



The Pocket Knife Effect

By: James Mundell



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Too many tools can overcomplicate and under deliver. How to maximize your ad spend by sharpening your media mix.

A little over a year ago a curious phenomenon took place in newsagents and corner shops across the UK. After an absence of four years Cadbury's Wispa bars, withdrawn because of poor sales and production problems, suddenly re-appeared on the shelves and instantly became the most successful chocolate bar product 'launch' in decades. More surprising still was the fact that the communications supporting the launch consisted only of the exploitation of social networking sites such as Facebook and Bebo. These sites were used to seed rumors and to initiate a 'spontaneous' consumer led campaign demanding the resurrection of the old favorite. Within no time more than 14,000 Wispa lovers had formed nearly 100 Facebook groups, generating coverage in over 300 news items with more than 54 million opportunities to see or hear the story. At a fraction of the cost of a traditional above-the-line product launch campaign, the Wispa social networking launch was a brilliant example of how clever use of a specific channel of consumer communication was able to produce stunning sales results.



The central conundrum of marketing has always been how best to get a particular message, or brand idea, across to potential customers. This is a puzzle that has increased in complexity over time as the array of potential consumer touchpoints has ballooned. The marketing community has not been slow to embrace the opportunities offered by this swelling media landscape and the early years of the new millennium have been marked by a boon in advertising creativity, frequently driven by the unique aspects of newly available media channels.

The Wispa example perfectly illustrates one of the central findings of advertising research from the past couple of years: *Thanks to consumer empowerment and participation, new media can be effective.*

Today, we increasingly see big communication ideas being born within the digital space and taking advantage of the intimacy this area can create between consumers and brands.

The boom times of the past decade have given advertisers license to indulge in experimental uses of different media combinations. But things are different now. As marketers are compelled to pull in their advertising reins, the demand for exceptional creativity in new campaigns is greater than ever and is being accompanied by an equally robust demand for improved media efficiency. What else has research taught us about the effective deployment of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)?

First, there is one fundamental truth about advertising that never seems to change: *Great creativity always underpins a great campaign.*

Back in 1886 when A&F Pears invested in a picture called 'Bubbles' by Sir John Everett Millais, the richest and most popular painter in late Victorian England, it was an inspired gamble on exceptional creativity, creating uproar at the supposed prostitution of art, but in turn moving advertising to a much higher plane. The soap brands were still at it more than a century later when Dove decided to re-invent the whole concept of beauty, startling consumers around the world by showing that the female form can be as alluring at 50 as it is at 20. That Dove successfully employed all modern media channels in sharing with its audience this engaging truth was much less important than the idea itself. Once the images of the "Campaign for Real Beauty" had been created, they were sufficiently powerful to come alive through any medium.



A second important lesson is that marketers should not get carried away by the attractive assortment of media opportunities at their fingertips: *When it comes to media selection more is not always better.*

When Cadbury identified the chocolate biscuit category as a key market for growth, it had the resources and know-how to launch its new 'Cadbury Milk Chocolate Digestives' with full marketing fanfare. But instead of choosing this route they developed a single TV ad, 'Thank You', which brought to life the joy experienced by customers as they realized that two British favorites – the digestive biscuit and Cadbury's chocolate – were now available together, 'Oh Happy Day' playing rousing in the background. The American advertising Hall-of-Famer James Randolph Adams noted back in the first half of the last century that "The most common trouble with advertising is that it tries too hard to impress people." The impressive thing about the Cadbury Chocolate Digestive approach was the focus and simplicity with which the idea was connected to its target audience, avoiding unnecessary creative or media wizardry and providing a significant boost to the entire Cadbury biscuit range.



The internet boom of the late nineties tempted marketers to fully embrace the IMC concept, and the rewards on offer to those who used it well were substantial. But today it is incumbent upon marketing teams to take a step back, cast a critical eye over the hits and misses of their integrated campaigns and isolate those elements that were true communications successes. Weeding out weak links in the media mix and identifying a narrower mix for new campaigns will be central to finding the necessary efficiencies in advertising spend.

Embracing the idea that each individual medium can be highly effective in isolation (depending on the task at hand) may present a barrier to some marketing teams, especially those used to allocating sizeable budgets, but it may also be a mental re-adjustment that breathes life into a whole new movement of focused creativity.



Despite the success of the Cadbury Digestive ad, single medium campaigns are never likely to oust integrated campaigns as the marketing approach of choice, particularly for mass market advertising. The latter simply offers too many opportunities to

enliven a campaign idea or to extend its reach. Witness the launch campaign for Microsoft's Halo 3 video game which incorporated every consumer touchpoint known to marketing, plus some original ones of its own, including street murals, postage stamps, fictional testimonials of characters within the game, 'commemorative' street plaques and documentary films on its making. Importantly, these were not simple campaign add-ons whose only role was to minimally extend reach, rather they were a natural progression from the brilliantly simple idea of 'How to honor a hero', in this case Master Chief, the main protagonist of the Halo universe. In the real world, the creation of a monument would be the ultimate honor. This is what Microsoft did for Master Chief. A live monument to the great battle was meticulously created, allowing people to visit either in person or online, and from which all the other 'honors' would be born.

Halo 3 was a brilliant success, but should not be seen as a universal blueprint for marketing. Through recognizing the power of individual media to achieve specific responses, marketers should feel inspired to make each element of their mix accountable and avoid the gratuitous extension of campaigns to cover particular media simply because they are there. And while the emerging media are intriguing and can be effective it remains evident that: *Traditional media channels are not dead.*

They offer great opportunities for connecting with consumers in specific ways.

Carphone Warehouse knew they needed to revitalize the idea of TV program sponsorship if their partnership with TV talent show X-Factor was going to pay for itself. Rather than using standard idents, Carphone Warehouse used the spots to direct the audience to a website where they could 'audition' for themselves, send in their recordings via their mobile and potentially see their performance set to an animation. This approach not only tapped directly into the nature of the show and got people using their mobiles, but actively engaged its target in a way that most broadcast advertising cannot.



Having achieved huge success with large businesses, Vodafone found itself in a relatively weak position amongst smaller enterprises. Research indicated that this audience would be most effectively engaged at a local level. In the UK, 'local' is the heartland of radio, so the 'Vodafone Small Business Challenge' was launched on local stations across the country with a tiny budget of less than £250k, aiming to raise financial support from small businesses to support local community projects. Unglamorous, but in tune with its audience and exceptionally effective, this campaign increased small business sales by 55% and customer preference by 16%.

Under pressure from the burgeoning use of e-communications Royal Mail used Direct Mail to illustrate its own effectiveness and uniqueness to Senior Marketers who were under-spending on DM. Royal Mail argued that unlike electronic communications, DM can engage all five senses, building on Ipsos ASI's research that shows *the more senses a brand or its communications can engage, the more impactful or successful it tends to be.*

The letter itself was crafted from fine chocolate, creating an instant multi-sensory appeal, resulting in more than 90% of the mailout being opened and 70% of these senior executives planning to take action as a result. And not just eating the mailout!



Each of these examples demonstrates a strategic use of media that allows the communication concept to work effectively but without stretching it too far. Not all campaigns can be this focused, but it does highlight a further key learning about integrated campaigns: *The more effective campaigns assign a strategic objective to each element of the media mix.*

Research conducted by Ipsos ASI has suggested that once a campaign idea has been represented across four or five different media, there tends to be little to gain in extending it further. The optimum number and mix of touchpoints will vary significantly from brand to brand, from idea to idea, and from one marketing objective to the next. Judiciously executed research, either during campaign development or as the campaign unfolds, can identify those elements that are not additive to its overall impact and provide direct guidance on where costs can be cut without harm. As always in advertising, it is the power of the core idea that is most likely to determine the success or failure of a campaign. The choice and range of media should be a natural progression from the idea itself. If that idea requires twisting or stretching to fit a pre-identified set of media outlets, the chances are that it will lose its oomph.

In 2006 Victorinox, manufacturer of the original Swiss Army knife, produced 'The Giant', a knife that contained every type of blade and function ever incorporated into one of their products. It contained 87 implements, had 141 individual functions, and cost a smart \$1400. It showcased the sum total of what a pocket knife could achieve and was undeniably an impressive piece of equipment. It was of course useless, the effectiveness of each implement compromised by the close proximity of its 86 neighbors. Its impressiveness was limited to the idea that such an implement existed at all. Today's media toolbox is similarly impressive, although unlike 'The Giant', its ultimate usefulness increases in proportion to the skill of the user. The most cost efficient campaigns in the next five years will be those designed by marketing teams who truly know how to select media for their individual merits, combine those that gel in support of a great brand idea, and discard those whose function is in any way ambiguous.



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