

BEING REASONABLE BY MARC BABEJ

Planning Media on Motivations

MEDIA PLANNERS ARE FINALLY GETTING THE CREDIT THEY DESERVE, not only as communications creatives but also as contributors to marketing strategy. Now the time is ripe for a media planning perspective on communications strategy — one that is equally actionable for both media and messaging.

Consumer attitudes, the cornerstone of conventional brand strategy, don't fit this bill. Attitudes are thoughts that begin with "I like..." or "I dislike..." There are two fundamental problems with focusing on attitudes: First, attitudes tend to be vague and fleeting. Second, they are notoriously un-predictive of the only thing that really matters to marketers: behavior. There can be an enormous gap between liking a product, and actually choosing it over the competition. Many people like Apple better than the competition, but still choose Windows at the end of the day.

When it comes to media strategy, the attitude-centric view amounts to little more than reading tea leaves. But there is a superior standard for marketing strategy, and it's particularly suited to media — motivations, or thoughts that begin with "I want," or "I need."

Focusing on motivations offers three crucial advantages. First, motivations are robust enough for strategic decision-making. For example, most laptop buyers are motivated by a combination of portability, performance, and value. Second, motivations are resilient; today's laptops offer better performance and are smaller and lighter than they were ten years ago, but the basic combination of motivations has remained constant. Third, and above all, motivations are, by definition, linked to behavior. Provided there are no external barriers, such as affordability, people tend to act upon their motivations.

Media strategy based on motivations focuses on behavioral motivations, or how relevant a given media property is to the decision-making process for a certain product, and contextual motivations, which indicate whether the media property is relevant to the product or service.

The key to motivation-centric media strategy is to determine the right balance of contextual and behavioral relevance. For example, a consumer brokerage's primary marketing objective is to sign up customers for a new service, and the role of advertising is to motivate prospective customers to request more information. Behavioral relevance informs the choice of medium in this case; the more a medium lends itself to interactivity or response, the more likely it is to motivate the desired behavior. By that standard, the Internet, direct mail, and response-enabled print and TV emerge as leading contenders.

Contextual relevance, on the other hand, informs the choice of type of property within a given medium. The more a media property reflects the mind-set consumers are in when thinking of their finances, the more contextually relevant it is.

Some media content providers and advertisers enjoy a "natural" advantage in terms of contextual relevance. As a rule of thumb, the more fun or exciting people consider a product category, the more its messages will be welcomed across media properties. Cars, electronics, or liquor have a natural contextual advantage. Ironically, media properties dealing with "serious" issues stand to benefit most in this regard. Consumers might not be in the mood to think about their finances when perusing *Men's Health*, but can be quite receptive to an ad for a luxury car or watch when reading *Fortune* or watching CNBC.

Equally, certain product categories and media have a natural advantage on the behavioral dimension. The more readily a product or medium lends itself to interactive communications or even transactions, the greater the advantage. An online retailer or service can motivate transaction behavior through marketing communications. Big-ticket products or complex services, such as cars or investment banks, have a steeper hill to climb; their marketing communications are an initial step in a more complex courtship.

A focus on motivations opens the door for media planners to become key contributors to overall communications strategy development. They can discover a unique combination of context and behavior for each advertiser with a singular goal in mind — paving the way from motivation to interaction to transaction. **M**

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