

Then Vs. Now: What Has--And Hasn't--Changed For Marketers

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CMOs are constantly looking for ways to keep their brands relevant and competitive. New ways of marketing are being invented every day in a variety of spaces, from mobile to social and beyond. What's more, marketers' goals have expanded from simply raising brand awareness to facilitating consumer engagement. So what does it take these days for a brand to have longevity? Instead of looking forward, let's for a change look

back and compare a successful campaign from the past with one from the present.

One of our marquee clients in the '70s was Boeing. We worked with it for more than 25 years until after the merger with McDonnell Douglas. Contrasting that work with what we're doing for one of our marquee clients today--the International Olympic Committee (IOC)--offers some insight that underscores what it takes to survive in today's advertising environment.

Global is a given. Beginning three decades ago, we talked a lot about Boeing's gift to the world: the ability to fly. That gift inspired people to dream of visiting other cultures. The challenge, then, was that the dream of traveling abroad was aspirational and only affordable to a few. For many it was barely relevant.

Today the idea of visiting other cultures is also barely relevant--not because it's aspirational, but because people now do it every day. For example, with the IOC's "Best of Us" Challenge, youth and Olympic athletes from all over the world were able to compete with each other by uploading videos of themselves doing something they are great at and then sharing those videos with people from more than 200 countries. Great marketers today, regardless of size or industry, realize it's a given that we are playing in a global world, being judged in a global context, and creating global communications.

Marketers are also embracing the shift from "informational" to "relational." Work during the '70s, '80s, and even '90s was largely about delivering information that would result in a single action: a purchase. As an example, we would run ads congratulating airlines on purchasing Boeing planes in the hopes that people would choose that airline for their modern fleets.

Today there are so many more ways people can say "yes" to a brand beyond a purchase. For example, the IOC utilizes digital and social media channels to engage consumers who can reinforce the brand's values of excellence and friendship by creating video content demonstrating their personal efforts. In many ways, marketing is now at the service of the consumer.

Brands that thrive today do three things well: They inspire people to do something as opposed to merely telling the customer something; they facilitate a relationship between people and the brand so they can engage on their own terms, and they find unique connections that further the relationship between brands and people. Years ago, there was no question in our mind that Boeing owned its brand, and it was our job to get that brand in front of people. In essence, media would invent new ways to use existing media to "surround" the customer. To tout the benefits of the merger, we bought a "wrap" from USA Today, which allowed a select audience (Boeing employees and their clients) to see the benefits of the Boeing merger with McDonnell Douglas in every story on a fictitious cover of the publication.

In contrast to "surround," today our customers often become the media, as they did with the IOC. With hundreds of videos created and viewed more than 4 million times during the last winter games, consumers and Olympic fans were delivering the IOC's global brand message by participating in our challenge. In essence, consumers took ownership of our brand. Staying relevant means getting really comfortable with the fact that we can no longer control what's said about our brands. Instead, we empower consumers to further our message in a positive way.

Adaptive thinking trumps process: One of the biggest challenges for brands today is to become adaptive. Our work for Boeing followed the age-old cycle exhibited on Mad Men today: The client laid out a challenge, the agency did research to figure out the right strategy, then created work, sometimes put that work into testing, produced the work, and four to six months later launched the campaign--only to wait another six months to see if it "worked." There was plenty of time for creatives to hone their craft and polish their work. It was an art director's dreamland.

Today, brands have to adapt and change immediately based on success and failure. The pace of adaption and evolving a campaign is much faster, and the results are often instantaneous. Successful brands are shifting their attitudes and approach to become active partners with their agencies and, hence, consumers. They're ready to adjust to something unexpected and exciting. With the IOC Global Youth social media campaign, the consumers' work became our work. We gave them the framework to participate, and they did. We enlisted popular bloggers to participate in the campaign and build buzz via word of mouth. And when the popularity of certain videos took off, those became the videos that moved to the front of our online seeding strategy.

Whether you look forward or back, one thing hasn't changed: the importance of people. People were at the center of what brand marketing was then, and they are at the center of what brands do now. Only now, consumers are not passive receivers of brand messages--they're active participants in brand experiences.