



Punch up the Contrast!

By Carl Langrock

In 1962, a soon-to-be very famous artist executed what would become perhaps the most famous placement of a Procter & Gamble product. And, although he proved to be among the most sophisticated marketers of his day, Andy Warhol was so far ahead of his time that he didn't have the opportunity to ask for a placement fee.



Was Warhol an artist? After all, virtually anyone could make a wall out of stacked Tide boxes. Although he had mastered all of the requisite fine art skills, Warhol based his most famous work on concepts that just about anybody could execute. One of the marks of genius perfectly illustrated by "Wall of Tide" was Warhol's unique vision for repeating the commonplace, while shifting colors and punching up the contrast. The technique swaps some of the detail between foreground and back, revealing previously suppressed information.

As he developed the form, Warhol shifted into mass production. In tooling his pop-art production line, Warhol re-assembled routine building blocks in ways previously unforeseen. When visiting the Factory, the "Wall of Tide" effect was astonishing. The bold orange was so highly contrasted that the Tidal wall--the entire room--seemed to vibrate, shake, quake and spin with day-glo electricity. The display caused a psychedelic vision, an instant sensation! The ocular overexposure permanently shifted the public's perception of the commonplace.

It is this type of repeatable magic, teasing meaning from mundane, that sophisticated marketing artisans perform every day. Revolutionary ideas are, of course, exceedingly rare. The best in craft stay in front by taking familiar building blocks and re-assembling them in a different way--a way that reveals the obscure or sublime.

It seems axiomatic that our world is changing faster than ever before. Perhaps nowhere is this axiom more true than in the world of media. Scarcely anyone breathing needs to be convinced of the Internet's impact. Media people are painfully aware of the competition for eyeballs in a universe of fragmented audiences. The leaders of the pack are not only looking for innovative ways to use the new media, they're blending media like an artist with a palette knife, striving to create new marketing harmony. Buyers executing the plan typically are specialists in a particular medium. But it's the mix that moves the brand. The idea of analyzing lift--exposing the impact that individual marketing components, blending together, have on sales--has been around for decades. The evolving confluence of two immediately measurable media--direct response television (DRTV) and forms of online marketing--is adding a new dimension to lift reporting.

RE-ARRANGING THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Hardly a week goes by that I'm not asked about using the tools of direct response analysis to show the impact of a television schedule on web clicks (a.k.a., lift). Gotham Direct presents an interesting study of a team of media artisans who've taken the familiar building blocks of DRTV and online marketing and processed them in different ways, for different product types, to produce results for their clients.

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"The really interesting thing, when using DRTV to drive people to a URL, is that the response is often faster than with an 800 number," says Greg Messerle, Gotham's president. Messerle is a huge fan of using DRTV to support a

website. "When we launched GoDaddy in their first Super Bowl, GoDaddy gave us 10 minutes from when the spot first aired to consumer checkout," he says. "A 10-minute results window. And it worked! With an 800 number, we certainly wouldn't expect the majority of callers to be checked out in 10 minutes. People are often on their computer and watching TV at the same time."

"Consumers know that they don't have to type a unique URL, like 'FamousBrand.com/tv,' to get to where they need to go," explains Chris Gilbertie, Gotham's senior vice president. "So we need another mechanism. We look at traditional response patterns and apply that learning to the data that we get from our customers' websites. Then we use traditional DR buy optimization to increase the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the campaign."

There is no universal standard for how a marketer captures data or what data is important to them. But Gotham has developed a system that's proven successful for its clients. "We use the client's metric. It could be homepage views, sales to a particular budget, unique visitors--whatever their measure of success is," says Gilbertie. "We summarize that data by hour. We use our media analytics system to help us determine what activity occurred during that hour, and apply the same type of response patterns that we see with an 800 number."

According to Gotham, different types of ads produce different response patterns. For example, for some executions, a major part of the lift will occur within two hours of the ad occurrence. "We use [software] to track the web data back to the ad occurrences," says Gilbertie. "Combining this with the buy data yields success metrics for each network. When we have multiple ad occurrences, we pro-rate the response based upon program audience size. Ultimately, we do a daily acid test of cost per acquisition by hour. In those hours where CPA is out of whack, we have under-performing networks. That's where we drill down and optimize the spending distribution. The method works."

Gilbertie is quick to acknowledge that the method isn't as precise as the use of a unique 800 number. "The unique 800 number is most accurate because you know what station the call came in on; there is no ambiguity to it. Our analysis of web activity can't support the same level of precision. But it doesn't have to; the results are strongly directional. And the results speak for themselves. Clients are asking us for this analysis all the time; it's like the Holy Grail. It's where accountability meets branding. It's where we're finding our new business and our growth."

Gotham recently proved the process for Spiegel. "For a very modest testing investment, we proved the concept that television, using the tactics of DR tracking and optimizing via a website, can be very successful," says Messerle.

One of the most important keys to success, according to Messerle, is the sharing of data. "When we can pull down the data ourselves, that's when our analysts can deliver the most for the client. At the heart of it is cooperation and full disclosure, combined with a level of number crunching and data analysis that traditional agencies don't do."

RE-TOOLING THE FACTORY

The cornerstone of Gotham's growth is the actualization of Messerle and Gilbertie's vision. From the common building blocks of direct media, they've developed their unique process. They profit through the repeatability: recognize the pattern, get the data, crunch it through their media analytics system and light the hidden details into high contrast. By applying their lift analysis machine, they've grown their young company--a business started as a traditional DR media agency--and their client roster is a blend of blue-chip, big-brand clients. Gotham Direct gets my vote for this year's Warhol Award for repeatable media genius. And for Gotham, discovering the process has been like completing the quest for the Grail. Next month, I'll present the case of another media artisan with a different process for machining the commonplace into the inspired.

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