



The evolution is the impact

I'm hopeless at predicting the future. I couldn't even read my own present. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would be here at JWT working with the biggest creative team in India. Three years ago, I would have laughed to death if you said JWT. So why believe anything I say now? Please don't. Just enjoy the possibilities. What are the three things that will impact advertising? Let's start with the obvious.

The web will redefine how we look at traditional media. The web will not replace TV or print. It will be the Viagra that will make conventional media more exciting. Right now, as I sit and gaze into blue sky, I can't help but see the Dove 'Evolution' video - a viral marketing effort that's breaking new ground for Unilever worldwide. This now-famous film by Toronto's Ogilvy&Mather is a huge hit on YouTube and has been subsequently covered by virtually every major news outlet. Starting with the web, it's now going mainstream. It epitomizes the way brands will talk to consumers. It's moving from one-way entertainment to two-way engagement.

The web is teaching traditional media to start a dialogue. It's about throwing the brand open for discussion. This two-way interaction creates huge user generated content, which brings the brand even closer to its audience. The brand is no longer owned by the manufacturer, but by the consumer. There is no control, just the security of brand beliefs.

Dove is not the only one. Look at another Unilever brand - 'Sunsilk gang of girls'. By throwing open the brand world to its audience, Sunsilk is staying young and relevant and is remerging as a top-of-mind brand for the new generation.

There are two observations here. One is that the web will provoke TV and print to get more inventive. And two is, that it will force brands to move from entertainment to engagement and dialogue.

Brands will have to go beyond the 30-second spot. Today advertisers and their partners will need to consider user generated content on the Internet, mobile phones, live events, video games and the retail media environment. If old advertising was about interrupting consumers, the challenge

ahead would be how to engage them.

The second impact is the arrival of 'cause based' advertising. I've been saying this for some time now. But it's becoming even more apparent. Look at the work that's gaining recognition worldwide. I've just come back from Cannes. The Grand Prix for Outdoor went to a hoarding that had solar panels fitted to it. The idea being that while the hoarding is busy advertising the commercial brand, it's also serving a larger cause - that of supplying energy to the school below. Or take the Titanium awards at Cannes 2007. One award went to the 'tap water project' in New York done by Droga5 for Unicef - which involves branding tap water. The other was for 'The Earth Hour' done by Leo Burnett in Sydney. They got the people of Sydney to switch off their lights for a whole hour - as a symbol of the effects of Global warming. Now look again at Dove's 'Evolution'. That too is a cause related idea. It champions the cause for real beauty by questioning our distorted stereotype images. It invites us to debate while it sells soap and shampoos. Back home in India the work on Lifebuoy or Surf Excel 'Dirt is Good' are other such examples. We'll see more of these in the coming years. As brands become more iconic they need to find marketing solutions in the context of social movements. There's a human cause hidden in every product or service and it's our duty to find it.

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The third impact that I see is the rise of technology and music in the creation of the idea. The music director and the computer geek who were once backroom boys will now lead the idea. They will not be last minute inclusions to the creative team, but will actually be the originators of the idea. The conventional copywriter-art director team will be useless in the new world. Greater collaboration with new influencers will bring about more refreshing ideas. Almost all the films I saw on the New Directors' Showcase at Cannes were a result of this. There's a new sound in the air and it's the sound of the future.

Of course, in all this big talks about the future, there's one thing that will not change. And that is the power of the idea. You either have it or you don't. If you don't, you are history. That's the final impact.



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