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Mobile Apps Versus Mobile Websites

By John Tornow

It’s no secret that the computing world is going mobile. We can do more while on the go than ever before, and the trend won’t slow down anytime soon. Devices get smaller. Computing power gets bigger. Just take a look around and see how many people around you have their faces buried in a mobile device. Smartphone sales are continuously on the rise, and a recent survey states that smartphones make up about one-third of all active mobile devices. In late 2010, there were more smartphone devices shipped than the combined global market of desktop and laptop computers. That happened two years before analysts predicted it would occur. And the trend is only getting bigger. Analysts have predicted again that “mobile phones will overtake PCs as the most common Web access devices worldwide by 2013.”

The mobile movement is more than just selling smartphones. Brands taking advantage of the mobile space have seen massive increases in awareness and sales directly attributed to their mobile presence. For example, in June of 2011, PayPal reported it has seen up to $10 million in mobile payments per day and has set its expectations of over $3 billion in mobile payments in all of 2011. Another major player in the mobile landscape is eBay, with nearly $4 billion in mobile sales in 2011 alone.

These stats are important, but they don’t tell the full story. The real issue is that mobile users visit an average of 24 websites per day, and the Top 50 sites on the Web only account for about 40% of all mobile visits. What does this mean? It’s simple — your brand is already part of the mobile landscape, whether you like it or not. Everyday, there are visitors interacting with your brand on a mobile device, and it is time to engage them properly.

So we’ve agreed that mobile is growing and an important place for your brand to devote attention. Now that that’s settled, it’s time to move on to the meat of the discussion: The mobile web versus mobile applications.

The Argument

While most geeks are elated to see HTML5 in mainstream media recently, its presence has sparked a heated debate between the merits of the mobile web and mobile apps. The basic argument is that HTML5 and other web standards technologies will give developers the opportunity to deliver an immersive high-quality mobile experience to a wide variety of mobile devices and platforms. These immersive experiences have been the main benefit of apps over the past several years. But the recent explosion of more advanced HTML5 standards has reinvigorated the argument. The growth of HTML5 has even caused some pundits to posit that mobile apps are an endangered species and even to declare that apps will soon be dead altogether.

There is much debate on the proper mix of Web and apps. For example, three of the most relevant mobile companies right now have three very different strategies on mobile: Apple is putting their weight behind apps. Google is split half and half between HTML5 and apps. Facebook has been a huge supporter of HTML5 as its sole platform moving forward. Each company has significant justification for its strategies, yet they are at times radically different from their competition.

So which is it — the HTML5 mobile web or native applications? The real answer is that you don’t have to choose between them. Every mobile solution is different, and your brand should use the best tool for the job. This will almost always involve a mobile website. Sometimes it will include an app as well. The important decision to make is to include mobile as a first-class citizen within your digital strategy. Let’s outline the difference between these platforms.

Native Applications

Native applications (we’ll just call them apps for short) are so called because they run directly (aka natively) on the mobile device for which they were built, without the need for a standard web browser. Apps take advantage of lower-level aspects of a mobile operating system and perform actions that could not be dreamed of from within a web browser. Since these apps are coded with a specific programming language that has been optimized for each device (Objective-C for iOS, Java for Android), they are typically very fast. Apps can interact with other parts of the mobile device outside the app itself, such as its camera, GPS sensors, address book, calendar, microphone and speakers.
Mobile Apps Versus Mobile Websites

Apps are typically installed from a centralized app store (App Store for iOS, Marketplace for Android) and downloaded and stored on the device for easy access. Since apps are installed on a device, they do not require Internet access to function in normal circumstances. Apps also have access to create portions of code that run behind the scenes (otherwise known as background tasks) that can provide the user with timely notifications.

While most of these points are huge reasons to invest in an app strategy, there are significant drawbacks to a native strategy as well. First, you are forcing your users to take the time to download yet another app and add it to their already crowded home screen. You must provide an extremely compelling reason for them to do so. Apps are also subject to review on some platforms. Apple has famously reviewed each app on its App Store, and there is always the chance that after months of work your app could be rejected and never make it to the store.

At a minimum, app development means supporting iOS and Android devices. Arguments can be made to support one over the other, but in most cases you’ll want to support both platforms. This is an expensive and time-consuming process because two completely different applications will need to be developed, tested, approved and released. Ongoing maintenance of these apps on multiple platforms can also be a continuously expensive process.

Apps typically boast a great user experience and, when done correctly, can have significant impact on your brand. The benefit of being installed on a device and having your icon on a user’s home screen can provide long-term access to your mobile brand. In addition, the immersive experience and access to device resources in an app are currently unmatched by the mobile web. However, approval restrictions and the high costs of development and implementation are important aspects to consider when creating your mobile strategy.

The Mobile Web

In the dark ages of the mobile web, sites were served in so-called WAP sites. It was hideous. Most humans simply didn’t appreciate the text-only version of brand websites available back then. Luckily for all of us, the technology has advanced significantly, and starting primarily with the announcement of the iPhone in 2007, the mobile web is now a legitimate place for modern brands to represent themselves.

The modern mobile web is based on the set of technologies commonly referred to as “HTML5.” While HTML5 is part of the mix, we are also using this umbrella term to refer to the unique blend of HTML5, CSS and JavaScript to deliver a web experience through a mobile web browser. Mobile websites are not served from a centralized App Store or Marketplace, but rely instead on domain names (yourbrand.com) and search just like the Web we are all used to. Typically, a mobile site visitor will be redirected from the desktop view to a mobile-optimized view of the same information. Or, if the site is cutting-edge, they can also rely on responsive web design to show a mobile-optimized website without the hassle of separate sites and redirects. See “The Responsive Web: A Web Fit for the Future” for more on this topic.

Mobile websites are great for finding relevant information quickly on the go. Instead of waiting for an app to download, users can quickly access a mobile website and navigate to the content for which they are looking. And, like apps, mobile websites can read a user’s location from the device’s GPS and show relevant localized content.

Even if the mobile web is not as immersive an experience, it has one significant advantage over apps: it works completely cross-platform and requires no installation (and therefore approval) for use. Every major mobile platform’s operating system comes with a web browser installed by default. Your brand loyalists are one tap away from viewing your mobile site no matter what device they’re using. This is especially important as more and more platforms are developed. Offerings from Microsoft and several others are released every year, and with little to no effort, each mobile website is easily accessed on these platforms.

The Winner

There is no clear winner in the debate of apps versus the Web. There likely will never be one. Don’t get caught up in the battle. Just choose the best course for your brand. If your brand requires an immersive solution that uses a significant amount of device resources, you’ll likely need to go with an app. In most cases, you’ll also need a mobile website as well. What’s important is to develop a mobile strategy based on your brand’s specific mobile needs and attack the various platforms based upon that strategy.

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Taming the Social Stream

By Scott Luther & Sarah Allen

Social media is often referred to as a stream, with a constant flow of status updates, tweets, check-ins and shared links being pushed out in real time. But no longer is “stream” the appropriate metaphor. As friend counts, the number of social networks that we are tuned in to and the volume of content our network is sharing grows, the amount of content we are expected to monitor has grown into a roaring deluge of information.

Mirroring the explosive growth of sharing is the growth in ways we access this flow of stories. Social media has now invaded every facet of our daily lives. But life is more than the sum of its tweets. People have signaled that they are not willing to surrender to the overwhelming flood of social obligations. Most people find it beyond them to abandon social media entirely, to turn off their easy access to their circle of digital intimates.

This brings us to a subtle balance between the fear of missing out – the fear of being uninformed, uninvited or left out – and the threat of social fatigue. Combatting this strenuous position is the rise of digital tools meant to tame the stream and highlight that which truly matters.

Rather than allow their hard-won users to disengage, the networks themselves are building tools to make their services more manageable. They are creating tools that mimic offline social dynamics. Google+ Circles and Facebook smart lists filter the flow to highlight certain groups that we know we want to pay attention to. The goal of these new tools is to add context to our connections, and by filtering these stories from the stream, they raise their visibility for a longer period of time.

It works when users consume information directly from their social platforms, but social has become a layer of context throughout our web experience. As web APIs pull information from social networks to influence everything from restaurant recommendations to where you should take your next vacation, a substantial user complaint is that the preferences assigned to our profiles are not representative of our real-life network. Social networks have largely been unable to push the assigned value of a connection — either strength of personal connection or perception of a connection’s expertise — to the social layer outside their platforms.

As adoption of filtering tools increases among users, though, expect social networks to find ways for their APIs to learn from this new data and create even greater personalization. As this information becomes available, we should think about how our brands can use data to appropriately improve their mobile, Web and physical experiences.

Filtering and paring down what is shared with us on a daily basis help limit our connections’ activity to a manageable level. The next challenge in taming the stream is assigning relevance to content shared by people outside those specified circles. One way this problem is being addressed is by attaching weight to stories affecting our collective consciousness, events that are sparking interest among a number of people whose opinions we have signaled as valuable. A great example of a service addressing this challenge is Percolate, a tool that combines Twitter feeds, RSS readers and Tumblr feeds to surface the content that multiple connections choose to share.

Several social platforms have also attempted to address this with native tools. The Facebook “Talking About This” and Google “What’s Hot” topic clusters ensure that major events are not missed, similar to the long-standing Twitter Trending Topics sidebar, and draw attention to topics that have affected multiple connections.

These tools aim to solve one of social media’s — and the Web’s in general — greatest challenges: assigning relevance to topics that users have not indicated they care about. For brands wanting to break through
the clutter, the most important part of the solutions to understand is how these tools are able to introduce people to new experiences and perspectives. With this understanding, brands can identify means of reaching new audiences.

A final class of tools rising to stem the flow of social content being pushed to us on a daily basis is the social magazine. Social magazines are services pulling in the best from our various networks to build personalized periodicals for each user. The first and best example of this service is Flipboard, which combines Facebook, Twitter and external news sources to provide each user with a collection of stories that are most relevant to them.

Many others have attempted to bring value to this space, from CNN’s Zite, Yahoo!’s Livestand or News.me to personalized news services like Pulse and Flud.
Taming the Social Stream

While these services are positioned closer to traditional media platforms, all have incorporated a social element, choosing to highlight the content shared from a user’s networks as a way to provide a more relevant experience each time that user checks in.

Apart from providing a collection of recommended content, the primary benefit of these tools is that they pick items out of the stream and allow people to take part in their social activity when it best suits them. Like the DVR, TiVo and online video have accomplished for television, so, too, will stream filters and social magazines allow users to engage with social media on their own schedule and on their chosen device.

Over the next year, we will see the maturation of these tools, first by improving the content that is pulled in from each of our social networks and news sources, and also by learning what content we appreciate beyond what has been shared by our network. This behavior is what will make these services most valuable, learning what a user wants and also learning how to suggest new topics to broaden a user’s perspective.

In 2012, brands will earn attention by telling interesting stories and by building experiences with social context. Brands need to become as much a part of the fabric of social media as people. Plan for experiences that move beyond your brand’s website or page. Craft social stories that are meant to be shared, not just with your brand’s immediate connections, but also into the second circle.

Breaking through will require brands to understand how content is being filtered, both electronically and by content curators, and to position their social presences around their brand’s promise. Successful brands will also think about which groups they want to be associated with: for some it will be the savvy shopping group, for others, entertainment and pure fun, while some may anchor new groups being created around the brand. Another approach will focus on creating utility for a brand’s connections, either by acting as the experts in their category and taking on the role of curator for their followers or by leveraging the vast amount of data available through social networks to create more personalized experiences for their customers.

Lastly, we expect to see brands begin to understand how sharing has changed word of mouth amid this deluge of status updates and tweets. Participating in social media requires building engagement beyond status updates, extending your brand’s promise into each digital touchpoint to create experiences your fans will discover and share on their own. Brands that take this approach are embracing the community aspect of social media and building campaign-agnostic presences to engage with fans in the long-term.
Reuniting the SEM House

By Derek Louden

It’s Getting Crowded

Search engine marketing (SEM) is a discipline that, like most things digital, has become more sophisticated (and complicated) over the past decade. As online content continues to explode and everyone is using a smartphone, marketers now more than ever need to ensure that potential customers can find them by staying up to date on search engine marketing. According to a study by McKinsey & Company, the amount of digital content is expected to grow by a factor of 44 annually between 2009 and 2020, and with an estimated global value creation of over $780 billion, the importance of SEM cannot be overstated.

Equally important to the issue of search engine visibility is the issue of managing SEM efforts to ensure they are providing positive, measurable results and thus are driving the client’s business forward. With no shortage of places for marketers to spend their finite resources on improving their SEM game, it is recommended that attention be given to how they can spend smarter to ultimately advance their digital business. By managing and evaluating search engine optimization (SEO) and pay per click (PPC) efforts with common metrics and fostering communication between these (usually) separate teams, marketers stand to substantially improve the efficiency of their programs.

The Old Model

SEM is most commonly divided into two distinct parts. In one corner, you have SEO, which deals primarily with technical factors of website construction that affect how a site ranks on major search engines like Google and Bing for desired keyword searches. On the other side, you have PPC search, where marketers have more direct control over user experience through bidding on desired keywords. It’s this control that drives a more direct comparison between dollars invested and results generated. While the paths of these two disciplines occasionally cross, for the most part they’ve remained separately managed and evaluated.

It’s recommended that these different methods for increasing search engine visibility are best managed together when marketers consider both the business goals they are trying to achieve and how both SEO and PPC can help to achieve those goals together. The emergence and maturation of social platforms like Facebook and Google+ have changed the SEM game, and continuous developments in the PPC search space, notably mobile, should give marketers sufficient incentives to encourage collaboration between their SEM and SEO teams where they can more effectively achieve common goals.

Let’s Work Together

The most important efficiency gained from ensuring a company’s SEM goals are consistent is that they can make sure to communicate the same message in both organic and PPC search. This way, when users are searching on high-value terms, the paid and natural results complement each other to provide a consistent experience for the user.

Another, perhaps more important, benefit to managing PPC and SEO together is an assurance that information is flowing freely between teams as they move toward achieving marketing goals. When managed separately, or by separate firms, there tends to be a competitiveness that can stifle information flow as each firm tries to achieve the goals that will help them to keep their jobs. This can work against the client and can even produce inferior overall results. When the climate between these teams is a more open one, the client ends up reaping the benefits. An example of this type of cross-discipline sharing could be the examination of keywords from a PPC campaign that were particularly successful or profitable and then incorporating these keywords into future SEO efforts. Another could be the analysis of natural keywords driving particularly high levels of customer engagement that could uncover broader customer characteristics. By using existing performance data on these keywords, the risk of underperformance is lowered since something about the keywords’ performance was known prior to their utilization.
One of the areas seeing explosive growth is mobile SEO, where companies are discovering that users coming from mobile devices have different needs than those coming from desktop search. One useful exercise for the SEO team to perform is to examine inbound search traffic from the mobile site to get a pulse on what users are searching for while using their mobile device. For example, users looking for an insurance brand from their mobile device are most likely searching for “towing” or “roadside assistance” rather than trying to get a quick quote. Google has also started providing mobile-specific keyword search traffic so that marketers can begin to understand temperamental differences between mobile and desktop searchers. This information could be used to inform the PPC campaign to target these terms through mobile and perhaps promote a mobile app that is in development. This is just one example to show how this type of information sharing can lead to smarter, more successful campaigns.

Campaign Goals

When boiled down to its simplest form, dollars invested in a marketer’s digital presence are intended to affect the bottom line. This is achieved through attracting an increasing number of qualified visitors and potential customers, or purchasing ad space that effectively gets in front of these potential customers. The degree to which the investment is successful is what ultimately determines the direction of future marketing efforts. The question then becomes, how is this success measured? It is at this point where the marketing team or agency partner will step in and define those activities that qualified users are most likely taking. For e-commerce sites, the metric could be sales, and for sites where transactions aren’t possible, valuable activities might be store locators, product descriptions or signing up for email updates.

For a company’s SEM efforts, this becomes an important discussion because many times the SEO and website teams will have different goals than the PPC team, which is typically more connected with the specific marketing efforts. With each of these practices aiming for common goals, the end result can be a practice where both SEO and PPC drive more results together than either practice could achieve on their own.

Finally, the definition of goals is only as good as the methods used to quantify those goals. This is where both teams should coordinate closely to understand the fundamental differences in how they work together. While a company’s SEO efforts should be concerned with user experience on the site, it’s the quality of that user experience that ultimately influences whether a user converts. This is where communication with the marketing team and those managing PPC strategy should be very close. If the ultimate goal is to increase sales, then intelligence gained from either practice can make the other smarter, whether that’s discovering keywords that appear to drive particularly efficient conversions or which text ads are generating the best clickthrough rates (CTR).

Bringing It All Together

The value that search can unlock for companies is immense, but is only fully realizable when all the parts are working together efficiently. For this to happen, companies have to realize that SEO and PPC are really working toward very compatible and similar goals. It is through this type of coordination and information sharing that marketers can unlock the full potential of search engine marketing for their brands.

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Advertising in the Dust of the Digital Revolution

By Amanda Plewes & Sarah Allen

For years, marketers and advertisers have been talking about the “digital revolution” and the “digital agency” versus the “traditional agency.” As the lines blurred and the “digital revolution” evolved into the “digital reality,” ad agencies and their clients also evolved to meet the demands of this new world.

While this change has been ongoing for many years now, reports of the death of the advertising agency have been greatly exaggerated. For better or worse, agencies have coped with and responded to the digital revolution for over a decade. However, in the coming year, agencies will continue to make more widespread changes to their business.

Ad agencies exist to endear people to brands — no matter the channel. As 2012 dawns, agencies will begin the radical adjustment of the previous business model, leading to more stability and more innovation.

Fragmentation Chaos

Every day, new platforms are launched, technologies are released and products are updated. Agency and corporate executives are hammered with emails from hundreds of services all promising to revolutionize their business. Marketing partners and vendors are suggesting that companies need to exist in dozens of online channels, all monitored and managed by dedicated resources.

With increasing clutter and demands for attention, one of the most important changes in 2012 will be the decision of brands to focus their energies on a few places rather than spreading across many.

Jim Collins, in his classic *Good to Great*, suggests that the best companies adhere to what he refers to as the “hedgehog principle.” The hedgehog principle lies at the intersection of what the company can be the best in the world at, what they enjoy doing and what they can make money doing.

Understanding this desire to focus leads us to believe that in the coming year, agencies will adjust by providing greater channel clarity in the face of new communication outlets. Marketers will look to agencies to be experts across disciplines and channels and increasingly rely on the thought leadership of their agency partners.

Experts Ascending

2012 will also be marked by the increasing battle to attract and retain top talent. While it’s always been a challenge to dissuade employees from agency-hopping, the past years have seen increased competition for technological talent. This competition comes not just from other agencies, but also from other sectors.

As complexities continue to grow, an additional need for specialized talent will arise. Employees specializing in social media metrics will add to their counterparts in analytics; those working in online community management will join the more generalized social strategists. This will lead to a requirement that agencies have subject matter experts on an ever-widening variety of topics.

As vanguard agencies forge ahead into this model, agency strengths will become clear. For decades, agencies have brought together divergent thinkers to collaborate on cohesive, creative work. Agencies’ ability to collaborate across disciplines will continue to be the cornerstone of their creative development and lead to groundbreaking creativity across channels. Now it’s incumbent upon agencies to leverage this creativity into holistic campaigns that simultaneously launch and encompass multiple platforms.

Rise of the Consultancy

The life cycle of ad agencies has evolved from the early years where they effectively comprised the entirety of a client’s marketing department and budget, to the modern era where procurement-led pitches are more frequent and clients viewing the agency as a vendor are more prevalent.
Advertising in the Dust of the Digital Revolution

As the evolution continues, there will be a rise in the agency as a business consultancy. Smart clients will involve the agency in comprehensive business discussions leading to a more consultant-like agency-client relationship. Agencies will even begin developing in-house consultancies to compete with the larger, more established players.

The move toward business consultancy is driven by the need for successful agencies to understand every part of the client’s business—not just the part the agency has been selected to touch. By understanding the end-to-end business challenges and opportunities, agency consultants will be better able to see overarching themes and cut through the fragmentation of markets and marketing to develop innovative communications and business solutions.

Income Diversification

When I was eight, my mom taught me that a diversified investment portfolio yields the best returns over the long haul—forget about the glamour of the bubbles or the temptation to heavy up in a few select sectors, diversification will yield the most consistent returns. Through the financial crisis and ongoing volatility that started in 2008, fluctuating budgets and tense clients hit advertising agencies hard. This taught agencies about the dangers of having only fee and project-based income. To reduce the large swings in stability when the market experiences high volatility, ad agencies have devised new ways to create more consistent cash flows while remaining in the creative sector, and these will grow significantly in 2012.

One approach agencies can grow into new revenue streams is through creating software as a service (SaaS) products to sell to a wider audience. From platforms for creating and tracking mobile coupons to social media posting services to custom content management systems and beyond, there is a larger appetite for these services. While the initial investment in creating the services can be daunting, they can provide a constant income stream that does not have the same elasticity as projects and retainers.

Agencies are renowned hotbeds for creative thinking, and they will continue to foster that through the creation of in-house start-up incubators. These incubators will create and sell products—leading not only to additional agency revenue, but also to additional ways to showcase creative. Further, agencies will be able to demonstrate their marketing skills in promoting their own products, increasing credibility with potential clients.

The tech start-up world is starting to collide with the advertising world, and advertising agencies are better capitalized for growing ideas and companies. The development of a Silicon Valley-style start-up culture will help diversify revenue streams and help agencies win the talent war with attractive challenges to offer the best and brightest.

Agencies Will Patent Their Work

As the work of tech start-ups and advertising agencies converge, intellectual property ownership will become an increasingly important consideration of agencies. As creative powerhouses venturing into new revenue streams, agencies will seek to protect their creations as well as their clients' through patents.

With the tech powerhouses like Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook battling in court over technology ownership, the power of patents has never been clearer and patent trolls have increased. Since 1991, there has been a compound annual growth rate of 5.6% in the number of patent infringement cases filed, with many of these cases filed by non-practicing entities. With the proliferation in cases, and a corresponding surge in settlements, agencies will need to defend their technologically groundbreaking work in ways they haven’t previously. By developing their own proprietary technologies and maintaining a store of patents, agencies can also defend themselves and their clients from absurd licensing fees demanded by non-practicing entities.

The Richards Group

Recognizing the shifts in client needs and media landscape, The Richards Group has worked to make digital part of our DNA. We’ve stopped delineating between “digital” and “traditional” advertising and are using the combined experience of over 650 of the brightest, smartest, most-focused people in the world of advertising to create brands people love. Digital experts now reside in every discipline, from media to creative to brand management to planning, and form integrated, collaborative teams ready to excel at positively influencing their clients’ business.

In Sum

Five years from now, we might not call them “advertising agencies.” They might become “innovation centers” or “creative marketers,” but whatever you call them, agencies are evolving to meet the needs of an ever-changing world. Agencies are reinventing themselves as companies focused on providing the best marketing and advertising advice and services to clients—no matter what forms the advice and services take.

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Creativity + Technology: Walking Hand in Hand into the Sunset

By Jayr Sotelo

There was a time when writers and art directors were in different departments. Today, this idea seems hard to believe, but before Bill Bernbach, nobody thought of bringing them together into one team. It was the 1950s and advertising was mostly print, and television was on the verge of becoming the most important communication medium. Bernbach’s idea of creating the art director and writer team revolutionized advertising and gave way to more cohesive ad campaigns that shaped consumer culture visually and conceptually.

This creative model has remained the same since the 1950s. Unfortunately, media has changed.

Drastically.

In the new age of digital advertising, it’s time to take another look at the old model of the creative team. As technology plays a bigger role in advertising, teams must adapt their thinking to this new media landscape. An entirely different collection of media touchpoints has replaced the dinosaurs, and technology cannot be ignored in the creative process.

Just as television was in the ’50s, digital is the new frontier today. How can technology and creative walk together hand in hand toward the sunset of perfect communication in the new digital age?

This can be done in very different ways, but to truly have a cohesive campaign, the change has to come within the creative part of the process – the place where the most naive and raw ideas are explored. Technology has to be part of every step of the process from conception to execution. It simply can’t be left to the end.

The collaboration between technologists and creatives can already be seen in other industries and can be mimicked to improve the output and evolution of advertising. One of the examples is the combination of computer scientists and animators to create digital motion pictures in Pixar. This company began with scientists whose names are now the standards in shading, modeling and rendering in 3-D and with animators from Disney’s Cal Arts University. These people created a new way of looking at animation, a way of simplifying it and a way to make it better, which led the creative process, not vice versa.

In a similar approach, forward-thinking advertising companies have started adding a “creative technologist” to their creative teams. Most companies using the new approach started as production companies, which have a deeper understanding of the importance of execution than traditional advertising companies.

One of the best examples of how advertising is taking a more technological approach to campaign building is Nike+. Using different parts of the new medium, which is the Internet, social networks and new GPS gadgets, they were able to create a concept and execution that became not just the ad campaign of the decade, but also a new sort of product.

New Creative Team

A brief holds in its limits a world of possibilities, especially now, when digital advertising is growing and changing at an incredible pace. The creative and technology teams already communicate with each other, but only at the point of production.

When you consider how much advertising grew after connecting the thoughts of art directors and writers, you should think how it can grow after adding developers. The creative will push the technology and the technology will inspire the creative.

As technology keeps changing, advertising will be able to keep up with it or even be able to spearhead and become purveyors of new technology.
Creativity + Technology: Walking Hand in Hand into the Sunset

What This Changes

So, what will this change? In a matter of group dynamics, the team might need a little time to adjust to new personalities. The human factor is the only difficult part in this ordeal.

In terms of creativity, having a technologist as part of developing a campaign will ensure the ideas that are pitched are doable, innovative and push the current state of technology and media.

Of course, it’s not the sole responsibility of a technologist to develop and judge digital ideas. Instead, we need to be thinking more collaboratively as a whole, suits to creatives and everything in-between, to understand the true context of opportunities available for us as marketers. As has been touted before, ideas can come from anywhere, and in the new digital world, it’s more important than ever that we build in opportunities to collaborate as a team to arrive at a true digital big idea.

The end result is the development of great digital work that rivals the traditional media formats, creates more cohesive integrated campaigns and builds the best possible brands for our clients.

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Watching TV, Tweeting and Chewing Gum

By Alex Kenney

If you’re reading this without consuming any other media at the same time, whether watching TV, checking your mobile device or listening to music – you are in the minority. A recent Knowledge Networks study showed that two-thirds of all Internet time is spent using another medium simultaneously, and this behavior has been steadily increasing over the past several years and across all platforms. As marketers, this has crucial implications on how we communicate with consumers.

The Modern Day Viewing Experience

With all the speculation around TV viewership declining as new technologies emerge, TV viewership has actually increased by 22 minutes per month over the prior year. What is changing is how we watch TV and what other activities and devices are competing for our attention, and ideally augmenting our experience, while we’re doing so. Media multitasking is behavior that we’ve seen for years, but the recent rise of smartphone penetration (currently 43% of the U.S. population and projected to continue rising) is taking this behavior to a new level. The ability to access information wherever you are and whenever you like becomes practically addictive. In fact, 7% of all digital traffic in the U.S. is consumed on mobile devices and tablets instead of computers. This presents an immense opportunity for marketers to connect with people on the go and on the couch, always thinking holistically about the entire experience from the consumers’ perspective.

And when looking specifically at TV viewership, 80% of web-enabled phone owners are mobile multitasking while watching TV, with nearly half of them doing so every day. Sixty percent of these multitaskers access the mobile web during commercials, 38% of which is related to the content being watched. This means there is great opportunity to better connect with the majority of viewers who are doing activities unrelated to the viewing experience. The more fun and unique ways that advertisers can encourage this behavior, the more likely viewers will be to engage with the brand. One of my favorite examples from this year was the Old Navy commercial that prompted viewers to use the Shazam app to identify the song in the spot and shop the look. That took it a step beyond just showing their website URL on the screen and tried to engage viewers on a different level. We should expect to see a lot more of this type of spot next year.

Know Your Target

As with any marketing strategy, knowing your target is paramount to determine if this 360° experience makes sense for your brand. Multitasking is happening much more frequently among Millennials than older consumers, and young women specifically are the most likely demographic to surf the Internet related to what they’re watching on TV (almost two-thirds of women under the age of 35 do so currently). And if your target skews upscale and therefore more likely to own a tablet, that opens up a world of opportunity to connect with your audience. Searching for content related to what’s on TV is much more prevalent among tablet multitaskers than laptop/desktop multitaskers.
Watching TV, Tweeting and Chewing Gum

Making It Social

Delivering real-time messages that connect viewers together socially, both through programming or advertising, gives an extra incentive to forget using that DVR. The water cooler is live, and anyone not participating is left out of the conversation. MTV’s Twitter Tracker allows viewers during the VMAs to go online and see what the stars were tweeting in real time from the audience, while also allowing viewers to tweet. This is a great example of a content provider that successfully gained control of the natural conversation happening and ensured not being left out of it.

Sporting events especially offer a unique opportunity to connect with viewers in real time through their additional devices. Football Sundays at my house typically include the TV broadcasting the event, an NFL app open on the iPad and a Twitter feed on the smartphone to follow along with sportswriters’ opinions and inside information. This is fantastic from a consumer perspective, receiving additional information about the event while enabling information about other games on at the same time. From a marketing perspective, we need to continue to always think about delivering messaging that ties the whole experience together on Facebook, Twitter and beyond.

Ultimately, the way we need to think about media consumption is from a multiscreen perspective. It’s not about reaching someone through mobile, and separately through TV, radio, print or online. It’s about how we can best connect all of these channels together simultaneously to ultimately provide a more engaging experience for the user around the content, as well as the advertising.

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Real Artificial Intelligence Has Arrived: Voice Recognition

By Colin Hogan

Some of the most futuristic portrayals of technology have involved conversations between human and machine. Think of Hal 9000 from “2001: A Space Odyssey,” C-3PO or even Wall-E. All of these well-known characters had the ability to understand, interpret and produce language. This capability has long been considered one of the key hallmarks needed to reach true artificial intelligence.

Voice recognition has existed in some form or another since the 1950s, starting with the “Audrey” system from Bell Laboratories, which could understand only numerical digits. Since then, many other companies have toyed with voice recognition, including Dragon Dictation, which launched the first speech recognition software for the PC. Soon after, the telecom industry began creating voice portals, which were intended to replace customer service representatives by giving information through voice-activated menus. Instead, they became a nuisance to cellphone users looking for answers about their overage charges.

Despite these advances, the ability to truly communicate with machines through conversation remained confined to the realm of science fiction.

The latest advances in voice recognition software have found a niche in the automotive department. Ford’s SYNC feature debuted in 2007 and has now become a popular offering across its product line. In last year’s Super Bowl, Chevrolet advertised OnStar’s ability to read live Facebook feeds aloud.

2011 was also the year when IBM’s Watson successfully defeated record-setting “Jeopardy” champ Ken Jennings, thanks in part to its exceptional voice recognition capability.

Even with all of these advances, the capability of technology to communicate through voice recognition remained spotty at best and not available en masse.

Along Came Siri

In October 2011, Apple became the latest company to jump into the voice recognition conversation when it launched the iPhone 4S. The most buzz-worthy feature of the newest iPhone was Siri, which became the first voice recognition software incorporated into the core of a smartphone.
Real Artificial Intelligence Has Arrived: Voice Recognition

Prior to the release of the iPhone 4S, Siri was available as a stand-alone app in the App Store. The technology that powered Siri was born from SRI’s CALO project, the largest artificial intelligence project in history. The project created technology that linked machine learning to natural language, which helped bridge the gap between how computers speak to one another and how humans speak to one another.

Two months after its launch, Apple acquired Siri for more than $200 million and withdrew it from the App Store.

What sets Siri apart is its uncanny ability to understand and interpret language. It is by far the closest thing to talking to a real person. It engages you in conversation, by asking for clarification, learning your habits and adapting to your needs. Siri recognizes context and can truly understand what you mean to say, not just what you literally say. For example, even something as seemingly simple as “tell my wife I’m running late” involves multiple processes. Within this command, Siri knows:

1. “Tell” means send a text message.
2. Your wife’s name and contact information, even though she’s probably not in your address book as “wife.”
3. “Running late” means you're not going to arrive on time and will be there soon, and not any other connotations, such as that you’re out jogging.

What’s Next?

It will be interesting to see if in the future, Apple chooses to open Siri to other platforms and expand its capability to other areas. There have also been rumors of a new Apple TV that will use Siri to replace the traditional remote control. At least for now, however, it’s likely that Siri’s impact will be limited to the iPhone.

In 2012, we can expect to see more third parties build apps that take advantage of Siri’s capabilities. So far, we’ve seen a utility app that lets you speak your to-do list and set reminders. But Siri isn’t just a productivity tool. Expect to see a new generation of mobile games and entertainment that are controlled by the sound of your voice.

Since Siri is embedded into the core of the iPhone, it can seamlessly integrate with its other features, such as geo-location and the gyroscope. These features will combine to create an exciting new generation of apps.

Voice recognition now makes it easier than ever for users to interact with their phones, and there are implications for the mobile category as a whole. For example, if Siri does not know the answer to a question, it often suggests a mobile search over the Internet. As more mobile users adopt the iPhone 4S (and subsequent mobile devices), we can expect to see a rise in mobile searches.

Local search will be especially impacted, since Siri’s results are determined by the user’s current location. So if you’re looking for a restaurant or business near you, you can only view those that are optimized for local search. And since Yelp recommendations are embedded in Siri’s responses, ratings and reviews will continue to play a role in local search.

Beyond Siri

Beyond just the iPhone, Siri’s success has ignited a deeper conversation about the role of voice recognition in all technology. Will we finally be able to move beyond keyboards, mice and even touchscreens? Is voice recognition as an interface here to stay?

This conversation extends well beyond features for an ever-expanding list of capabilities for smartphones. Siri represents a paradigm shift in computing. It will change how we interact with computers, much like how Apple revolutionized both the smartphone and tablet markets with its multitouch screens.

Siri started as a stand-alone app, but the vast majority of the population didn’t care until it became native to the hardware. This is another factor in the buzz around Siri. It isn’t just a feature, it’s a whole new interface. You don’t have to navigate to a specific app or phrase your question in a robotic tone. Voice can now be the interface for everything.

The possibilities are endless, and tech enthusiasts everywhere are hoping that this time, reality just might catch up with science fiction. Imagine incorporating voice recognition into every machine in your house.

Wake up to an alarm clock that tells you, on command, what the traffic is like on your route to work, so you know if you can afford to snooze for five more minutes. On your morning commute, talk radio becomes much more interactive, because the radio host is asking you questions and engaging you in a conversation to get you to wake up. When you pull up to the drive-through for lunch, the voice behind the speaker never gets your order wrong, because the machine interprets your voice perfectly.

That may sound scary to some, but it’s exciting to others. Will voice replace all other interfaces for technology? Or will it always be complemented by touch features?
Implications for Brands

How can brands create relevant customer experiences by incorporating elements of voice recognition? We’ve thought of a few examples.

You walk into a retail store and open your app, which greets you when you walk in and knows the layout of the entire store. The app taps into your location and speaks to you with a customized greeting. Once you speak what you’re looking for, the app can then direct you to the nearest aisle. If the product is out of stock, the app can ask you whether you prefer to drive 1.8 miles (it knows) to the nearest Home Depot that has what you’re looking for in stock, or if you’d rather buy it online and ship it to your house.

We also foresee mobile users using Siri to further connect the in-store experience to an online environment. For example, if you’re in a store and you see something you like, just say, “Siri, is that coat already on my Amazon Wish List? If not, add it.”

These are just a few of the ways that Siri can make branded apps come to life to provide a better consumer experience. The key to taking advantage of voice recognition is recognizing its place in the overall digital experience of the brand and not treating it as a stand-alone feature.

2012 will be the year when voice recognition goes mainstream. Expect to see even more functionality from Siri as it expands its databases and opens itself to third-party app developers.

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The Next Big Step for Digital: The Internet of Things Gets Real

By Brian Kress

2012 will be a year for Internet-connected things. The tipping point of a long lead time of theories is now a reality, because of new tools available to create a true set of a connected web of objects. The Internet of Things is a world where our physical objects are active participants in the global Web. Instead of a Web where the only nodes are people (as Web 2.0 generated), our things get their own voice.

The Internet of Things has enjoyed the luxuries of good press for over a decade. Much like the heralded “year of mobile” that was touted year upon year until someone (Steve Jobs) came out with something actually relevant, the Internet of Things has made Top 10 Trends lists like this one for several years now.

Why it’s relevant now, though, when before it was pontifical hooey, is that it has begun to actually materialize in a relevant way. The Internet of Things started with a round of inventors affectionately referred to as “hardware hackers” who tweaked open-source prototyping electronics like the Arduino, the open-source microcontroller board used to make cool interactive devices like switches and sensors to control physical outputs like motors and lights.

This expanded quickly into mobile device add-on elements like QR codes and near-field RFID tags.

But now, the applications in the Internet of Things have grown up to be less hacker-like, less obscure and very relevant to the Average Joe’s and Average Jane’s daily lives.

Craftsman Is Making Our Tools Sentient

The Craftsman AssureLink garage door opener is a great example. Recognizing that the majority of us forget whether we’ve closed the garage door every once in a while, Craftsman has built a tool for us to double-check without driving home. The Craftsman AssureLink garage door knows when it’s open or closed, and with a smartphone app allows homeowners to remotely control their garage doors from anywhere.
Kinze Is Automating Farming

Through what they’re calling the “Autonomy Project,” Kinze, a farming equipment manufacturer, has recently revealed a self-driving tractor and grain cart that harvest crops and can make “intelligent operational decisions in real time based on field conditions.”

Twine Is Connecting Your World to the Internet

A new group of guys out of the MIT Media Lab calling themselves Supermechanical has created a project called Twine. Twine is a product that allows communication between a device with a smart sensor that has a built-in thermometer and accelerometer, and an online interface that allows users to give simple instructions to the sensor. Examples of how Twine is being used now are things like alerting users when their basement gets below freezing and when their clothes dryer buzzes that it’s done.

All Brands Should Be Involved

The Internet of Things is changing, and it’s taking the world along with it. The technological capabilities that have heretofore been the stuff of science fiction are now a reality, and a new world is being created around us in which our things are joining our experience on the Internet.

A brand’s best and brightest opportunity is to rethink product functionality. Organizations should consider ways to make their product sentient, allowing it to speak one on one with your customers to make their experience easier. It may take an evolution in thinking about product functionality, but the extra capability afforded by simple connectivity is one that consumers will flock to when done right.
When I was in my early 20s, I took a part-time job selling cellphones at a kiosk in a department store. I was given a standard Nokia flip phone and told that one of the biggest selling features of the phone was its ability to connect to the Internet. This was the first time I had used something other than a traditional desktop computer to browse the Web, and my mind reeled at the possibilities. I got home and activated my new phone; to call the experience disappointing is an understatement. Sites were stripped down to their bare bones, and navigating with a number pad was a nightmare. Just Googling something became an ordeal, and the phone was quickly relegated to something I used only in times of utter boredom.

Even to the tech-savvy like myself, it wasn’t until the release of the first iPhone and iPod touch that an alternative to the standard browsing experience was something accessible. Apple’s new phone and MP3 player boasted a “full web experience,” and it delivered on its promise. Small talk was finally the open-book test I had always dreamed it could be. Checking sports scores in the bathroom while out on a date was a breeze. It was a glorious time for people as married to the Internet as I am, but it was quickly tainted.

It wasn’t long until the mobile redirect reared its head in my portable browser. Suddenly, this “full web experience” was being relegated and compartmentalized into quarantined URLs marked with an m.sitename.com or sitename.com/mobile. Web designers and developers, being forced to strip Flash content and streamline UI, started segregating their mobile traffic from the full versions of their sites. The community at large decided that slower download speeds and a smaller screen required sites to be redesigned and developed to accommodate the seemingly crippled devices. The practice of compartmentalizing the Internet started with mobile, but soon it carried onto tablets and other unconventional browsers. The new generation of web-enabled devices became the lepers of the web development community, but one small feature of the CSS3 specifications changed all that.

What Is Responsive Design?

Responsive web design is an emerging discipline in web design and development that takes a holistic approach to building sites that perform on mobile, tablet and desktop within a single experience. In a site built on the principals of the responsive web, the layout is framed within the context of the user’s viewable area and elements are intuitively refactored to meet the shifting user interface demands. To put it plainly, the responsive web is one that responds to the visitor’s web browser and device and serves an experience geared to their needs without having to redirect traffic to a different site entirely.

On May 25, 2010, Ethan Marcotte wrote an article for A List Apart entitled “Responsive Web Design” and it instantly became the buzz of every web designer’s Twitter feed. Almost immediately, people started emulating the practice Ethan advocated, most notably on Hicksdesign. In the year that followed, the “responsive web” blew up. Mediaqueri.es launched as a collection of the best examples of sites using the discipline. Ethan Marcotte published a book on the subject, also titled Responsive Web Design.

Media Queries: The Hero of the Responsive Web

Being able to use alternative layouts for devices and browsers is nothing inherently new. Front-end developers had been using separate layouts and styles for printers or Internet Explorer variations for years prior to the release of CSS3, but it was the ability to serve specific rules based on a browser’s size that was the real game changer in CSS3. Using media queries, developers no longer had to isolate mobile browsers and could apply specific rules to a site based on the resolution of the visitor’s viewable area. Whether this viewable area was defined as a small-screen device or merely a browser window tucked away in the corner of a larger screen, the developer could adjust accordingly. Media queries quickly became a powerful tool in the front-end developer’s toolbox.
Mobile: The Canary in the Coal Mine

It’s difficult to talk about the responsive web without discussing mobile, because mobile handsets were the first case in which casual consumers began exploring the Internet outside their desktop or laptop computers. Mobile certainly is a big part of the practice, but, ultimately, the goal of the responsive web is much more ambitious. To put it simply, the objective of designing and developing a responsive web is to create an Internet that works regardless of the user’s chosen platform or device. Since the early days online, the Web’s pioneers have seen the Internet as a repository of information that is potentially accessible by anyone, from anywhere, and the responsive web is the fruition of this promise.

One of my favorite browsers isn’t available on a desktop or a mobile handset; it’s on a video game console. The Nintendo Wii had an update shortly after its release that introduced users to “The Internet Channel,” where users could navigate the Internet through an Opera-based browser by using their controller. It was a really fun browsing experience, and Nintendo seeks to improve upon it with their next console, the Wii U, this time implementing touchscreen browsing capabilities. As a developer, I find this to be an exciting innovation, as it bridges the gap between desktop browsing and tablet browsing. But how do we react to innovations like this? How do we design and develop sites that have varying screen widths in the same experience? What about accommodating devices like the Kindle Fire or the Nook? As a mouse and keyboard become increasingly antiquated, being abandoned for multitouch, gesture and even voice-based input devices, how do we adapt our user interfaces?

Getting Started

When you’re finally ready to take the plunge into building a responsive site, there’s a lot to keep in mind. First and foremost, you need a general understanding of the ebb and flow of a responsive site. The responsive web demands a holistic approach and interdisciplinary communication. Currently, those who are most successful in the practice are those who can both design and code themselves, because the original intent of each element within a site can be interpreted as the developer sees fit. Success in the responsive web doesn’t have to come at the cost of good design, though. Nor does it require an art director creating three versions of the same site. In fact, this approach is the polar opposite of the core purpose of the responsive web.

To successfully design for responsiveness, the art director has to approach the layout as a series of parts contributing to the whole of a design. Elements are designed as individual pieces, fitting comfortably into one another, yet they do not depend upon one another. Headers, footers, theater space and copy blocks all need to have a sense of fluidity that feeds into the brand and brings the site to life.

Another key element is the adherence to a grid. This gives the developer a set of units and provides him or her with a bit of malleability between the core elements on a page. Grids bring a sense of compartmentalization to a site, which the practice almost demands.

Device Agnosticism and Future-Proofing: Why Responsive Matters

The responsive web marks the beginning of an exciting time for web professionals. Since the “Web 2.0” trend, starting around 2002, the Internet has evolved into a wholly different landscape. Before the start of Web 2.0, there was no iPhone. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Reddit hadn’t been launched yet, and Wikipedia was in its infancy (all are now among Alexa’s top-ranked sites). In just 10 years, the Web completely changed, and the responsive web marks another evolutionary milestone in Internet technology.

Device agnosticism is one of the principal benefits of developing responsive sites. Visitors are going to browse the Web in new and exciting ways in the years to come, and they will expect each site to work, no matter how we built it. Developing native applications for every new device isn’t efficient, and redirecting users onto compartmentalized variations of sites would be a nightmare to maintain. The truth is that the responsive web is a necessity to build an Internet that meets the needs of those using it. It’s not simply an issue of technology or having the latest and greatest in programming practices. The responsive web is the answer to the constantly evolving web user interface, and it offers a relatively future-proof approach to a constantly growing and evolving medium.

The Web isn’t known for standing still. Constant advancement is inherent, so changes cannot be attended to individually. Instead, adaptation must happen automatically. The responsive web demands that web professionals from every discipline, from design to development and beyond, be prepared not for where the technology is, but for where it’s going. It’s a practice of architecting while looking forward. If the Internet is the printing press of our age, the responsive web is the next leap forward. As web technologists, we stand on the precipice of advances in our industry unlike any before, and the responsive web marks the beginning of an exciting period for everyone involved.

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Buying Audio and Video

By Cheryl Huckabay

**Are you still developing separate television and streaming video strategies? Does your media flowchart lump streaming radio in the online section and show terrestrial radio as a separate line item?**

As broadcast consumption increases outside of television or radio, agencies and advertisers have to begin to think about developing comprehensive audio and video strategies. No longer can you think in terms of television and streaming video, you have to think of video as a whole. How can I best use my video assets to reach my target audience?

It’s the same with radio and streaming radio. What is the best compilation of audio formats that reflect your target’s consumption?

Consumption patterns are shifting. Consumers are using multiple devices at the same time. How many times have you been watching television and surfing the Web, whether on your laptop or cellphone? Consumption is also being shared between devices or completely shifting for some demographics. Adults 18-24 are 32% more likely to listen to streaming audio such as Pandora than to listen to a terrestrial radio station.

**Placement**

A video or audio asset traditionally produced for advertising is now being consumed on digital platforms, including connected TVs, computers, mobile phones and tablets in addition to traditional devices. Advertisers must take the time to understand how their specific target audience is consuming these assets and on which device it is being consumed, and allocate budgets accordingly.

The largest adjustment for advertisers between traditional formats and digital formats is how the media are purchased. On traditional formats, media buys are based on how a specific program delivers against your target. While you can also do this with digital formats, a lot of the digital video and digital audio inventory is purchased based on the audience. On the digital front, we are finding our target audience online (no matter what program or website they are viewing) and serving them a video asset. The majority of advertisers are still not comfortable purchasing an audience vs. programming in these spaces, but the entire industry is moving this way given the digitization of media.

2012 will be especially important in monitoring these strategies as we enter a political year with the potential of inventory becoming scarce or cost-prohibitive. In these situations, digital may be an important supplement for these buys to maintain specific reach and frequency goals.
Buying Audio and Video

Shifting Budgets

So how do we start adjusting our budgets to accommodate these shifting consumption habits? eMarketer reports online video spending increased 40% in 2010. Companies like Yume, in conjunction with Nielsen, have started to conduct studies to see what the appropriate budget levels are to shift from a TV budget to streaming video. They found that not increasing the budget at all, but shifting 5%, 10% and 15% of the budget from traditional TV to streaming increased reach across the board as well as frequency, GRP delivery and efficiency. Brand recall also increased significantly when video assets were used online and on-air.

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For audio, Arbitron reports almost 30% of consumers listen to online radio monthly. We see an even larger digital shift in audio between the true online format and mobile formats such as Pandora and iHeart Radio. Pandora reports over 50% of their registered members now consume audio on their platform through a mobile device.

We have several clients, such as Sewell Automotive Companies and Central Market, where we have dedicated 50%-100% of the audio budget to streaming onto a mobile device.

So, as you are considering where to place your video and audio assets, remember the following factors:

- Closely consider how your audience is consuming its video and audio content.
- Take time to understand the differences in delivery and purchasing across these different channels.
- Continue to monitor and test research that shows the appropriate budget allocations.

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