Beyond The Edge Of The Press Sheet - Surviving The Digital Age

By Louise Kralka

Plan for the future, because that’s where you are going to spend the rest of your life. - Mark Twain

The revolution that unseated Hosni Mubarak was a triumph of the Egyptian people over 30 years of tyranny. It was also a victory of digital technology over the government’s stranglehold on traditional media. Egyptians ignored the government’s television commentators and leaflets warning them to stay off the streets and instead responded to the leadership of their fellow citizens, who brought them together and organized the historic uprising using social digital media.

All over the world, people are increasingly turning to digital media like smartphones and tablets, as well as laptops, for information and entertainment – often to the detriment of traditional communicators, such as those of us who work in print. So how can printers ride the wave of this new technology instead of being drowned by it?

Printers have not been averse to using digital technology when it suited their needs and improved their business. Over the past 10 years, printers have added digital print, direct mail, fulfillment, inventory management and distribution services to their offerings. Properly managed, all of these new services can reduce the attrition of traditional print revenues while attracting new customers and strengthening the loyalty of existing clients.

Recently, the emergence of 2D barcodes (such as QR codes) has created a new opportunity for printers in North America to create value for their customers using digital technology. Offering clients a chance to engage their audience through a video or multimedia digital experience using their smartphones adds another dimension to a printer’s portfolio. The value of the codes isn’t in creating or printing them, but rather, in managing the user experience and measuring their response—capabili- ties that many digital direct mail printers already possess. Once a QR code is scanned, it’s not much different from a simple URL or even a personalized URL, except that the consumer is presumed to be using a smartphone rather than a PC, and therefore they can engage on the spot, from wherever they may be.

CHANGING PERCEPTION

In an increasingly digital world, a printing company’s success will come from seeing beyond the edges of the press sheet and redefining the range of services it offers and the nature of its profile within the industry. Successful printers will have to change the way they’re perceived by their clientele and market themselves based on the...
services they provide. Printers can extol the benefits of variable direct mail or the utilization of 2D bar codes, but if they never use these tools to market themselves, they will lose credibility. With a new technology like 2D barcodes, printers have to show by example and practice what they preach.

For example, when PDI Inc. launched its new mobile marketing service in December 2010, we created a modified PDI logo that incorporated a QR code along with the tag line, ‘We make print interactive.’ We also included instructions on how to download a QR code scanner. The QR code in the PDI logo led the client to a mobile web page with a video and general information about QR codes. Since smartphones were just beginning to take off in North America, it was crucial that this video and information also be mirrored on our regular desktop site for those who did not have smartphones.

We also added the same QR code to our Christmas cards and inserted a contest card with yet another QR code. When this contest QR code was scanned, the client was brought to a mobile web page where they could register in a contest to win an iPod Touch.

With a third QR code for our 2011 calendar, we invited our clients to scan the large QR code on the first Wednesday of every month to be directed to yet another new information session on QR codes and mobile interactive marketing. We felt it was of the utmost importance that the clients experience the concept of mobile marketing for themselves and that PDI demonstrate that we are very knowledgeable about this new technology.

Last but not least, we made stickers with the modified PDI logo with the QR code, which were put on the envelope of every page proof that went out to our clients for approval, along with our 2011 calendar.

SOME TIPS

A printer can develop new digital services internally or through an association with or acquisition of another company. PDI decided to develop the necessary expertise through the acquisition of PromoMee, a company specializing in this domain. Whichever methodology you use, the success of these new initiatives will depend on employing some common strategies:

1. **Sell the new service internally:** The first target audience for the new concept is your own employees. Don’t underestimate this step since everyone has to be 100% on board.

2. **Train the sales team:** Invest a lot of effort educating your sales team. If they are not comfortable with the new realities, they won’t make a convincing pitch.

3. **Repeat, repeat, repeat:** Your great reputation as a printer in the industry may prove to be a blessing and a curse when introducing a new service. The excellent relationship that you have built with your clientele, which will open doors for you to present your new services, is a blessing. The curse can come from clients “pigeon-holing” you into a profile that you are trying to escape. Sales reps can fall into the trap of only mentioning the new services once to the client and then thinking their job is done. This is a big mistake, since the client might not have needed that particular service when the representative introduced it. Or maybe the client was just having a bad day (not that those ever happen in print) and couldn’t focus on absorbing how this new service could be of use to their company. So repeat, repeat, repeat, and find a way to bring the topic of your new service back to table at least seven times in order for the client to “get it.”

4. **Identify an in-house resource person:** Name an internal “go to” person to support your employees who can smooth out the learning curve and help with the education and transition.

5. **Involving upper management:** Have upper management available to support sales representatives on presentations of the new offering.

6. **Educate and inform your clients:** Proper application of new technology ensures the success of a project, and the adoption of new technology can be daunting for your clients, too. Consider setting up information sessions to explain the opportunities, the best practices, the proper applications and the terminology that comes with new technology.

7. **Share your success stories:** Do this with both your sales team and your clients.

The digital age has given us powerful and exciting communications tools, and printers, too, can be part of the leading edge and expand beyond the edge of the press sheet.