 'vote with your fingers'. The power of social media for reputation issues, good and bad, is immense. And whilst people want brands to be good, if they say they are, they really really have to be. Or they will be outed. Authenticity rules.

Brands' figuring out how to utilise this power has to be a trend that is pursued aggressively. If a brand is accountable, people expect the CEO of the company to be that face, not a low level marketing exec. In addition, every employee,

customer, and partner can be your marketer. How do you ensure that they advocate for you?

10. Deconstructing siloes

Because change is everywhere, structures need to change. The structures internal to businesses - where sales and marketing are separate, where within marketing there are divisions between departments and channels - need to be broken down if we want to ensure that people experience a unified, cohesive brand experience.

Why is customer service in a separate division to advertising? Agencies will have to break down some of their rigid structures too. "It's in traffic" might just not cut it for much longer. How do we change these systems and structures to move more efficiently?

11. The pace picks up

Things just got faster. Part of the deconstruction of siloes will be the need to respond faster than we currently do. To everything. The deconstruction of systems is essential if brands want to really become consumer-centric.

But, and it's a big but, speed cannot be at the expense of creativity and thinking. We just need to find ways of doing the big thinking upfront, using big consumer insights - so we can react quickly.

12. It's all about me... or you... or your consumer

Companies talk about wanting to be consumer-centric, but they don't change how or what they do. This will change. Much has been written about the need for marketers to start producing content that aligns to individuals' purchase journeys rather than the way they normally do it - using their own internal sales funnel.

As with Amazon, who say it's not in the business of selling books, it's in the business of helping people buy books, businesses need to discover their purpose, their 'why' (a la [Simon Sinek](#)), to be truly consumer-centric and deliver authentic experiences, products, brands.

Augie Ray, director of Word of Mouth Strategy, American Express ([@augieray](#)) says: "Creating true WOM is more dependent on how you respond to customer needs than whether you serve them ads."

2014 is going to be fun.

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ABOUT GILLIAN RIGHTFORD

Gillian's CV is a mix of marketing, strategy, advertising, and leadership. She obtained a Business Science (Honours) degree in Marketing from UCT, worked in marketing strategy consulting, then headed into the creative world, doing account management and strategy for below and above the line agencies, before becoming co-founder and managing director of Hercules/DMB&B, and then group managing director of Lowe Bull...

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