

ADVERTISING COMMUNICATION AND INTERNET

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Key words: media, advertising, Internet, interactivity

Abstract. After invading all other medias (television, radio, press, cinematography), the publicity enters on Internet, inventing new forms, often seductive, sometimes ambiguous. Internet is a media unique, a very particular advertising support, which involves important changes in companies and people's behaviour.

1. Introduction.

Publicity is in huge progress on the world network because the specialists in this field have realized that this new media represents a great opportunity, due to the very high speed of the Internet (seven times higher than radio and television in the 50's).

In order to understand the great proportions of this phenomenon it is enough to take a look at the statistics provided by the Forrester Research and the International Advertising Bureau according to which the value of the publicity investments on the on-line advertising market in 2003 was of 15 billions of dollars compared to the situation of 1998 when the investments were of 2 billions of dollars.

Many factors are at play in transforming the media and marketing landscape, but the most important of these can be summed up as two sea-changing trends: a demand by marketers for greater accountability in the return they get for their ad spend, and a demand by consumers for greater control over their media and marketing experiences. Both of these trends have major implications for online marketing, and both are being driven in no small part by pressures that "new media" are putting on "old media."

The enterprises which carry on their activities internationally or globally are the most interested in the Internet advertising. The most implied companies are those which are selling a very specialized product or a globally standardized product (CDs or books, for instance). The global characteristic of the Internet mass-media perfectly corresponds to these world products and it assures a very efficient communication for their promotion.

Some brands, such as *Marlboro*, *DeBeers*, *Nike*, *Coca-Cola* and *McDonald's*, can confidently attribute their respective dominant market positions largely to their heavy investment in brand advertising. Some other brands, by contrast, such as *Starbucks*, *Google* and *The Body Shop*, have grown to prominence based almost entirely on PR and word of mouth and no conventional advertising[3].

Most companies, however, fall somewhere in between. They feel compelled to spend on advertising in order maintain competitive share, but their confidence in traditional measures of the effectiveness of their ads is moderate at best.

This quick evolution does not cause many reactions among the networks' customers. Taking as example the advertising posters, the internet publicity does not stop the "voyageur's itinerary". Less aggressive than TV spots it does not cut the broadcast of a movie. In what regards the efficiency of the message the internet is situated after the newspapers but before television.

2. A New Revolution in Communication

The telephone, the radio, the computer, the Internet...each revolution in communication has an impact on a generation and announces a revolution of behaviors. We can not live in the "Internet city" without borrowing some of its customs. When the man comes into contact with this kind of media based on interactivity he can not be satisfied just watching, he becomes participant. This should give birth to another way of learning, another kind of consumption and other customs in the labour field.

Publicity accelerates and translates what is going on all over the world. It verbalizes, short time ahead, the technological revolution and the social manifestation which are accompanying it. The Internet is not a technological phenomenon; it is in the first place a social phenomenon which is already anchored into daily life. The advertising communication is based on the fact that people do not recognize themselves in the modernity characterized by the Age of Enlightenment. We are living in a new world, where publicity proposes an optimistic way of perceiving things surrounding us; it is based on technology, which makes the old social contract seem obsolete.

The Internet is characterized by the four features of the direct marketing: definition of the target, interactivity, data collection and the possibility of making tests. The Internet is the only media where the reception of the advertising message can be immediately followed by the acquisition of the product.

In the case of Internet the connection is completely intuitive, affective, insignificant and, at the same time, essential. It is a perfect space for anonymity, externalization, personal recreation. The internet creates a hierarchy where each element is as important as the others.

The use of the Internet network as an advertising support is very recent. The users reject the advertisement when it is made on the model of "*push* information" (information diffusion) and prefer the publicity based on the model of "*pull* information" (when the customer can get by himself and directly the information he needs).

In front of this new media the traditional media are facing a double risk:

- the loss of some audience/readers who are satisfied with the information or the services they find on-line for free;
- the loss of some customers who prefer to address directly to the consumers or prefer to buy advertising space on the most busy sites on the Internet. For instance, the German press group *Burda*, elaborates sites which are used for free or almost for free and are mainly financed by advertising. We may notice the same situation in the health and touristic services.

The age when "Internet" column wasn't present in the communication plans is over. Now "the Internet must be part of these plans as any other media", states the Yahoo advertisement manager. A media as any other, although the only one which allows to pass immediately from information to communication and from communication to agreement.

2. The Specific Features of the On-line Advertising. Relations with other supports.

The technical possibilities of personalizing the advertising messages prove that the on-line services are unique. For instance, an on-line CD seller can propose to a record company to launch an advertising campaign having as target groups only the customers who have already bought a special type of music. The precision of this method and its commercial results are always superior to those addressing undifferentiated customers. Thus, the advertising communication with the help of the Internet is much efficient than the classic one.

It is true that publicity changes its appearance when it enters this new universe. If the motionless bands which firstly appeared on the computers' screens were nothing else

but a taking over of a concept efficiently used in newspapers and magazines, the advertisement has been subsequently invented in order to adjust itself to the world network. It borrows from direct marketing the possibility to directly address some very precisely motivated customers, and from "advertorial" the possibility to offer more information than with the help of a simple image or of a very short spot. Moreover, it is not limited to the presentation of a product's or service's characteristics, it delivers itself the service by combining the possibility of exhibition on Net with the possibilities offered by E-mail, forums and e-trade.

The objectives of on-line advertising are:

- to stimulate the research of the information provided by a site – *pull information*;
- to make traffic
 - in order to inform people of a new site;
 - in order to inform people of a new product on an existing site;
 - in order to build and maintain the notoriety of a company or of its brands.

Publicity does never run out of inspiration, it always explores new possibilities. Some companies (*NetAddress*, for instance) offers free e-mail services to private persons but with one condition: the advertising messages must appear at the end of each message. The *CyberGold* Company proposes to the customers whom it achieves advertising communication to pay according to how much the advertising banners have been visited, and in order to challenge the users it offers them points that can be ultimately changed into money, representing additional bonuses in case they are buying the products of its customers.

Although, the advertising banners does not represent but the tip of the iceberg. The real interest is to establish a connection with the site of the company who is advertising. For a site to be visited it is necessary to be visible and have a real value, in what concerns the services or the information it contains. It is necessary to create an application that can lead naturally the one who sees it to ask for the products of that brand. This kind of strategy has already been adopted by the big American companies. For instance, the site of *800 Flowers Company* offers the possibility to order flowers on-line and also to remind its customers their important anniversaries. Thus, ten days before the date specified by the customer, an electronic message reminds him that it is time to think at a bunch of flowers and a greetings card ... that *800 Flowers* certainly offers to deliver at the respective address...

Nevertheless, the on-line advertising is still limited compared to the other supports. This phenomenon can have the following explanation: in case when the advertising campaign is on TV there is a real correlation between the importance of that campaign and the sales. The Internet network has other criteria: it allows the creation of an image and a better contact with the possible customers. Moreover, the Internet assures the reactions of the customers and the very fast increase of the campaign's efficiency. However, on-line publicity is very often judged by not realistic criteria, as the view-through rate, which is less important and relevant than the conversion rate.

3. The Attention Economy

The latest tendency regarding the desire of companies to immediately take advantage of the Internet users' interest in a product or in the content of a site has been explained with the help of the theory of "attention economy", expressed in 1997 by Michael H. Goldhaber during a conference at Harvard University. Being sure that the laws of conventional economy are not in force anymore on internet, Goldhaber states that the classic law of demand and supply is not viable in a society characterized by the information overflow, where the number of sources is always increasing. The engine of the

present effervescence is to look for an “attention area” of the readers or customers taking into account the fact that the number of receivers is growing faster than the number of senders. Consequently, the attention, and not the information, would be the main product of virtual economy. According to Goldhaber, “if the Web and the Net can be viewed as spaces in which we will increasingly live our lives, the economic laws we will live under have to be natural to this new space. These laws turn out to be quite different from what the old economics teaches, or what rubrics such as “the information age” suggest. What counts most is what is most scarce now, namely attention. The attention economy brings with it its own kind of wealth, its own class divisions - stars vs. fans - and its own forms of property, all of which make it incompatible with the industrial-money-market based economy it bids fair to replace. Success will come to those who best accommodate to this new reality”[5].

The publicity specialists have concluded that starting from this theory, the best way to fight against the decrease of view-through rate of the advertising banners is to reward the users who are accessing them. Companies like *CyberGold* or *Netcentives's* have already adopted this formula with points that can be changed into money or products.

There are two attitudes of reserve regarding the attention economy.

The first one is that the theory “is still developing”. Goldhaber himself admits that many concepts are not very clear yet and there are many things to do, especially in order to solve the great contradictions with the principles of classic economy. On the other hand, even if the theory gives interesting explanations of the economical phenomena happening in the virtual space, it is very hard to provide trustworthy recipes for success. Indeed, the massive use of a technique by a great number of companies will cause the increase of informational overload of the audience and thus the technique will become non-operational.

This could mean that the sellers of the virtual space are condemned to always innovate? It is too early to state this, although at first sight it seems a logic consequence of this theory.

4. The Impact and the Efficiency of On-line Advertising

Publicity represents the matrix of any media. The value of the advertising spaces is an essential variable for the settlement of the advertising industry on the Internet.

The delimitation of the target represents an essential characteristic in order to understand the stakes of Internet advertisement. The Internet Marketing is perfect for the niche markets: Coca-Cola's promotion on the Internet is not important, but in the case of golf clubs it is best. As the user is the one who access the site it is sure that he will be receptive to the promotional message. The Internet opens the way of “one to one” marketing that is perfectly adapted to the customer's profile.

Nevertheless, we should mention that the targets of the Internet are not as wide as those of the conventional media. Especially in Europe the users of Internet are not from all social classes, so that not all companies can use the on-line advertisement communication, because they face the risk to not gain all the possible customers. In USA this problem is to be solved because already almost all people are going to have Internet access. Moreover, there are many companies which attract some target groups, which are not always on-line, and create special services for them. It is the case of *Procter & Gamble* Company, which sponsors sites dedicated to young parents, and thus creates a traffic composed of young mothers with very young babies.

As in the case of any other media, it is necessary to realize in the advertising communication too, a combination between “force” and “affinity”. Consequently, the promotion must be made on the sites with intense traffic, taking into account that it is

necessary to be compatibility between the target and the company's site. In order to realize the communication strategy, the companies must establish an optimal relation between the two fundamental criteria. There are many measuring instruments for this purpose and they are continually improved in order to provide the companies as much information as possible about its audience and its structure.

We should mention that many companies which offer on-line services propose identification questionnaires and then they offer "perfectly orientated and delimited" advertisement to the users of the site. This is the case of the great American on-line newspapers (*Wall Street Journal, Financial Times*), who offer their services for free on condition that a very complete form or the free e-mail service form should be filled (Hot-mail type). This technique has been adopted by the most important Romanian newspapers which condition the access to some services (archive, some interesting articles) by the filling of a questionnaire with personal and professional information. (*Adevărul, Capital...*).

The network knows everything about its users: their age, their profession, their salary, their tastes and customs. Their private life is not a secret anymore for the on-line sellers. By connecting to the Internet the user starts the "cookies" programs. Thus hundreds of pieces of information are stored in the program of that user and they represent an electronic "curriculum vitae" that can be subsequently used in marketing or publicity actions with a precise target. However, these methods represent an invasion of person's privacy and a violation of the confidentiality of the sent messages.

The Internet's **interactivity** appears on the advertising and editorial level.

- The advertising level

The achievement of an on-line advertisement campaign is necessary not only to increase the notoriety of a brand or of a product but also to offer interested users to that site. When the different advertising forms are accessed they send the user to the company's site. Here is the first level of interactivity, which has a great advantage over the traditional media: it implies a minimal action and consequently minimal obstacles.

The most researches show that the main problem regarding the interactive advertisement refers to the user's attitude. He does not access the advertising banner in order not to quit the page he is using, being afraid that he might not return to that page. In order to avoid this obstacle the specialists must pay more attention to the users and try to understand and anticipate their behavior.

- The editorial level

The second level of interactivity appears on the company's site whose advertising message has been accessed. The users will have enough time to read what he is interested in, in the order he wants.

The internet brings progressivity in the advertising contact: the user will search more or less detailed the company's site depending on his interest. Meanwhile, the company collects information capable of bringing new customers or at least an audit of the way in which the site has been realized. With the help of the questionnaires mentioned above the site will be able to select its audience from a qualitative point of view and to offer advertising messages dedicated to special and receptive users.

5. The Limits of Internet Advertising

The on-line advertising communication is still encountering many obstacles:

- The market is insufficiently known

The fact that the networks develop very fast and the Internet is totally decentralized does not make the users' number evaluation easier. It very difficult to establish the

size of the potential market, and this fact slows down the offer of services and content. The market is either not accurately divided according to the demographic, socio-cultural features or according to the consumption habits etc. The specialists in communication don't have yet all instruments necessary for the comparison of different advertising supports.

- The experience of the advertising creation companies is limited in what concerns the achievement of practical and attractive sites.

There are few companies capable of proposing authentic strategies in virtual trade, as the communication agencies are facing important restraints regarding direct sales and programming. The specialists in advertisement have been formed in the spirit of TV revolution and now it is difficult for them to integrate this structural revolution caused by the Internet coming out.

Both sides are blaming each other.

The companies are blaming the agencies for:

- The lack of skilled consultants who can tell them how can the technological changes help them reaching their high objectives;
- The lack of transparency regarding the prices. For the same service the proposals vary up to the triple price;
- The multimedia agencies have copied the classical schema of the communication agencies, emphasizing the creativity. Although, this is a wrong choice, in the first place because the creative process is limited on the Internet because of several constraints: the user can not be forced to spend his precious time waiting for the download of too complicated images and drawings. The true creation in multimedia field lays in the logic of traffic on the site, in rapidity, ergonomomy and in the arborescence administration.

Due to all these limits the companies have started to treat the assembly of their multimedia activities with the help of their own specialists.

The agencies are blaming the companies for:

- The fact that they do not know the market and the subject. The offer demands are not realized by the right persons, as they are asked to change the image of the Internet and in fact it is all about rebuilding the company's strategy.
- Too short terms.
- Lack of flexibility of the proposed projects.

6. Conclusions.

Publicity is sometimes so complex and so well realized that it is difficult for the simple user to make a difference between advertising sites and informative site.

In front of the sites more and more attractive and full of information the confusions between virtual equivalents of the advertorials and the information offered by the independent editors are very frequent. For instance, the site *Women's Link* is addressing women: advices on health, beauty, information about children care etc. It is financially supported by Bristol-Myers Squibb's laboratory and it invites its users to treat their headaches by taking a pill of Excederin that is produced in their own laboratories.

The message is distorted and the false information is going round, with no constraint. For all's sake, agencies', companies' and users', it is necessary that this "fog" disappear as soon as possible, without denying the fact that there exists the inevitable possibility of making confusions when a new media appears.

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