

Finding opportunity amidst media chaos

by Dan Logan

The world of mass media is in chaos. Newspaper circulation is nose-diving. Many television ads get TiVo'ed into oblivion. And the frontiers of the internet offer loads of opportunity, but so far, few advertisers have determined how best to optimize this media. So where should you advertise? How should you reach new customers?

These are questions we wrestle with daily at Trinity, helping our clients navigate the new media world. Should we focus in print, or online? Broadcast or blogs? How do we cross this landscape of broken old models and uncertain new ones?

The answers depend on your customers and your brand, but one thing is clear: there is opportunity in the chaos. It is there for those who are smart, resourceful and flexible in their approach, who do not follow the herd but carve out their own strategies, and who are consistent in what they are saying, even as they try different avenues through which to say it.

The old days were much simpler. On any given night, most homes tuned in to one of the three TV networks.

Understanding the pros and cons

At Trinity, many of our clients target their message to a small, well-defined group of people. Often, these are people with high value, with whom our clients want to build a relationship over time, through one-on-one interaction. Our goal is to start that relationship and dialogue and keep it growing. So it's important to communicate a consistent message across various media, and over time.

The good news is that there's no "right" way to do this any more. You get to chart your own course. No one has the map for today's media landscape and your competition has no better bead on the ideal marketing plan than you do. So resist the pitch for "the perfect solution."

The bad news is that the range of choices is bewildering, and each option has its appeal, and its drawbacks.

Take print, the old standby. Daily newspaper circulation may be declining, but it still has value: a settled, engaged audience that may be exactly the kind of people you're trying to reach. But newspapers are expensive, and they can be like using a shotgun for the job of a sniper rifle. Trade publications, city business journals and magazines offer more niche appeal, but also more limited audience, good for business-to-business advertising, but not necessarily for a broader reach.



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The right mix of passive and assertive media is required

If print ads are shrinking, web advertising is not. Targeted web ads can reach the right customers with incredible precision, but they can also get lost amid the clutter quite easily. Banner ads can be striking, and well-targeted, but web-surfers often tune them out as just more background noise. More assertive forms of marketing – from e-mail newsletters to text messaging – have their place, and typically require some expression of interest on the part of the consumer. But they, too, are easy to ignore amid the daily media shower. A mouse click and they're gone. Passive media, like websites, company blogs and printed material, offer you a chance to present deep, substantive information, the kind that makes sales, but they require customers to come to you, not the other way around.

For most service companies, the best approach is an integrated one. But how do you find the right mix? Here are some things to remember no matter how chaotic the landscape becomes:

- First, listen to your customers. Who do they trust? Where do they look for news and information? Be there. Part of advertising is attaching yourself to the credibility of the medium you're in and reaching the people who use it. So know who you'll reach where. Consider the messenger. The best media brands have value and credibility they've built up over decades by holding to high standards. People do still turn to them, and you may benefit from the association. Conversely, if a medium is not credible or accurate, or appropriate for your brand, advertising there can hurt. So choose partners wisely.
- Don't overspend. It's easy to do in this world of endless media choice. Know what you're trying to achieve, and how you want to achieve it. Calibrate your ad budget with the rest of your marketing efforts, and your entire business plan. Look for inexpensive ways to be heard. Too much time and money spent advertising is time and money not spent improving your product and serving your customers.
- Think about content. The line between traditional PR and advertising is graying but one thing is for sure – meaningful and relevant content is still appealing. Most service companies have strong perspectives and deep archives of information and data that they package up in newsletters and perspectives. In today's media world content can be an end in and of itself – through blogs, online video, or RSS feeds. It can also be a call to action in advertising, such as visit our site for the latest information on a specific topic of interest.
- And perhaps most important: Be flexible. Try something, learn from it, and try again. If one avenue is not working, it's important to recognize that and try another. If something is working, think about how other tools can complement it. And be prepared to shift as technology and tastes change, for they certainly will. This chaotic media world is indeed a world of opportunity. For companies that are smart about plotting a course through it, the rewards can be greater connection with potential customers, at lower costs. But the key is tailoring a plan that works for you.