Deliver on the Promise of Cross-Media

By Jeffrey Stewart

Your ability to help clients transition to more engaging, customized, personalized marketing across all media—including social media—may very well determine your future as a marketing services provider. But does your sales force have the tools to sell it? Can you deliver it? As your company adds more complex communication services to its traditional set of solutions, keeping your sales force up-to-speed on the terminology and possibility of cross-media communications is critical to effective integration. The key to delivering these new services lies in not only understanding the dynamics of the marketplace but also in understanding why cross-media works.
Shift Happens

Before the industrial revolution, people bought their goods locally. Shopkeepers knew their customers by name and often had a personal relationship with them. Because of this, stores could cater to the wants and needs of their customers and stock the right mix of products and services for their audiences. In the age of mass communications, companies began using new channels and technologies like newspapers, magazines, “spray-and-pray” direct mail, radio and television. What they lost in personal relationships, they gained in their ability to reach more and more people with their messages.

With the digital revolution, there has been a return to the days of one-to-one communications—albeit a hyper-connected one-to-one on steroids. Today, enhanced, personalized communication architectures are making it easier for marketers to develop, package and deliver relevant, timely information. In fact, organizations can now customize content for all of the audiences they need to reach—customers, employees, business partners and other stakeholders. Instead of one-to-many, digital communications allow us to return to one-to-one.

This paradigm shift also has changed the relationship dynamics between consumers and companies. New communications channels have opened up and returned power to customers to interact with companies and brands when, where and how they choose.

One of the biggest shifts is the ability to interact through social media. Smart marketers have recognized the value of social media as a marketing tool. Within these communities, there is a tremendous opportunity to share information, create dialogues, collect information (crowd sourcing), make recommendations and influence the audience.

While the channels for communicating with customers and prospects have expanded, advertising spending has remained relatively flat. Obviously, something has to give. Globally, the trend has been a decline in traditional mass media spend and an increase in dollars budgeted for interactive media, such as online advertising, mobile and social media. In the United States this year, digital media is predicted to overtake print for the first time.

As your customers look to you for ways to integrate more interactive media into their marketing campaigns, you not only need to deliver on the promise of cross-media but also to effectively sell it.

Know It

When I’m speaking to audiences about cross-media or technology in general, I like

The digital revolution is enabling the return of a one-to-one marketing model
to relay something Albert Einstein once said. “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it.” If you don’t understand cross-media, how can you sell it?

So what is cross-media? At its core, cross-media is a technology and communications strategy that allows companies to cultivate relationships with their audience. Recognizing that mass, one-way communications cannot fulfill the need for immediate, relevant information, cross-media uses data and technology to deliver messages through the most cost-effective and efficient channels.

To create the two-way dialogue that constitutes a relationship, cross-media communications must also incorporate feedback mechanisms to monitor the dialogue, collect information and continue the conversation. The more you can learn about individuals and audience segments, the more relevant you can be in your messaging, your offers and the channels you use to communicate with them. Because the audience controls the relationship, they get to decide which channels they use to respond, whether that’s digital print, email, web, mobile or social media.

Because of this, a multichannel, multi-touch approach is most effective in capturing the highest possible response. New research is confirming the validity of this technique. For example, a study from GetResponse shows that integrating email and social media significantly increases click-through rates. In our experience, the triad of print, email and social media is proving to be even more powerful.

This multichannel, multi-touch model reinforces the message while providing numerous opportunities to respond when and how the audience chooses to do so. Adding social media to the mix expands your reach even further. Incorporating social media buttons encourages message sharing. Feeding these channels allows you to spread messages virally with little effort. Now, especially with the explosion of mobile devices, instead of one-to-many, messages are spread many-to-many. Because the audience controls the relationship, they get to decide which channels they use to respond, whether that’s digital print, email, web, mobile or social media.

Delivering it requires collaboration between a wide range of skilled people, including graphic and interactive designers, copywriters, account managers, prepress production, direct mail experts, programmers, application architects, database experts and system administrators. If you don’t have or can’t find the talent it takes to deliver on all the tactics your customers need, consider partnering with someone who already has these capabilities in place.

Just like no one person has all the skills needed for cross-media, there’s no one software package or solution that provides everything. By choosing best-of-breed software and systems and building mashups, you can take advantage of the best solutions, combining them as needed for specific projects. Again, finding a partner can help you quickly fill in any gaps in your offering without making huge technology investments.

### RIDE THE MESSAGE ROADMAP

Trekk learned a long time ago that communicating an idea to our clients is just as important as developing the campaign creative and messaging. Over the years, we’ve found that using program or campaign roadmaps is very effective in explaining—and selling—programs to our clients.

This visual technique helps us document the process flow, showing how a cross-media campaign mingles print, email, social media, web landing pages and other tactics. The roadmaps spell out the individual tactics, channels, response mechanisms and feedback loops that allow us to track response and learn more about individual customer preferences.

By breaking programs up into smaller, bite-sized steps, we reduce the complexity and improve our ability to understand our own cost structures. It also allows our clients to see each individual channel and
the steps in time from one touch point to another that ultimately guide a prospect to a measurable call to action.

A good example of this is a recent campaign Trekk designed and implemented for one of our clients. You can see in the program roadmap that we included a combination of variable direct mail, variable email, lumpy mail and QR Codes that directed recipients to a personalized URL. The landing page is available as a traditional web page as well as a mobile-device optimized version. This is critical if you want to use QR codes as part of your strategy.

**MEASURE AND OPTIMIZE**

In the days of mass marketing, segmentation and measurement was, at best, a guess. With digital, you can measure exact response and ultimately ROI. Now, instead of relying on gut instinct, data tell us where we are in real time. This knowledge allows us to refine campaigns and programs in mid-stream rather than waiting weeks or months to compile campaign results. This more rational approach keeps you on track to achieve your program goals and increase return on communications investments.

Too often, marketers implement a marketing campaign that doesn’t garner the expected result. But rather than optimizing the campaign by trying different offers, messaging or calls to action, the entire plan is scrapped in favor of a new one.

This phenomenon is what Trekk partner MJ Anderson refers to as the Gilligan Effect. If you remember the old television show Gilligan’s Island, in each episode the castaways would come up with an elaborate plan to get off the island. And each week the plan would go awry because of some bumbling error committed by Gilligan. But rather than applying what they learned and adjusting accordingly, the next week there would be a brand new, equally elaborate plan. Like the castaways, marketers who use this old approach will never “get off the island.”

Instead, by building test and measurement into cross-media programs, you can monitor what’s happening and continuously change and adapt your strategy and tactics to optimize response. The very nature of data-driven technologies gives us unprecedented flexibility in testing campaign components and identifying unique segment behavior. Headlines, images, messaging and lists can be accurately tested—even for small campaigns—at minimal cost. Based on the data, campaigns can be refined for the next cycle continuous improvement.
I also like to misquote Voltaire by saying, “perfection is the enemy of good enough.” What I mean by that is that you can’t afford to wait until you have all the pieces in place to develop the perfect program (because you never will). Today, behaviors are quickly changing. What worked yesterday may not work today. To be successful in cross-media, marketers and their service providers must continually identify unique segment behavior, test, innovate and optimize. The good news is that cross-media and its underlying technologies allow you to do all of those things—quickly, inexpensively and effectively.

At Trekk, we deliver cross-media campaigns, projects and tools for our clients using a web-to-everywhere philosophy. You are probably familiar with the term web-to-print, which typically refers to online or web-based ordering and customization of print-on-demand or variable data print. Web-to-everywhere takes that concept further, allowing for customized variable output across all media.

The first thing to remember is to manage all marketing message content in a way that completely separates content from format. We then use asset and content management tools to help organize, assign and deliver text, image and multimedia content and channel-specific templates for delivery to web pages, email messages, social media networks and, yes, digital print.

An example from one of our clients shows this concept in action. Product information is structured in a common XML schema and managed by a web content management system (CMS). The CMS delivers the information as web page content by transforming the XML structure into HTML for delivery to and rendering by requesting web browsers.

That same product information is formatted for variable email, variable direct mail and for Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. RSS can be used to deliver email to other web sites and social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter. The structured content can also be used to drive digital print for catalogs. All of these outbound channels are designed to create click-throughs back to a featured product page on the website for tracking and call to action. The website is e-Commerce and e-Mobile enabled to deliver the easiest and most convenient customer experience for purchasing the product.

**WEB TO EVERYWHERE, EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING**

**LAUNCH & LEARN**

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jeffrey Stewart, a founding partner and chief technical officer at Trekk Cross-Media, has been on the forefront of communications technology since the firm’s inception in 1995. An early adopter of web technologies and one-to-one cross-media marketing, Stewart uses his technological expertise to help clients improve processes, reduce costs and optimize communications across print, web, mobile and social media, as well as help printers transition to marketing service providers. Today his focus is on database system integration, web-based applications and content management systems, cross-media formatting technologies, variable data communications and emerging uses of social media and cloud computing platforms. Stewart is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and regularly blogs and tweets on topics ranging from variable data marketing and web-to-print technologies, to web content management solutions and social media.

**www.trekk.com**

stew@trekk.com