

Entertaining Trust

BY RODNEY MASON

HAWKEYE

This instant, all around us, web-based social networking and video media are exploding while the music and entertainment sectors are being pulled apart and recreated. Entertainment may or may not seem relevant to you and your industry, especially if you work in the B-to-B space, but it is. The entertainment industry is a bellwether and your business isn't far behind.

All of this change is a little like watching the first lunar landing. One small step for the internet; one giant leap for marketingkind. You see it happening, and understand it is amazing, but it's not clear what all this means to your business. Everything sort of looks the same. But there is an undercurrent you haven't yet figured out.

A little confused by the lunar reference? Jump on your computer and go to YouTube. In the search section, type in *First Moon Landing 1969* and experience that raw, infant technology churning away on the web.

If you like, send it to a friend. Just scale down and click on "share." While you're there, forward it to me (rmason@hawkeyeww.com) and describe the single word you felt when you viewed this video. I'll collect all the responses and shoot them back to all of you.

Maybe we can start an online networking group for marketers who are trying to better understand how social networking is changing the landscape. We can even create verticals within the network based on industry-specific challenges, and so forth. I'll create the group and hang the lunar video in it—and maybe

even post REM's song, *Man On The Moon*, to enhance our little abode.

We can make our first group-wide discussion around engaging the masses in social networking. That's easier said than done, because according to the Jack Myers *Media Business Report*, social networks are at the bottom of web sites on which U.S. adults are likely to pay attention to advertising. So, let's make sure we recruit a few folks from the entertainment industry, because entertainment sites are tops for garnering the attention of adults for ads.

I would propose three hypotheses for our group:

1) Marketing now must be based on building *trust*, not biased persuasion. Biased persuasion communication, as the majority of marketing is today, runs counter to group consensus, unless it is transparent and provides a balanced perspective.

2) Entertainment can help build trust faster because it connects emotionally and the feeling it creates can be shared with others in a community.

3) Entertainment companies have content to assist in building trust and now need to partner with your brands to overcome the drastic changes they're going through.

How widgets, webisodes and ecosystems can rejuvenate your brand.

WEBISODES & ECOSYSTEMS

To illustrate how trust can be incorporated with entertainment, imagine an e-mail blast with an offer from an auto-insurance provider. Most people would delete it immediately. If it had any appeal at all—because it was optimized to incorporate appropriate trigger words—the recipient would still check for trusted opinions before considering trying the service.

Now imagine the same insurance company promotes a rate-comparison site. On the site is a widget represented by our astronaut in a moon buggy, which is connected to a season's worth of television-quality mini-webisodes. When you click on the widget, you can watch the latest webisodes, featuring celebrities in a cameo situation comedy.

In one of those episodes, in the middle of a dream sequence, our astronaut has a moon-buggy accident and calls the insurance company to make a claim. The widget can also be posted on the viewer's networking site, so it can be shared with friends, customized, and then linked back to the rate-comparison site. Sound a little far fetched? We're developing similar webisodes right now.

We're also creating ecosystems for companies to enable their own customers to connect to one another. These tools are creating communities around brands without ever serving up an offer or selling message. The only branded messaging is in the form of solutions to questions and challenges discussed in the forums. Many of the solutions come from other customers and not specifically from the brand itself. These forums also have entertainment platforms as an enhancement to the experience.

Another example of entertainment driving viral awareness is Ben & Jerry's. They launched a cause flavor with a portion of the proceeds going to benefit *Rock The Vote*. We helped launch the flavor through a special online offer in partnership with iTunes. Any person who pledged to vote online and opted-in for vote reminder e-mails was awarded a free music download and a coupon toward the purchase of the new flavor.

In just a few days, we had more than 100,000 registered participants for a program designed to run for a few months. We also netted millions of online impressions from our alliance with iTunes. The cause objective was exceeded and the flavor became a top seller. *Rock The Vote* now has a voter registration widget that can live on your site. They also have a lot of entertainment supporters and are looking for partners like your brand.

I hear all the B-to-B doubters out there: "Entertainment has no place in our marketing." I beg to differ. We have used entertainment as a differentiator for a variety of B-to-B brands.

For Selective Insurance, we partnered with "The Worse Case Scenarios" team for a variety of interactive and roadshow messages that had tremendous impact on overall results. We've created networking environments and viral videos for Agilent Technologies. The viral videos used humorous short films to let scientists and lab technicians around the world know about new products that were coming soon.

BIG AND GETTING BIGGER

MySpace, which began as a "music-oriented network," is the leading social networking site with more than 60-million unique visitors a month, according to Nielsen Online. Facebook has made giant leaps and currently has more than 22-million unique visitors a month. But none of these numbers really reflect all the social networking that's going on. That's because personal networks outside of large portals are too massive to count.

Social-networking time now exceeds time spent on e-mail portals, according to comScore. A JP Morgan survey meanwhile reports that although social networking began as a Gen Y phenomenon, it is quickly making its way across all generations.

And what are our children doing online? Mediamark Research reports that playing games, doing homework, listening to music and watching videos are their top activities. Among older generations, households with children are adopting to social networking faster,

Social networking is quickly spreading across all generations.

according to a report conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for the American Marketing Association.

Speaking of children, trust and entertainment — let's go back in time for a moment. Imagine it's Saturday morning and you just turned on your new, gigantic 24-inch color TV, housed in a handsome, oak chest. About 15 seconds later, *The Jetsons* is beaming in living Technicolor.

Need a visual reference? Go back to YouTube search. Type in *Jetsons Setzer*. Take a gander at George Jetson's pad. See the giant flat screen in the media room complete with two-way communication? Judy can watch the *Jet Screamer* show whenever she likes. She can even talk to and share the show's star with her friends. See how excited they all are! They're all connected and part of something bigger.

The episode you just watched from the 1960s is a mash up with Brian Setzer Orchestra's *Jump, Jive and Wail*, as a promotion for the 2009 feature release of *The Jetsons*. Nice, subtle way to let us know it's coming out.

MUSIC INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Now, let's look more closely at our friends in the music industry. They put MTV on the moon, turned the iPod into a global must-have and have been dragged against their will to the forefront of the technology revolution. Because of that resistance, the music industry is contracting, as it has not adapted quickly enough to the social networking and file-sharing revolution.

It's easy to say the music industry should have seen the need for change. The business was based on album sales. Today, thanks in part to iTunes, it is driven by less-profitable singles. Radio was the engine that drove exposure for new music, with MTV and movie soundtracks serving as rocket boosters. The core youth audience that has always driven the business isn't listening to radio or watching as much TV. They seek out the music they like on the web and share it with their peers.

The core audience lost their trust not in music artists, but in the labels that refused to provide a platform conducive to their technological preferences. Then, when they worked around the industry through file sharing, the industry responded by filing lawsuits

against their core customers for copyright infringement, reducing trust further.

The music industry had the world on a string and very little interest in partnerships with marketing folks like us. They were too busy printing money. Now they need partnerships to provide exposure for their artists and to grow their distribution since losing 1,500 music-based stores in the last few years.

How did this happen? *Social networkers wanted it to be this way and they amassed the power to make it happen.*

You see, music fans are so emotionally connected to music that they tend to believe it is *theirs* and not the creator's. That's because it is the soundtrack of their lives. Music has a funny way of opening up those little movies that run in our minds, remembering impressionable moments in our lives — sort of like YouTube, only more personal.

Don't you absolutely wish your product made that kind of connection with your customers? What if the iPod purveyed information instead of music and movies? Remember Newton — Apple's first attempt at a handheld device? If you don't, go to Google and type in *Top 10 Apple Products Which Flopped*. It's number one on the list.

Had the Newton incorporated music and movies, it would have been number one on the most *successful* list. Music turned a Newton flop into an iPod success. Imagine what it can do for your business.

NEW BUSINESS MODELS

Entertainment is one of the first industries being forced to find a completely new way of doing business. Blockbuster is losing out to Netflix. Recording artists are becoming their own publishers. Tour management groups who can physically reach audiences at experiential events are becoming labels. Labels and studios are becoming data managers and deal brokers with marketers like you.

Feature movies and games are becoming heavily dependent upon online buzz for big opening weekends (Google *IGN*). And the primary issue in the screen writer's strike? It was that television content is moving rapidly to the web. This is due, in part, to the fact that more than 65 percent of video content watched on the web is now professionally-produced TV programming, according to ChoiceStream. For

young adults, viewership of TV content on the web is even higher.

ChoiceStream also reports that family and friends and web site recommendations (social networking) are a key driver of viewership. More than half of all web videos watched are recommended or referred first, while more than half of all adults watch video on devices other than TV (more than two-thirds for the 18-24 audience).

As you're planning your new communication strategy, think about all the ways your customers interact with your brand and how those interactions can be enhanced. Enhanced customer experiences are the key to unlocking social networks.

Providing information and experiences that can easily be shared with peer groups and open and transparent communication will win every time over forced "propaganda" messages. Entertainment that reinforces a brand message or customer situation can help you build bridges faster.

When reviewing touch-points to enhance customer experiences, you also need to begin to consider handheld devices seriously. Next year, the internet is going to be distributed wirelessly over the current TV spectrum in the United States and social networking will more aggressively move onto handsets enhanced with GPS tracking.

Think the iPhone—only better. Skype, which already enables calling over the internet from handheld devices, will be able to do so on a much broader scale with the broader wireless spectrum. That means more people will move toward web-enabled products like the iPhone.

And because all current handheld devices outnumber computers 3-to-1 globally, you can imagine the impact that handhelds will begin to make on social networking, television viewing over the web and general web video content viewing. That's all the more reason to be thinking about entertainment incorporated into your messaging. Go to skype.com and slingbox.com for a quick download on the handheld future.

PAGING WARREN BUFFETT

The entertainment industry was hijacked when it did not comply with the wishes of the social networks. This can happen to you if your customers lose their trust and faith in the way you conduct

Entertainment that reinforces a brand message builds bridges faster.

business. Sure, if you're hankering for a Peanut Buster Parfait, Warren Buffet's Dairy Queen can offer you a tempting message, and get you to make an impulse purchase. But that's because you already trust Dairy Queen.

Mr. Buffet's Geico might also send some messages your way. You've probably seen the Caveman's Crib. If not, take a look at cavemanscrib.com. It's an excellent example of connecting with an audience,

providing entertainment they can share with a friend and making a brand more endearing and a little more trusted.

Anybody who actually considers Geico will still check sources to determine if it is a good product. But the inclusion of entertainment, sometimes celebrities and content from the past—or the Caveman and the talking Gecko—all help expedite the trust-building process.

Warren Buffet is the second-richest person in the world, and he earned his fortunes by growing companies. He and his business are the embodiment of trust. He lives a less-than-lavish lifestyle (well below the Caveman's) gives back substantially to charitable organizations and makes sure his companies do what they promise they will do. Many of his leading brands are embracing social networking and entertainment.

I'm pretty certain Warren was watching the lunar landing in 1969 and that he understands the powerful things that can be achieved when you bring people together for a higher purpose. Warren, if you're reading this, we need you in our network!

Trust, entertainment on the web and social networking will continue their progress with or without our proactive involvement. It's imperative we all connect, share, build trust, entertain, listen and adjust, in real-time, with our customers. If we don't, they will be doing it without us. ■



RODNEY MASON is chief marketing officer and managing director of **hawkeye** (rmason@hawkeyewww.com), providing digital thought-leadership in the entertainment, communications, CPG, B-2-B, technology and financial services sectors.