

The Three Es of Marketing

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The world is becoming very complex. This is particularly the case for marketing practitioners, academics, commentators and thinkers. Consumers have a new found scepticism in traditional marketing and yet they have become more brand savvy than ever. Brands are defined by experiences and not products. The days of segmentation and mass broadcasting to (or at) a target market have been replaced by the era of mass personalisation and two way communication. The marketer has the ability to listen to individual consumer voices and engage with them in a respectful dialogue. This is not the exception. This is the new rule!

So how do we engage consumers with our brand in an era of intangible benefits and technology driven dialogue? To address this problem, we have a simple model called “The Three Es of Marketing”.

The first E stands for the “Ethereal”

Television was once the marketing practitioner’s “silver bullet” broadcast media for when the budget could afford it. But the advance of technology has changed that situation. Digital and subscription TV has fragmented the audience and TV now competes with other online content serving solutions making the industry extremely competitive. In addition, technology has also altered the way television content is consumed with consumers viewing TV with other screens in use at the same time. This changes the viewing experience as the laptop, smart phone or tablet is distracting the viewer one moment and enhancing the viewing experience the next (perhaps as they look up a brand on social media or a web search).

Television is still an important medium but it is only one contact point in the “ether” in which the consumer connects with content.

The key here is to establish an “Ethereal Strategy”¹; developing an integrated, cross-platform strategy for engaging with the consumer in the ether and holding them in the presence of your brand in the ether as much as possible for a positive outcome.

The big mistake that many brands make is that they take a platform strategy approach to these technologies. For example, while the advertising agency is tasked with attracting traditional (older) consumers to messages in their TV advertisements, the young marketing assistant is asked to work

¹ See: <http://literallybrilliant.com.au/wp-content/uploads/20140908-LBPS-Ethereal-Strategy-Development-MNv05.pdf>

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out how to attract young consumers to the company's social media platform. At the same time the IT department is asked to turn a corporate brochure printed 3 years ago into a web site "so people can visit it when they want to know more".

Now the example is extreme; most companies are a little more advanced than that but the unintegrated platform thinking is still a problem.

Consumers simply are not interested in your platforms. Rather, they are interested in how they can engage with people and with the brands they love within the ether space.

The key to good ethereal strategy is integration and interconnection from the consumer's perspective. Do not focus on any single platform or even on emerging media. Traditional media like television (and to a lesser extent radio) play an important role in engaging with the consumer in the ether space.

The development of ethereal strategy usually involves a lot of questioning calls to action. What do we want the consumer to do next? It will often involve starting with basics like getting the TV campaign, web site and social media posts coordinated to work together but ultimately expanding from there once integration has occurred.

The challenge for marketers in the ether space is to project content "interventions" from their different platforms to engage the consumer in the ether space and then attract them to other content interventions from other platforms in the ether so that they continue to engage with your brand in a positive experience. For example, a TV advertisement might lead to engagement with content on a social media site utilising one of the multiple screens already opened by the consumer. This social media content may then encourage viewing of further video content on a content sharing platform which may then suggest a recipe downloaded from the website and ingredients purchased from an online store.

The critical thing here is having a strategy that connects the different interventions from the different platforms.

Practitioners therefore need to develop an overlying ethereal strategy before they develop their latest TV campaign, web site, social media content plan, SEO strategy, video sharing content ... and so on.

The second E stands for the "Experiential"

"Your Brand is really the summary of the stories that stakeholders tell about their experience with you."

If we have engaged the consumer in the ether, we now need to ensure that they start having experiences with our brand that helps to engage them positively with our brand. In essence,

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experiential marketing initiatives give the consumer the opportunity to participate in the ongoing development of your brand. Participation encourages buy-in and “ownership”. People who feel they own part of your brand become advocates for it.

Experiential marketing often aligns an experience of a brand with another positive experience with which the consumer is normally associated. People follow a particular sport; a brand activation is designed to be incorporated whilst attending a game. People enjoy going to the beach; a brand activation is designed to enhance the beach-going experience on a warm summer’s day at the beach.

Even simple sampling opportunities now need to be considered experiential opportunities. A cube of food on a toothpick really doesn’t do it! These activations need to be wrapped in theatre to make them special experiences of the brand story.

There seems to have been a boom in the experiential marketing industry. We have seen a proliferation of specialist experiential agencies. Marketers need to be able to provide an experience of the brand that that delivers the brand promise, lives out the brand story and builds brand credibility.

There is an old saying that “people buy from people” and to some extent, the quality of experiential brand activations is dependent on the quality of the people representing the brand and the experience they deliver. Crucially, no matter how good the people are, their ability to deliver is dependent on the quality of the brief. They need to have the objectives and brand story comprehensively articulated for them so that they can deliver the required experience. Visit one of the great Barossa vineyard cellar doors and it will soon demonstrate how seemingly simple and simultaneously sophisticated these experiential events can become.

Every aspect of the experience needs to reflect the brand story. The practitioner must take time to clearly articulate their brand story and brief well to deliver the experience that will engage the consumer and enhance their brand allegiance.

The third E stands for the “Enduring”

The ethereal and the experiential are both ephemeral; they are fleeting moments, temporary experiences of your brand.

Consumers want to have confidence in an ongoing brand. They want to connect with brands they know will be around in the future. Initiatives should be put in place to help give the brand a sense of permanency making their perception enduring.

To some extent, repeated presence in the ether space helps to create the illusion of permanency. However there are some simple steps that can be taken to project permanency onto a brand.

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At one end of the spectrum, companies can become associated with a prime real estate site. The OXO building in London became such a cultural icon in the city that the logo on the building has been preserved long after the company vacated. Tall and iconic buildings in cities all around the world have been associated with (and known by the name of) brands.

This is often more than a process of putting logos on buildings. There is a brewery in Adelaide that has a factory just outside the central business district on a main road. It is highly visible. But to reinforce its brand links with local football, the premiership team has its colours painted on the top of the chimney each year in a ceremony that is now part of local folklore.

Sometimes, when brand real estate assets are not highly visible, making a brand more enduring involves purchasing long term outdoor advertising assets. There is a large neon sign on the corner of William Street and Darlinghurst Road that marks the start of Sydney's famous nightclub district, Kings Cross. Almost everyone can imagine the corner in their mind's eye. Almost everyone will remember the soft drink company logo that has been there for as long as I can remember. In doing so, that soft drink company brand has become an enduring part of Australian social life.

There are some more simple examples. Coffee brands in local cafés use logo printed cups, umbrellas and bollard screens to try and make their brand more enduring. A coffee lasts just a few minutes but the bollard screen is visible every time the café is passed.

Simple promotional items like pens, satchels, USB sticks and coffee mugs with logos printed on them become every day opportunities for companies to make their brands more enduring.

In all of these cases, the logo becomes a memory hook for the brand. Hopefully, when the customer sees a logo, they remember the brand story and the brand meaning within it. If they see the logo often enough, they attribute enduring qualities to that brand story.

So why is this model so valuable?

This is a simple model for marketing practitioners seeking to build their brands. It is about taking time to get brand building initiatives into balance between the ethereal, experiential and the enduring. All of these things managed well can help build trust.

This brand building occurs alongside more sales related initiatives in many cases. But at the end of the day, done well, the three Es will help build brand engagement and ultimately emotional commitment to **your** brand in your consumers' relatively "brand cluttered" lives.