SHARED VISION

How to do thoughtful marketing communications
on social media

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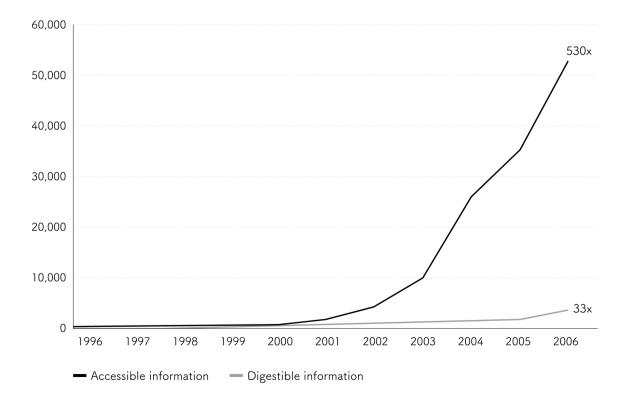Hirota

Marketing & Creativity
宣伝会議

Chapter 1

How Social Media Has Changed the Game

Information overload and what it means for ad agencies

    Over the past five years or so, people in the ad industry in Japan have been starting off their presentation decks with this famous graph based on a survey conducted periodically by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

■ Source: Information Distribution Census Survey FY2006, Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (FY1996 = 100)

Legend: Accessible information — Digestible information

The graph shows that while the spread of the internet has not greatly increased the amount of information that consumers can digest, the amount of information they can access has exploded. We have entered an age of *information overload* in which the messages being put out by companies are not reaching consumers; people are overwhelmed by too much information.

Today, in the information overload era, one of the most important demands placed on ad agencies is, "How do we get our message through to the target audience without it being swamped by this deluge of information?" As devices and applications that deliver content to people proliferate and diversify, as the topography of contact points grows more complex, how can we ensure that consumers are reached by the message?

Credibly addressing this difficult challenge is becoming a non-negotiable, essential element of any compelling marketing proposal.

Of course, as consumers are faced with exponential expansion of information around them in their everyday lives, the amount of information that is not important or meaningful to them grows apace, making it harder to punch through with a marketing message. A company can blast out messages all it wants yet fail to capture the attention of its intended audience.

What approach is needed to solve this problem?

In the information overload era, new strategies are being unleashed to tackle this challenge head-on and formulate clear and focused concepts, creative, and media plans.

The birth of communication design

Against this backdrop, a concept called "communication design" has emerged, a systematized discipline for reaching consumers with marketing messages.

And this concept has spawned a new job description: the communication designer, who handles the overall design of marketing communications deploying a full range of methods.

Traditionally ad agencies were split among the creative, marketing and media sides, each of which produced their own plans and executed in their domain of expertise. But to reach consumers, it's no longer enough to think in terms of conventional expression or advertising frameworks. Instead, you have to develop a deep understanding of the people you want to reach, figure out where they are plugged in, and deliver the right messages at each contact point.

The communication design concept aims to deliver the message to the target audience (in some cases visualizing a particular individual) by latching on to the key interests and affinities of the demographic, developing ideas based on deep insights, and utilizing each medium to its maximum potential at the contact points where consumers are plugged in.

Just graphics and video no longer suffice as creative concepts; ideas must now encompass exploiting relationships across media, designing application architectures, and more.

In short, **communication design requires profound thinking about what is necessary to optimize message delivery and how that can best be packaged.** Rigid frameworks and formulaic presentation are out, and media-agnostic, solution-neutral perspectives are in.

A communication designer can be compared to a restaurateur or a building foreman, in the sense that theirs is the role of orchestrating a staff with varying specialties to obtain the best outcome, by being involved across multiple domains.

(For more on this, I recommend the book The Dentsu Way: Secrets of Cross Switch Marketing from the World´s MOST INNOVATIVE ADVERTISING AGENCY by Kotaro Sugiyama, Tim Andree and the Dentsu Cross Switch Team.)

In recent years, the communication design philosophy, especially the insight-based, media-agnostic, solution-neutral philosophy, has assumed increasing importance. Communication designers are being asked to boldly take on challenges that existing marketing solutions cannot handle, and to create new and innovative solutions.

As the corporate marketing environment becomes ever-more complex by the day, this perspective is becoming a necessity not just for communication designers per se, but a fundamental tool for all planners.