



EXPERIMENTATION SHOULD BE YOUR 2006 RESOLUTION

And Why All Marketers Will Have to Become Media Companies As Well

December 12, 2005

QwikFIND ID: AAQ41K

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My new year's resolution consists of one word: Experiment.

2005 was the year even reactionary CMOs were forced to confront the fact that the old ways would no longer ignite growth. Mass has become micro. Push has transformed into pull. The middle of the road has evolved into "the long tail." Those who laughed at Toffler, scorned Gilder, and ignored the mantra "TiVo is my friend" now understand that all those marketing megatrends were, yes, both mega and trends.

Bloggers, podcasts, feeds

But the good news is: Experimentation is easy and cheap. You can keep up with the Joneses -- and the bloggers, the podcasters, newsfeeders and viral marketers.

The striking dive in the basic costs of creative expression has been matched in marketing expression as well. Just as an intrepid trumpeter can record and press a studio quality CD with an investment of only a few hundred dollars above and beyond the cost of a Macintosh G5, so the frisky corporate marketer can put her CEO's verbal wisdom on the Web for an investment of, oh, \$50.

Implementing RSS newsfeeds is equivalently inexpensive -- you can even find free editing packages for XML, the programming language that codes RSS feeds, at [rss.com](#). These services allow you to drop into anyone's e-mail box, Outlook screen or My Yahoo page all manner of information to which they have subscribed. RSS (which stands for "Real Simple Syndication") threatens traditional media companies that have depended on selling fully bundled information and the advertising that surrounds it. Your audience gets only the information to which it's subscribed.

Media revolution

These personal production technologies help realize a vision many of us have been propounding for years: that all companies, no matter their core field, will have to have expertise in two businesses: their own, and the media business. But these technologies also overturn a convention so embedded in our collective psyche that it constitutes a marketing psychosis: that creating and distributing media products is an expensive, all-consuming process that must only be attempted by large teams of experts.

It's quite the opposite. When mainstream publishers evinced little interest in the books we wanted to bring to market about the areas of functional business expertise we knew our

audience wanted, we decided to roll our own. A day's worth of research showed that everything we needed -- writers, editors, designers, printers, binders, distributors, even automatic Web-based credit-card purchasing fulfillment -- could be bought off the shelf. We published our first book in six weeks, broke even on the sales, and since have published a dozen more. The businesses built have justified the meager investment many times over.

It's astonishing the level of quality one finds from major consumer and business-to-business marketers, in online work that replicates the best of TV, radio, or film, or print -- or all of the above combined. Go to webbyawards.com to check out the cream of the crop.

Start small, scale up

Even more astonishing is the use of these formats by companies that can't and don't spend a fortune on high-priced businesses, don't spend months in strategic marketing planning exercises, and don't kill good ideas by putting them through layers of review. They start small, do it themselves, measure success, then scale up.

As personalized technologies proliferate, the only way to navigate the plethora of opportunity will be to emulate these Edisons of the new marketing universe. In 2006, resolve to experiment.

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