

Moments of truth

Mike Staines, Branded Moments of Truth (BMT), argues that the right combination of activity at the point of purchase is the most effective means to influence sales

WHO CAN REMEMBER those iconic cinema adverts for Gordon's Gin 25 years ago - a lizard scurrying across the desert, the gin of choice being poured seductively over ice, and so on? Gordon's was not only a gin, it was the gin brand *dujour*, and advertising was the critical marketing tool used to propel it to its goal. However, with government dictates curtailing much alcohol advertising, the fragmentation and proliferation of the media and an ever-increasing cornucopia of beverage alternatives, advertising is not having the impact it once did for alcohol and many other product categories.

Brand advertising, in particular, is hugely expensive and is becoming

increasingly divorced from the moment when consumers are actually formulating their decision to buy. So much so that a greater proportion of marketing spend than ever before is going into promoting a product at the time of purchase; this time being heralded as a 'moment of truth'.

Precious seconds

For example, 'Procter & Gamble Co. believes shoppers make up their mind about a product in about the time it takes to read this [sentence]!' So begins an article on the front page of the *Watt Street Journal*. P&G's most recent concept for conquering the world of consumer packaged goods (CPG) is the First Moment of Truth, the three to seven seconds after a shopper

first encounters a product on a store shelf. It is in these precious few seconds, P&G contends, that marketers have the best chance of converting a browser into a buyer, by appealing to their senses, values and emotions.

When was the last time you walked into a supermarket or up to a bar and knew, way beforehand, what wine, beer or cider you were going to order? The odds are heavily in favour that you had no idea what you were about to purchase; and this behaviour is borne out by vast quantities of research that show that the majority of us have little concept of our brand preference for up to two minutes before requesting it. For instance, fewer than 20% of items on a housewife/husband's typical grocery shopping list are brand-specific.

When faced with brand choice in-store most consumers make their decision within ten seconds; however, prior to walking into the store they have, more often than not, made no pre-emptive brand decision. The key, therefore, is to win the first moment of truth - meaning, get and keep the attention of the shopper at the point of purchase, where a massive 70% of buying decisions are made.

But how can this be achieved? To start, it is necessary to debunk the old marketing AIDA model (Attention-Interest-Desire-Action), which is no longer appropriate. Today the customer is king and he or she negotiates a wholly individual journey from awareness to purchase. The trick is to understand how these journeys work and then, by optimising a moment of truth, directly influence the sales opportunity.

In a bar, payer chooses

In a bar or pub, research shows that there is a very high likelihood that whoever is paying for the round and chooses the first drink will unwittingly dictate the choice to others in the group. Thus, if the payer chooses a brand of lager, the number of 'me toos' will be significant. Again, this is a 'moment of truth' - the time when brand choice is made; and there are a set of rules governing brand choice. ▶



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As a result experiential marketing, part of the moment of truth armoury, is having a significant impact on delivering sales, while also building brand presence and equity. It often uses live experiences to engage with the consumer, allowing the latter to interact with the brand, helping to deliver an emotional response; in short, a clever sampling opportunity. Consequently, many brands are switching their marketing budget to support these moments of truth. For instance, Savanna Cider found that around 82% of consumers expressed a preference for experiential contact with its brand over traditional advertising, proving that consumers like to taste a product before purchasing.

Savanna Cider has also used staff within pubs and bars as 'brand suggestors'. They were trained to endorse a particular

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brand. Using 'brand suggestors' is a proven and very effective method of steering the key procurer towards the promoted brand.

Can it be said that traditional marketing is failing to have the impact it once did? Probably. For, as mentioned earlier, with the fragmentation of the media and additional media choice, the rise of the internet and the number of messages flying around the ether - each person is exposed to about 4,000 messages a day - the sheer volume of noise means that the majority of messages are blocked out. The old adage that 'I know that half of my advertising works, I just don't know which half could, most likely, be changed to a more prosaic 80:20 in favour of not knowing.

Push or pull?

Today's consumer is forced to ignore 95% of media messaging, opting instead to 'pull' information and brand messages as and when they need them. Thus, marketing programmes need to plan from this perspective, taking moments of product consideration, purchase and consumption as the starting point, rather than the consumption of media.

Branded Moments of Truth rely on a different set of variables from mainstream marketing. They distil information from many different areas using REAP: Reference (what people are saying about the brand), Experience (how the brand feels in the flesh), Added value (does the brand stand out) and Presentation (performance at point of purchase).

Reference points include ambassadorial programmes, opinion leaders and PR; other areas of influence can be CSR programmes and the ever-influential web search and tracking. Experience is reflected in the type of advertising used, sponsorship activity, face-to-face communication and experiential events; while added value is enhanced by targeted promotions, which can add value, allowing the brand to promote a unique positioning. Presentation is replacing PoP in the BMT hierarchy. It combines the use of store or e-commerce layout, POS, in-store promotion and packaging.

The good news is that there are new agencies whose *raison d'être* is based on developing branded moment of truth strategies around the buying conundrum and brands that understand this missive. For instance, Mailer's Lick the Lid of Life retail road show, which rotated between key shopper locations on maximum-traffic days, and appearances at all the major Comic Relief events, proved immensely popular and effective.

Quantifiable success

Events like Lick the Lid of Life are quantifiably successful. For instance, tracking consumer behaviour after sampling has found that 45% of the consumers purchased the product immediately or shortly after the sampling opportunity. This is in contrast to Nielsen research, which concluded that only 17% of traditional promotions in a typical grocery store are recalled by shoppers immediately after exiting.

Research by EBM found that consumers receiving a sample sustain a 63% brand recall score when tested fully one month later. And 60% of them told other consumers about their experience. Compare this to the general public's awareness of the official sponsors of the 2004 Olympics, when no brand achieved more than 20% awareness.

While it would be foolish to suggest that a great deal of marketing activity is having little impact on consumers' decisions to buy, it would be more thought-provoking to suggest that these traditional methods are not the panacea they once were. This is, perhaps, borne out by TBA's findings that, since the late 1990s Coca-Cola has spent more each year on visual display than media advertising.

There is just too much competition, too many media alternatives and too little time to digest the messages. What is certain is that marketing to the consumer during the small window of opportunity when they are actually considering purchasing is becoming increasingly important. •