

# Stop Guessing

Over the years, promotional tools have become oft-used weapons in the brand marketer's arsenal, employed by thousands of brands to attract and retain customers. Last year alone, more than 20 percent of total marketing expenditure went to promotional activities. Analysts predict that, by 2003, 50 to 70 percent of Internet marketing budgets will be spent on promotions.

One of the major benefits of running promotions has been the window such efforts can open on consumer behaviour. Brand builders can monitor the effect of promotions by soliciting action from consumers -- getting them to complete coupons, enter competitions, return product labels, you name it. The response to these gimmicks then stands as a clear indicator of the success or otherwise of a campaign. Compare the measurability of this strategy with that of, say, pure TV advertising, which affords brand builders scant consumer analysis in the short term.

But what are you measuring? It's one thing to monitor the number of coupons being returned by customers, but it's another to ensure the marketer's message was understood. The case might very well be that the consumer acted on the coupon, completing and returning it, without ever having understood the brand message behind the promotion. You can understand my pleasure, then, in noting the recent debut of several companies that offer what I would call second-generation online promotion. These start-ups are using the Internet's interactive

capacity in new marketing tools -- tools that enable marketers to monitor their online campaigns and enhance their promotions by measuring the consumer's demonstrated understanding of the brand message. One example is

YouWinTrivia.com, a Florida-based site owned by YouWinIt.com that has, over the past four years, created a small but very lucrative niche for itself and gathered a very attractive audience. The company has developed a new form of brand advertising and ad analysis, called Mind Share Marketing. The idea is that consumers choose subject areas that interest them, then play a trivia game based on those interests. But before they play, they're exposed to an ad -- and the game includes questions about the ad.

Now, the difference between this and other online promotional concepts I've seen over the past months is that Mind Share Marketing uses incentive-based marketing to get consumers to read and, more important, understand the marketing message being presented to them. What I find fascinating is that, behind the scenes, the players' (or consumers') answers demonstrate to marketers which messages they remember, which they forgot, and which they misunderstood. And, the marketer only pays when an individual plays the promotional game, which means seeing and answering questions about the ad.

Matthew Mariani, YouWinTrivia's marketing coordinator for Mind

Share, draws this analogy: "It's comparable to running a commercial on TV but being able to stop after the ad runs and ask the consumer, 'Repeat back to me what our message is. What did you like about our offer?'" The approach is appealing because it allows marketers to constantly adjust their messages in response to the observable effect they're having on consumers. Additionally, marketers are constantly aware of the promotion's success (or lack thereof).

Of course, this type of product only appeals to a certain audience -- people who have the patience to engage in online promotion. But, looking around at the huge number of people who spend time on lotteries, at casinos, filling out coupons, and participating at home in TV game shows, the audience can hardly be called a small one, even on the Internet.

Including online promotion tactics in your marketing strategy is not necessarily the solution to overcoming your competition, but offline promotions are certainly still going strong -- and they have the potential to be translated online. It's a potential that, thus far, not many companies have explored. Only a few have created promotional campaigns that truly listen to consumer response and can be adjusted according to consumer reaction. And here's the potential bonus:



Tests show that online marketing promotions cost less than 1 percent of what offline promotions cost.

So if you happen to have an audience to which gaming promotions appeal, ask yourself if you're still working in the dark. Do you know if your brand's message works? Perhaps you should be considering making a move into the second phase of online promotion, in which guessing has been replaced with concrete facts.

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