

# The (marketing) law of intended consequences

Jim Kite, Starcom MediaVest, argues that if we want to get serious about media accountability, we must measure what matters - consumer intent

THE GLOBAL RECESSION did not create the need for media to be accountable to business objectives; it simply made this the live or die mantra. In short, the stakes have never been higher for all marketing services and communications channels to provide clear and simple proof of ROI.

Undoubtedly, this is a particular challenge for communications planning and buying companies as the syndicated media data that we rely on rarely provide metrics that seamlessly show the link between exposure and sales results. This is because most data exists as a currency to help buyer and seller agree a price, but does not prove how consumer behaviour changed on receipt of the commercial message.

Equally, client tracking data can monitor awareness, brand attributes and sales, but doesn't go deep enough into the role of media in explaining those outcomes.

## Bridging the divide

In 2007, SMG took the decision to bridge that gap. The motivation was the realisation that the spread of digital into our clients' businesses, and the abundance of behavioural data that follows in its path, was having a dramatic effect on how clients viewed media expenditure. Overnight, we were no longer in the message delivery business, but the consumer response and performance business.

The outcome of this consciousness was 15 months of research and development on understanding how media and marketing recall influences consumer 'intent' - behaviours and actions that directly correlate to actual sales.

So what is intent? It is any consumer outcome (emotional or behavioural) that follows message recall. It can range from developing new, positive attitudes towards the brand, to seeking out more information or experiencing the brand - any action short of actually buying.

The output of this investigation is a proprietary tracking study and data analytics platform called IntenTrack™. From modest beginnings, IntenTrack™ programmes now operate in 32 countries, tracking and analysing consumer re-

FIGURE 1

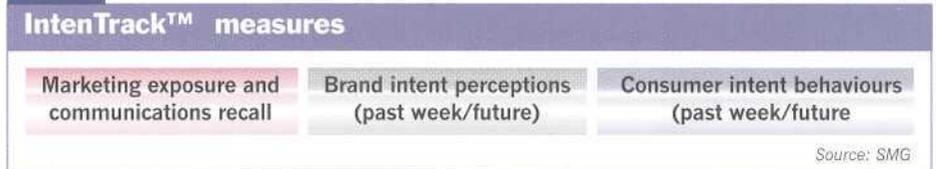
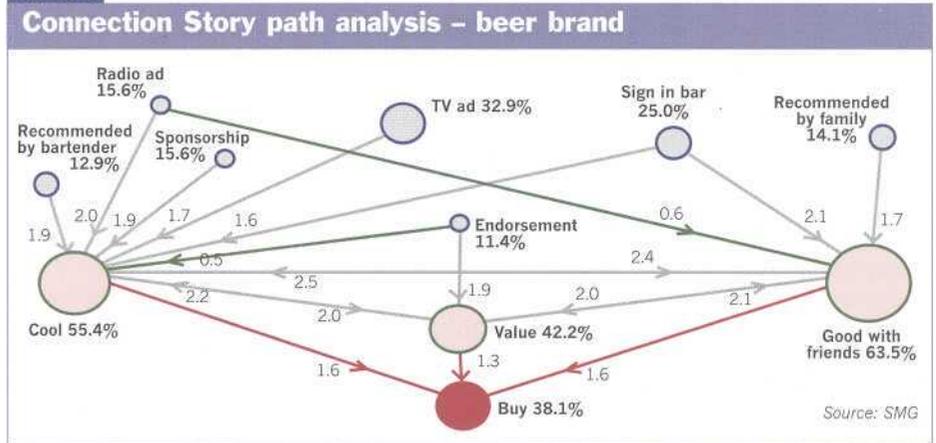


FIGURE 2



sponses to 400 different brands across 30 product categories.

IntenTrack™ is a continuous weekly survey of consumers in a given product category and their recall of media, in-store, digital and social activity. Around 15 media channels are tracked each week. The same consumers are then asked about their 'intent' behaviours towards those brands. These range from shifts in brand perceptions and attributes, to those more directly related to purchase intent behaviours, such as talking to others or putting on a shopping list.

Finally, we ask them whether they actually bought the brand that week or plan to in the near future (Figure 1).

## Large sample sizes

To ensure rigour and depth to the findings, the IntenTrack™ sample sizes are large (100-250 a week) and in-field for up to 12 months. We have partnered with online research companies around the world, such as GMI, Insight Express and Livra, to ensure that we are working with a good sample. In its first two years, IntenTrack™ has allowed SMG to have over three million conversations with consumers about their media, intent behaviours and purchasing habits.

IntenTrack™ is not, however, simply an adapted brand tracker with some new bells and whistles. It is a complete end-to-end data and analytics platform that uncovers intent behaviours by statistically evaluating the relationships between marketing exposure and final purchase. It can do this because of the two underlying products that are at the core of IntenTrack™ - Connections Stories™ and IntenTracker™.

## Making connections

Connections Stories™ are created from regression and path analyses of the IntenTrack™ database to identify those intent actions that most closely correlate to sales and media activity. To construct a Connection Story™, we first select a question that will be the focus of the analysis. This question is termed the 'primary dependent variable'.

Once this variable is selected, logistic regression is employed to develop a model that can be used to predict a respondent's likelihood of giving a positive response to the primary dependent.

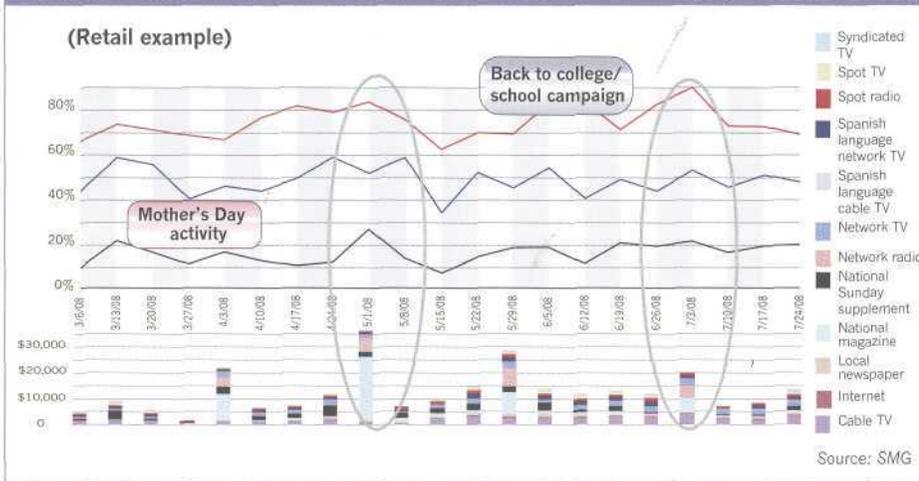
The set of independent variables that are candidates for inclusion in the model is made up of questions related to how the respondent feels about the brand (brand

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FIGURE 3

### Marketing spend versus consumer intent behaviour



attributes), questions about sources of media awareness, and questions about past week behaviours. The stepwise selection method is used to decide which independent variables to use in the regression. Under this method, variables are iteratively added and removed from the model, based on whether or not they raise the model's statistical quality.

The resulting set of independent variables, with their corresponding probabilities, is called the set of 'primary dependent factors.' Each primary dependent factor is then used as the dependent variable in a new logistic regression. The variables selected for inclusion in the models constructed in the second round are termed 'secondary dependent factors'.

This 'nested' regression approach provides a way to describe not only which variables drive the primary dependent, but which variables drive each of the primary dependent factors. A variable may serve as both a primary dependent factor, where it drives positive response to the primary dependent, as well as a factor for the model of one of the other primary dependent factors.

#### Strategic plan

The output is a strategic growth plan for a brand, charting exact relationships between message exposure and intent. These intent continuums vary considerably from one product category to another,

but the key is that we can now identify, measure and forecast the impact of a communications plan against specific business goals. Figure 2 shows the output from a typical Connections Story™ process. In this beer example from Russia, there are three attributes that positively correlate to buying the brand - 'Cool', 'Value' and 'Good with Friends'.

Here are four unequivocal marketing conclusions that this exploration of intent has discovered:

- There is a strong correlation between claimed marketing exposure and attitudinal shifts/intent behaviour for all categories.
- There is a strong relationship between claimed marketing exposure and purchase in lower involvement categories; this is not the case for higher involvement, where there are greater barriers to taking immediate actions.
- Brands within a category do not show uniform intent relationships, suggesting that the marketing mix can drive competitive advantage.
- For high involvement brands, seek/search and talk are the most critical areas to drive for communication companies. For low involvement brands, attitude change and trial are the priority.

Once we know the intent behaviours that correlate to sales or a desired consumer action, the other role of IntenTrack™ comes into play.

IntenTracker™ is the real-time tracking of the effects of changes in the media mix, flighting strategy and targeting on those critical intent steps that correlate to sales. The continuous tracking tells us how an uplift in sales is attributed specifically to an intermediate intent action, and hopefully an action that we have influenced by the media used and activation strategy.

Figure 3 is a retail example from the US that compares marketing spend and the core intent behaviour of word-of-mouth and shopping during two seasonal campaigns. In both instances, an increase in marketing brought about more conversations, message recall and sales.

#### Future planning

Finally, the millions of IntenTrack™ observations and correlations are the perfect fuel for a normative database to predict future media planning success. In a similar way to how brand or advertising awareness tools use algorithms to discover the relationship between marketing activity and recall, we are now doing the same, but for actions much further down the purchase funnel.

In a short period of time, the desktop tool IntenModeller™ has become a kind of 'intent' brand library of what certain weights and mixes of media can achieve.

In summary, in the current economic environment, it is crucial for advertisers to demonstrate the ROI on their media spend through the right targeting and mix of media channels. Where a direct link between awareness and sales does not exist, planning and buying for intent is the next best thing. Intent is measurable, logical and applicable across all communications disciplines.

In time, we are confident that the availability of larger amounts of consumer response data will negate the need for self-reported survey research to track 'intent', but while we wait, we have the tools in place to define and predict this most powerful marketing objective.