



NOURISHING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO MEDIA AND MEASUREMENT: KATE SIRKIN

A pioneer in nontraditional media planning talks to *KNOW* about making consumer connections in a fragmented landscape

Kate Sirkin is Executive Vice President, Global Research Director, at Starcom MediaVest Group (SMG), a member of the Publicis Groupe. A seventeen-year veteran of the media business, she has been at the forefront of understanding and adapting to consumers' evolving use of media. SMG's well publicized partnership with P&G has led to a reevaluation of the giant marketer's approach to media allocation decisions.

Sirkin is a native of Yorkshire, England, and began her career as a media researcher in Leo Burnett's London office. On a recent morning, Sirkin sat down with Justin Edge of Knowledge Networks to talk about reaching consumers and the role of measurement in nontraditional media.

I WANT TO START WITH THE EVOLUTION OF SMG'S RELATIONSHIP WITH P&G. WHAT CHALLENGES DID P&G SET FOR YOU BEFORE THE RECENT ACCOUNT REVIEW?

SMG has done significant consumer research for the P&G business during the last three years and expanded our strategic role in terms of recommending how they should start to communicate with the consumer. Until recently, our responsibilities were in traditional areas. When we started to see more fragmentation, more consumer control, less brand differentiation with traditional media, we dug deeper into the consumer's mind to find out more about how we could make our clients' brands more relevant to their target audiences.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID SMG ANTICIPATE THESE CHALLENGES?

We were already there, in terms of knowing what we needed to do. We simply had a realignment of business responsibilities. The new scope of services will allow SMG to action more of the recommendations that we were coming up with for P&G.

CAN YOU GIVE US A TASTE OF THE KINDS OF EXCITING THINGS YOU CAN NOW ACTION?

P&G was focusing on traditional television and print ads. They asked us to give them insights that would lead to a smarter spend; and our consumer research with Knowledge Networks and other, qualitative work indicated that those particular media were not successfully connecting with consumers. A much more personal connection was called for in several categories via those media—such as editorials in magazines, more online discussion, and many more Q&A sessions within magazines and online. Consequently, we are moving more investment dollars away from traditional uses of the media.

WHAT ABOUT SOME OF THE OTHER CHALLENGES YOUR CLIENTS ARE FACING?

Before, we used to just put television spots out there and people watched them in large groups. Clearly, with fragmentation and increased consumer control, this is not going to deliver what it did in the past. We have to find new ways of using television. We at SMG don't believe television will go away, but we absolutely need to find new ways of

using it to create visual engagement with our priority targets. We need to understand how to integrate brands within shows that increase relevance to consumers, not just bombard them with adverts. If you sit through a NASCAR race, you might see five different segments “brought to you by.” Who cares? Leveraging a brand through a NASCAR connection requires that the brand strategically interact with key consumers at the event, so that the relationship between NASCAR and the brand makes it more relevant to consumers.

We are also evolving the way we do media concept testing to demonstrate the value of



these contacts, how to activate them, and which parts of the package are most relevant to consumers.

YOU MENTIONED THE INCREASE OF CONSUMER CONTROL. WHAT DID YOU MEAN?

It's the DVR. When using it, 77 percent of people don't watch ads when they're watching their favorite shows. This is frightening, because it costs our clients up to \$300,000 to buy these shows. And as TiVo or DVR penetration increases to 8, 9, or 10 percent by the end of the year, it poses huge problems for securing a return on traditional media buys. We need to evolve the way we engage people in those households.

SO SMG IS WORKING WITH TiVo?

Yes. In 2003, we pulled a sample of 11,000 homes in a three-month period. That's twice the size of the Nielsen panel at that time. The challenge was in going through the data and manipulating it. But we ended up with really solid data about consumer viewing for the programs we're spending significant sums of money on.

DOES SMG HAVE A POINT OF VIEW ON THE NIELSEN MEDIA DEBATE?

Most certainly. Nielsen is better than it was, but it's just not going far enough. We need to have minute-by-minute data (or better), and we must evolve to commercial ratings. The current debate about live vs. Live Plus ratings is ridiculous. SMG will not trade on the Live Plus ratings. As members

of the AAAA, SMG is also looking for a change in the ruling on VCR recording as well, to make the back data more relevant. I think our perspective on the future of television measurement is that Nielsen on its own is not going to be the answer. We need set-top box data. That's one of the reasons we partnered with Knowledge Networks as they were building their business at the beginning—the vision of how a broader panel could be used better to understand how people are using television.

HAS IT BEEN DIFFICULT TO GET TRADITIONAL MARKETERS TO REEVALUATE HOW THEY OPERATE IN THIS NEW WORLD ORDER?

Not really. We go in with a strong perspective on what to do rather than simply complaining about the world today. We can take good consumer research and show brand and media managers some alternatives. We also put broader, more experienced teams in front of clients than we would have in the past. You need consumer experts and innovation experts. We've been spending a lot of time creating those roles and understanding how they fit in with the rest of the agency team.

CAN YOU GIVE US AN INSTANCE WHERE YOU'VE REALLY BEEN ABLE TO GO DOWN A VERY UNIQUE PATH WITH THE BRAND—FOR EXAMPLE, A NOVEL USE OF AN ESTABLISHED MEDIUM?

Through MCA research, Starcom discovered that Influencers, the parents and mentors of potential recruits, play the largest role in defining recruits' views of the military and propensity to join. The Army challenged



Starcom to “influence the Influencers” ... a particularly daunting task in a time of war. So when the History Channel premiered *Band of Brothers* the Starcom Entertainment team decided to create original programming content featuring soldiers from today’s 101st Airborne just back from Iraq. These men “hosted” the *Band of Brothers* series by relating their experiences to those of their Brothers from the 101st Airborne who served in WWII. Since *Band of Brothers* itself was the best ad for the Army, it didn’t need a traditional sponsorship to have an impact. Starcom created TiVo-proof content to go around other content, instead of advertising. That was a really exciting thing to do. The client is now using it as recruitment material.

WHAT ABOUT SOME NEW MEDIA, PARTICULARLY NONTRADITIONAL, BELOW-THE-LINE ACTIVITIES?

We have a group of people called SMG Street. They are literally on the ground

understanding guerrilla marketing. I can’t reveal too many specifics, but for one client we are taking the brand experiences depicted on TV to shopping malls around the country. We activate the contact in a way that’s truly relevant for consumers, especially target groups like teens.

IS THERE A GREATER APPETITE FOR NONTRADITIONAL MARKETING IN ANY PARTICULAR INDUSTRIES?

We’re doing some interesting work on some healthcare brands driven by consumer insights. People are much more receptive to indigestion advertising when they have indigestion. So putting ads on the 10 o’clock news at night is really not going to continue to drive things for us. So it’s about delivering a relevant message at a point (both in time and place) of suffering to optimize receptivity to that brand.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SOME OF THE UNUSUAL BRAND INITIATIVES?

We're using a process and approach called Market Contact Audit from Integration that measures the influence of all kinds of contact points on a consumer's experience of the brand. We're really trying to measure share of mind, and see how one contact influences other contacts that we know are really important.

It can be costly to administer this technique pre- and post-contact in a very custom environment, but right now it's the only way we have of genuinely measuring the effectiveness of some of these initiatives. These activities won't show up in a traditional marketing mix model, especially when they represent just one to two percent of the marketing budget.

ARE CLIENTS USING NONTRADITIONAL MEDIA REGARDLESS OF THE MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES BECAUSE OF BLIND FAITH?

Sometimes, but there's still the desire to measure in some way. I don't think there's a complete comfort level with existing return on investment measurements. We know there are great marketing mix models; we know these models do a great job of measuring short-term effects of television and price promotion. Clients are comfortable with that, but they know it's certainly not going to project to the future with the newer contacts. And it's not going to give an accurate read for smaller initiatives.

IF YOU COULD WAVE A MAGIC WAND AND SAY, "I WISH THAT THESE METRICS WERE AVAILABLE IN THE MARKETPLACE," WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

They would be completely focused on the consumers, and not on the media vehicles. It would start with the consumers, and then look at what they do—their world.

I DON'T BELIEVE TELEVISION WILL GO AWAY, BUT WE ABSOLUTELY NEED TO FIND NEW WAYS OF USING IT.

DO YOU SEE ANY INTERESTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP GOING ON OUTSIDE OF MAINSTREAM COMMERCIAL MARKET RESEARCH?

We've been using lots of nontraditional types of research funded by R&D money. It allows us to deep-dive into different methodologies and techniques, like brainwave research and eye-tracking research. They were interesting in that they illuminated issues that we now need to solve with more traditional methodologies. The old stuff is not bad—surveys, focus groups, ethnographies, and one-on-one interviews—we just need to ask new questions. ■

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