

AdvertisingAge®

It's Not the Media That Matter, but the Modes

Tune In: Understand the Mind-Sets That Drive Consumer Behavior

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We've all read stories heralding the death of advertising as we know it. But have consumers really abandoned advertising?

The answer, it seems, rests on the shoulders of the people who buy our brands and recommend them to others -- not with advertisers, marketers or consultants. That's why we went straight to the source by visiting people's homes in Columbus, Ohio (a test-marketing Mecca) to do the unthinkable: mess with their media. We deprived them of their TiVos, their laptops and their cellphones. We added ourselves to their e-mail lists. We asked them to journal their feelings and attitudes. We discovered that consumers don't do what they say, and that they've become experts in ignoring and rejecting messages. They can instantly recognize messages that are irrelevant or ill-timed.

More important, we learned that consumers aren't simply tuning us out; they just want us to tune them in. Spending time with consumers in the real world, where and when they actually engage with media, enabled us to see that when they spend time with media, they do it with a purpose, goal or need that drives their behavior. They enter different modes, or mind-sets, that drive their choices, actions and receptivity to marketing messages.

Part of the experience

Consumers don't think in terms of media when they're actually experiencing it. They think in terms of what they want to do and what they want to get out of

their media experience. If they're craving entertainment, they want to be entertained. If they're seeking knowledge, they want information. If they feel like sharing, discovering or expressing themselves, they want us as marketers to help make that possible.

To be successful in this new marketing era, we need not focus on the media, but the modes that consumers are in when they interact with and experience our messages. Regardless of whether the medium is online, TV, print or radio, the key is to understand the consumer's desired experience and craft our messages to help deliver that experience to consumers. When we align our messages with the modes that consumers are in, we can actually become a part of the experience that consumers are seeking.

Imagine a world where consumers actually look for brand messages and content and no longer feel forced to endure continuous interruptions (that we hope have some positive impact upon their future behavior). Learning how and when people enter into different modes and aligning with them is the difference between being ignored and being invited to the party.

Outdated model

Historically, two consumer modes have been well-served by the media -- information and entertainment. In the passive model, consumers were able to subconsciously switch between information gained through watching the 6 p.m. news to the entertaining antics of prime-time sitcoms and telemovies. But that model is history, and today's media-rich environment requires a far broader exploration of modes.

The rules have changed. We must match our message with the mode. No one wants to be disrupted with informative messages when they're in entertainment mode -- it's jarring and off-putting. Being subjected to a humorous message when you're searching for something serious is no picnic, either. We can help by providing the means, motivation and reason to pass along the message.

If we want to succeed, we must stop shoving irrelevant, ill-timed content down people's throats. What matters is what people show and tell us, and our work should reflect what we know about them. We have all the resources necessary

to identify what mode consumers are in at any given time. Aligning the message with the mode will determine whether our messages make it into consumer consciousness or become more wasted marketing efforts.

The Six Modes

The number of consumer modes is endless, but we've identified six of the most relevant ones:

1. **ENTERTAINMENT**

People in Entertainment mode are on a mission to be amused. This mode has been around for years (and has been well-served by the media), and TV is still at the forefront.

2. **INFORMATION**

Information-seekers are looking for knowledge to help them make decisions. This mode also has been around for a long time, but now people are searching for information online as opposed to in newspapers and card catalogs.

3. **DISCOVERY**

When consumers look for something new—whether it's a dessert recipe, a tropical vacation spot or a new station wagon—they're in Discovery mode. They do this because they want to nourish their minds.

4. **CONNECTING**

Consumers in Connecting mode are building relationships. They now have a world of tools enabling them to stay in touch with friends and family. E-mail is the most popular choice, and social-networking sites give them the next best thing to being there. Text messaging and online gaming allow them to have continuous and instantaneous connections.

5. **SHARING**

Similar to connecting, Sharing mode is a way to create common ground. Video- and image-sharing sites invite millions of people to swap their experiences.

6. EXPRESSING

Expressing mode refers to conveying an individual point of view. This is essential because almost anyone can become a valued resource by posting a blog, vlog or podcast.



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