

Marketing in a Browsing Society Part 4 of 4

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☀ The 4 p's of marketing

This fourth and last edition of Food Fax 2014 delves into the effect of the Internet on “promotion”, one of the four p's of the Marketing Mix, which collectively are place, product, price, promotion.

☀ Hard Data and Soft Data

The advertising industry has long faced a dilemma when recognizing stellar material. The hard data is quantifiable and measurable, such as the portrayal of product attributes, the cost of an advertising plan, the estimated and actual viewership or readership, and the subsequent change in sales and market share. The soft data does not easily lend itself to convenient analysis, comprising creativeness, originality, and consumer awareness, recognition and recall – to name a few. The most clever of ads (the sizzle) may fail to convert consumer dollars into sales data (the steak). This quandary was neatly summed up in a poster spotted during the late 1980's, on the office wall of the now-defunct Eaton's (Canada's answer to the USA's family-run Macy's) Foodservice Director:

THE HARD STUFF IS HARD.
THE SOFT STUFF IS HARD.
THE SOFT STUFF IS HARDER
THAN THE HARD STUFF.

Thirty plus years on, the statement rings ever louder.

☀ The Internet – a Temporary Leveler

The emergence of the Internet in the late '90's was a boon to health promotion agencies. Lifestyle and behaviour interventions - such as hand hygiene, smoking cessation, healthy eating & physical exercise, and safe sex (especially for the recently divorced, naïve and carefree 50-somethings) - are intended for citizens of all socio-economic strata. Yet, given the diverse language skills, reading preferences and TV-viewing habits of a people, the cost and complexity of reaching all population segments with the same information has always been challenging. The accessibility of the World Wide Web and the fascination it held, allowed for a much wider swath of society to be reached with the directed messages.

☀ A Fragmented Playing-field

The first years of the 21st Century saw the private sector perfecting ingenious ways to drive consumer traffic to a website just as social media was launched. With the transmission of the first tweet in 2006, the one-size-fits-all platform of the WWW was transformed into a social media canvas, and a fragmented society became ever more finely spliced.

☀ Going Viral

It is fair to assume that the viral capacity of social media was initially intended for positive outcomes - connecting, fundraising, heads-up for food recalls, traffic jams. Yet, an examination of the root of the word – virus – reveals that the association with anything permeating and nasty has existed since the 18th C. Virus is an original Roman word meaning slime, poison or secretion. It also meant semen - first animal, then human. Let's move on, shall we?

☀ Trolling

Trolling, the latest social media tactic, is often positioned as an astute marketing strategy. An entity of any size or description publishes something eccentric, either online or hardcopy, sometimes false and usually misleading, with the sole purpose to virally drive traffic to a website. The origin is an Old French verb *troller*, meaning to hunt, to set out in search of game. Currently, “troll” is a fishing term in which a baited line is drawn behind a boat. Similar to the original meanings of the word, trolling is devious, baited and dangerous to the unsuspecting reader.

☀ The Soft Stuff is Harder than Ever

New hard stuff: post-secondary marketing courses now include detailed IT curriculum. A passing grade requires mastery of online techniques, of the lexicon of the trade, and of the software which facilitates the skill set. As people of all ages swap their TV, daily newspaper and magazines for social media broadcasts, the soft stuff is harder than ever. **FF**