

Digital media's upside outweighs any downside for brand identities.

Branding 10101

How much are digital media really changing brand identity?

Jane Boulware: Digital media are changing brand identity significantly. Brand identity is about the relationship that people have with a brand, and digital enables brands to create a richer, more relevant relationship on their own terms.

Digital makes an even bigger difference generationally. If we're looking at digital natives—like my son who thinks texting is talking—we wouldn't even be talking about "digital media." We're getting to the point where it's not digital marketing anymore, it's just good marketing.

If you look at how Microsoft is going to market for small business, for example, our approach is almost exclusively very targeted and digital. Microsoft has to reach a very broad group of individuals and independent companies. The opportunities that digital provides to build our identity and to scale in a meaningful and relevant way is enormous.

Lakish Hatalkar: When I think about a brand's identity, I think about what the brand stands for in terms of its purpose, functional and emotional benefits, character,

and so forth. I don't know if digital media are necessarily going to change that by itself.

A brand's identity will be shaped via core brand-building strategies. Digital can inspire and enable strong brand building strategies, but not compensate for weak ones.

However, how consumers perceive the brand's identity can be

Twix, whose identity is all about "the pause moment." The videos reinforced the cool factor for Twix and allowed us to get closer to the 12-34 segment.

We also involved consumers by asking them to choose how the storylines ended. It enabled Twix to continue to be relevant to consumers by being where they are and

We're getting to the point where it's not digital marketing anymore, it's just good marketing.

JANE BOULWARE

reflected in how the brand chooses to engage with the consumer, especially when the consumer is initiating the contact. It provides an opportunity for the brand to respond in a very true and authentic way that can change the consumer perception of the brand identity.

Carole Walker: I don't see digital media changing brand identity unless that is the brand's strategy; I think of digital media as yet another platform on which to connect consumers to the brand.

For example, a couple of years ago we created an ongoing series of online video episodes about

involving them so that they become part of the brand experience.

Mitch Blum: The emergence of digital media means that brand identities can no longer hide behind clever marketing. We're entering a very exciting new age of transparency. This is great news for strong, honest brands and bad news for shoddy products and charlatans.

Where is the greatest potential of digital media to build brand identity?

Boulware: In business-to-business marketing, you often go through

A ROUNDTABLE FEATURING

Jane Boulware
Microsoft

Lakish Hatalkar
Novartis Consumer Health

Carole Walker
Mars Chocolate North America

Mitch Blum
Marketing Drive

partners or third parties, not unlike the way you go through retailers with consumer product. The opportunity with digital is that you have extended reach and you can syndicate your message or content. You can use webcasts, webinars and do virtual events as never before.

When we launched Windows 7, for example, we did a virtual event where we broadcast out of San Francisco, live around the world, via T-1 lines, which was inexpensive. We had a special invitation where people opted in and could submit questions online to Steve Ballmer and others. The excitement around that was phenomenal.

Hatakarkar: The place where digital has the greatest potential to build a brand's identity is in giving the consumer unprecedented access to the brand on their terms.

Digital media are an opportunity for the brand to establish and enhance a relationship with the consumers, if that is one of its core brand-building strategies. Specifically, it allows for a customized relationship based on what the consumer wants versus what the brand would like to impose.

For example, the only relationship some consumers may want is the right product at the right price while others may want something more in terms of education or support.

Walker: The greatest potential right now is in social media. Associating your brand with a fan community on a large social site like Facebook can only help reinforce the brand identity. It's a great way to link people and is another positive contribution that the brand can make.

M&M'S fans like to get together and talk about colors or their favorite type of M&M'S, for example. Or, they might talk about NASCAR because we are a big NASCAR sponsor. These are friends coming together, enabled

At Microsoft, we have 6,000 marketers who can engage in activities and generate campaigns. If you have one employee doing what they think is a good thing, but "going rogue" based on the immediacy of digital, you have the opportunity

Digital can inspire and enable strong brand-building strategies, but not compensate for weak ones.

LAKISH HATAKARKAR

by M&M'S, and they end up feeling positive about the brand as a result.

Blum: I use social media to describe the conversation aspect that's enabled through the technology, where digital is more about the tools rather than the behavior. What we have to realize is that digital and social media are just technologies that enable normal human behavior.

Instead of looking at demographic groups, you can talk to people based on their passions and their interests, which lines up a little closer to brands and products. People definitely have a deep, emotional attachment to products and brands that they love and there's great potential in digital media to build on that connection.

What's the greatest threat of digital media to erode brand identity?

Boulware: Digital's greatest potential is its immediacy and the ability to make a connection. However, that same immediacy is also one of the greatest threats to erode brand identity.

to impact the brand identity, intentionally or not.

Digital can take us to places we've never been before, that enable hyper-targeting, and to extend our reach unlike ever before. But while digital's immediacy can help build brand identity by making it more relevant, it also can help to erode brand identity if it's not well-managed.

Hatakarkar: It can expose weaknesses in what the brand is and what the brand stands for because, once again, you're not communicating on your terms, you're communicating on the consumer's terms. If you fundamentally have issues or flaws with who you are, there is a huge opportunity for those to be exposed very quickly.

Walker: Once you give consumers access to the brand's assets they could manage the brand in a way that could be harmful.

However, we had an example recently where someone joined the M&M'S Facebook group and started speaking about the brand in a negative way. The M&M'S Facebook community actually got together and asked that person to leave.

The community joined together because they had a common cause that was “we are M&M’S fans and you don’t belong here.” That’s ultimately what we would want to happen, but it’s not something we can control 100 percent.

Blum: One of the greatest problems is that if these are sincere, one-to-one relationships, it’s really hard to scale those relationships. How many relationships can one person manage before they are just managing the flow and it’s not a real relationship?

There’s also an issue with return-on-investment, especially with public companies that need to deliver short-term results. Digital media are very much a long-term play. There is an unclear ROI in the short-term and this space requires a real commitment of time, money and effort.

use phones and the immediate connectivity, I would still say yes.

I went shopping with a friend this weekend and she used her phone to compare prices in real time. Mobile phones not only change behavior but also the experience with the brand.

Look at *American Idol*. Being able to vote on the national winner via texting has enabled viewers to go from passive to active engagement.

Hatakar: All of us have an opportunity not only to provide consumers with something of value, but also to become valuable to them. A lot of times brands will really focus on providing value, which is coupons and things like that, but that’s just the starting point.

We have to start thinking about becoming more valuable to

is certainly one of the early opportunities to leverage mobile today.

Consumers who buy smart phones engage more often with social media than those who don’t have smart phones.

All of these digital platforms are changing the game, which is becoming more about convenience. But we shouldn’t let any digital platform overwhelm us because it’s just another way to connect with consumers.

As long as we’re thinking about digital media from the consumer’s perspective, that part of the game doesn’t change that much.

Blum: Yes and no. “Yes” in the sense that penetration of usage in smart devices will definitely continue to grow and the usage will become normalized. But “no” in the sense that consumers resent advertising being pushed on their devices. That makes people furious.

In addition, using mobile phones to scan bar codes for special offers, which is something people might want to do, is too complicated. It has to be easier to use. And then once it’s simplified, people are going to have to change their behavior.

It took 10 years for people to get comfortable with using their credit card online. It’s going to take a long time for people to become comfortable with paying for things with their mobile phones or to seek out relevant advertising messages on them.

Mobile is a great opportunity in a lot of ways, it just has to be easier to use. There has to be a clear benefit and it certainly has to have no cost to the consumer.

As long as we’re thinking about digital media from the consumer’s perspective, that part of the game doesn’t change that much.

CAROLE WALKER

In a weird way, control of content is a great thing that digital and social media bring to the table, but loss of control of your brand’s messaging is the big downside.

We can only seed the conversation, give it a gentle nudge, and then hope that it goes in the right direction.

Does the mobile phone represent a game-changer for brands?

Boulware: If I look at my sons, the answer would be absolutely yes. If I look at how older consumers

consumers. This starts with a real understanding of what consumers think is valuable and being able to meet those needs.

That’s where mobile can really play a big role because that’s a contact point that goes with the consumer where they are and can be valuable to them in a variety of ways. Understanding that aspect and figuring out what role brands can play is the key.

Walker: Right now the penetration of smart phones is just not great enough to be a game-changer, however it will be. Social media

Which brands have made the best use of digital media to build their identities and why?

Boulware: For me, the best users are Demi Moore and Ashton Kutchner because they have

that's been running for a long time that lets consumers see the world through a baby's eyes, both online and offline. It's their way of communicating that they understand babies and have their best interests in mind.

Walker: M&M'S has done a tremendous job using digital media to reinforce its connectivity and its

What we have to realize is that digital and social media are just technologies that enable normal human behavior.

MITCH BLUM

become synonymous with Twitter. What a great way to build a brand on the wings of technology! How relevant would Ashton and Demi be if it weren't for the technology?

In the business-to-business space, SpiceWorks is a great example of creating online communities for small businesses. It's a community where people connect, share information, learn best practices and so on. We've created incredible momentum for Windows 7 on SpiceWorks because the ability to hyper-target and reach out is really phenomenal.

Hatakark: Triaminic is a Novartis brand that has done a really good job with digital media by capitalizing on the notion of influencer marketing, ranging from professional, to other trusted sources, including other consumers. It is all about building trust and enabling those who trust the brand to express themselves.

Pampers also cracked the code on what moms care about and the role brands can play in their life. They've got a broad campaign

role as an entertainment platform. M&M'S is inherently social and it's a cultural icon, which really requires the brand to leverage online in every possible way. It's just a natural place for M&M'S to be.

We have come up with a program called "The Most Colorful Fans of NASCAR" which allows NASCAR and M&M'S fans to connect, vote and be involved with the brand. NASCAR fans are uploading pictures of themselves or pictures of their friends onto the NASCAR website. Skittles also has more than 4.6 million Facebook fans.

One of the greatest opportunities is for the sales force, along with brand management, to better leverage social media with retailers. Retailers are out there experimenting. A lot of our major retailers are investing heavily in digital as well as social. That's the next place where brands really should be thinking about investing their time.

Blum: Levi's has done a good job by fully integrating Facebook's "like" button into its online store. They



JANE BOULWARE is general manager of the U.S. Windows client commercial business for **Microsoft**, responsible for marketing and revenue performance. Jane previously was vp of marketing at Kimberly-Clark.



LAKISH HATAKARK is head of integrated marketing, communication, packaging and innovation at **Novartis Consumer Health**. Previously, he held a variety of marketing leadership roles at Procter & Gamble.



CAROLE WALKER is vice president of integrated marketing communications at **Mars Chocolate N.A.** She was previously a director of digital advertising and CRM at Kraft.



MITCH BLUM, vice president of strategy and planning at **Marketing Drive**, provides strategic direction that helps brands realize their full potential. He can be reached at mitch.blum@marketingdrive.com.

have about 310,000 fans on Facebook, and if you go to their store, you can see how many people like each individual item. Or, you can log in with your Facebook password and see what your friends and people in your network liked.

Ultimately, it's useful content and applications that help brands build deeper relationships with their consumers. Entertainment is great, but utility is definitely much more important. There is definitely that fine line between entertaining content and useful content. And brands have to figure out the right balance. ■