Business Intelligence

fast.MAP Marketing-GAP research — IDM-sponsored questions

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Abstract

For 9 years, research firm fast.MAP has been surveying consumers about their reactions to a range of marketing activities and asking marketers to anticipate what their responses will be. The difference between these two sets of answers is the ‘marketing gap’, which reveals where marketers have got out of step with consumer attitudes. This article reviews the findings from the most recent survey and a set of questions sponsored by the IDM. These reveal some important differences between expectations among marketers about the adoption of technology and social media compared with the reality among consumers.

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Marketers out of step with consumers

Benefits of technology are yet to come

Introduction

For the last 9 years, online market research specialist fast.MAP has been comparing consumer responses with a range of questions about their marketing preferences with what marketers expect consumers to say. The result is the ‘Marketing Gap’ — areas where marketers have got out of step with their target audience. As part of this programme, a number of partners sponsor sections of the survey. This year, the IDM included 11 questions relating to a range of new media and customer service options — this article looks at some of the most striking findings these produced.

The stated goal of direct and digital marketers is perfect targeting — to reach the right people at the right time with the right message. To do this, they rely on a scientific, technical approach to achieve their goal — collecting customer and prospect data to stay in tune with the marketplace.

In the 9 years that the fast.MAP Marketing-GAP study has been tracking, it has repeatedly shown that some marketers stubbornly cling to outmoded industry theory, rather than listening to and learning from consumers. It is not only traditionalists who are misreading the marketplace — some of the evangelists of the latest media, such as SMS, mobile marketing, Twitter and social networks, either do not know or are ignoring the fact that their enthusiasm is not shared by 9 of the 10 consumers who definitely do not want to be contacted by these routes.

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Answers to the IDM-sponsored questions reinforce the fact that technologies are finely merged with consumer life, for example, in the use of augmented reality to enhance the customer experience. Even so, the benefits of this new technology — as with others that marketers assume consumers are rushing towards — still lie more in the future than the present.

Methodology

Representative sample of UK consumers

An online self-completion survey of 62 questions in total was submitted to fast.MAP's consumer panel during July/August 2013. The panel comprised 1,072 adults recruited from the 30,000 fast.MAP wholly owned, closed panel whose profile echoes that of the United Kingdom's population profile in age and gender. The second panel comprised 308 marketers and fundraisers, drawn from the fast.MAP marketing professionals' panel and the IPM and IDM membership.

Findings

Time spent with technology

Marketers vastly underestimate (by nearly 100 per cent) the consumers' preference for using their laptops to access the internet in their free time and by nearly one-third for using their desktop computers. While 27 per cent of marketers said that they expected consumers to access the net mostly via their laptop, 49 per cent of consumers said that this was their most-used device. For desktop PCs, 25 per cent of marketers expected this to be the main access device, but actually 36 per cent of consumers named it.

In their overenthusiasm for the latest technology, marketers overestimate by more than 150 per cent the use of mobiles and by threefold the consumers' use of tablets as the preferred means of accessing the internet. Only 9 per cent of consumers said that a smartphone was their primary route online, but 23 per cent of marketers thought this would be the most connected device. As for tablets, only 6 per cent of consumers are mainly using these, while 18 per cent of marketers expected them to be in use.

Conventional devices more used than mobiles

In terms of the time spent with each type of device, laptops have overtaken tethered computers as the primary route to the internet, but mobile devices are still chiefly for light usage, rather than as the main access device (see Figure 1). The majority of consumers (61 per cent) are on their mobile phone for 2 hours or less, and only 10 per cent of consumers report heavier use of 3 hours per day or more. In contrast, 36 per cent of the consumers are heavy users of their laptop (over 3 hours per day) and 31 per cent are online for a similar amount of time via their desktop computer.

The calculated means for each device underline the extent to which marketers' perceptions of the new mobile consumer are ahead of the reality. Laptops are the main access device with 2.21 hours per day, closely followed by desktop computers with 1.98 hours. Smartphones lag far behind with an average time per day of 1.06 hours, while tablets only

Figure 1: Time spent online each day by device

command 0.52 hours (or around 31 min). Other devices, such as gaming platforms or smart TVs, have barely gained a foothold with just 0.24 hours each day, or less than 15 min.

One reason for this gap is that consumer ownership of mobile devices is far behind marketers' expectations. Smartphones have been widely adopted by consumers, with only 28 per cent saying they do not own one, while just 25 per cent say that they do not have a laptop. However, a significant 66 per cent of consumers say that they do not own a tablet, and 90 per cent do not have any other form of device that enables internet access (such as a gaming console). The picture of technology ownership in the average consumer's household is very different from what marketers see when they get home.

Augmented reality not yet real for consumers

A good example of the technology gap between marketers and consumers is around perceptions of the usefulness of augmented reality, where a mobile device overlays information on an image of the physical world. Some marketing campaigns and online services have already adopted this technique, while the success of a new generation of products, such as Google Glass, will depend on consumers' willingness to engage with it.

The good news is that one-third of consumers (34 per cent) are either positive or extremely positive about this technology (see Figure 2). However, 42 per cent of marketers expected a positive reaction — with 19 per cent believing that consumers would be very positive. This is a considerable difference between the two groups. In contrast, very few consumers (just 9 per cent) are negative about augmented reality, even though 30 per cent of marketers expected consumers to be against it.

Where the gap is largest is around neutral views. The majority of consumers (57 per cent) are yet to be convinced either way about the value of this new information overlay. That means that they are open to persuasion, or might equally decide it is not for them. Marketers

Figure 2: Augmented reality has yet to persuade consumers

Figure 3: Influences on brand perceptions

Reviews have more influence than WOM

underestimate this stance by a full 100 per cent, with only 28 per cent assuming that consumers have not made up their minds.

Marketers have long known that their own activity has less influence on how brands are perceived and the direct experience that a consumer has of it. That is why promotional techniques such as product trial are so important and why customer experience has risen up the agenda. This is reflected in the high scores that both consumers and marketers give to personal experience when asked what influences them most when they view a brand (see Figure 3).

Among the other influencing factors, however, there are changes afoot. The power of word-of-mouth has long been assumed by marketers to be critical and 19 per cent of marketers still believe it is a key influencer. However, this is nearly twice the level at which consumers rate WOM (11 per cent). Instead, reviews gain the second highest rating for their influence, among 19 per cent of consumers; yet this is underestimated by marketers (only 14 per cent named these).

Figure 4: Majority of consumers do not share content online

Online sharing less widespread than assumed

It is clear that the brand experience has to be consistent and positive. But it equally seems that consumers are becoming disengaged from their immediate circle of family and friends, seeking the views of others that they may not know via reviews. It should be noted that this is a more structured influence than chatter within social media, which only 6 per cent of consumers have named.

Virality is one of the main dimensions of digital marketing and a unique strength, as it can significantly extend the reach and lifetime of marketing messages through being spread by consumers. In looking to gain this viral diffusion, marketers are assuming that consumers have the habit of sharing content online. In fact, they massively overestimate the likelihood of this happening. A majority of consumers (56 per cent) say that they do not share content, but only 24 per cent of marketers thought this would be the case. That could have important implications for the targets that the digital marketers set themselves, if they are based on an assumption of sharing.

Marketers do get it right when it comes to some of the motivations for online sharing, such as to entertain, to make others aware of a product or service and to educate or share knowledge, where the scores given by marketers aligned closely with those given by consumers. However, they underestimate some of the other altruistic motivations — 21 per cent consumers say they pass on discounts or vouchers, but only 15 per cent of marketers thought this would be the case, while 16 per cent of consumers say they share in order to solve someone's problem, but just 11 per cent of marketers expected this response. Helping consumers to help others in this way, rather than involving them in building brand or product awareness, could therefore be a powerful trigger of virality, which has not been fully recognized (Figure 4).

Marketing needs to harness consumer goodwill

Conclusions

In the rush to adopt digital, social and mobile channels, marketers risk leaving a sizeable — even the majority — of their consumer audience

behind. Adoption of technology is slower than expected, not least because consumers have existing devices that are still fully functional, such as desktop computers and laptops, and may not have the privileged access to new devices, such as tablets, which marketers enjoy. As a result, consumers may be viewing marketing messages on much older devices than they have been designed for.

Where consumers are ahead of marketers is in the influences, which they have taken note of in relation to brands. Reviews have gained far more traction than the marketers assume, suggesting that marketers could profitably prompt their customers to provide reviews and ratings post-purchase. Equally, there is good evidence that the minority of consumers who do share content would be likely to respond positively to techniques that give them a sense of altruism, such as helping others who have a problem or being able to share promotions. If marketers can align their objectives with these behaviours, they are far more likely to achieve the all-important virality in their digital campaigns.