

## The Future of communications Planning: It's not who should 'do' it, but how

### What is 'Communications Planning'?

For the purposes of this essay communications planning will be defined as:

"The art and science of reaching target audiences using marketing communication. It is concerned with deciding who to target, when, with what message and how."<sup>1</sup>

This breaks down into a few questions that need to be considered for us to be able to conclude how best to approach communications planning, and by extension, who Clients should trust to do it.

- Who to communicate with
- Where and when to communicate
- How and what to communicate

### Traditional Approaches

Communications planning has its roots in the 'consumer journey'. Received wisdom states that particular messages, conveyed through relevant touch points, should be used to move a consumer from brand awareness to brand purchase<sup>2</sup>:

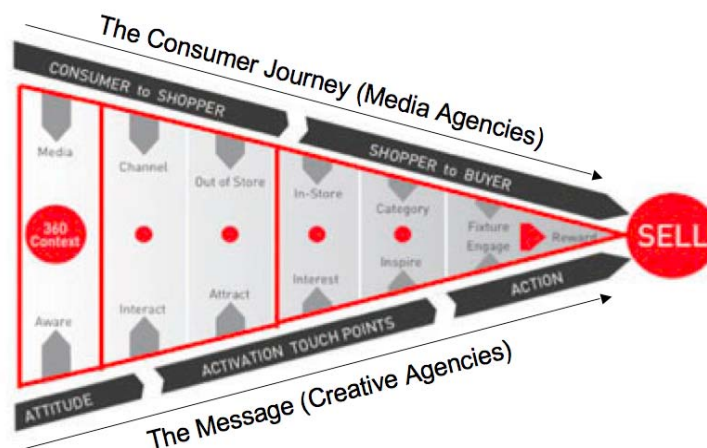


Figure 1: 'The Last Mile', OgilvyAction

Traditionally, Planners residing in creative agencies (both ATL and BTL) have been the owners of the message, with media agencies owning the consumer journey, i.e. where and when to communicate. If this paper was being written even 5 yrs ago the answer to the communications planning question would have been a hell of a lot simpler; a triumvirate of the creative agency Planner, media agency Planner and Client would be best placed to manage communications planning.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication\\_planning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication_planning)

<sup>2</sup> A. More (2005). Communities Dominate Brands: Business and Marketing Challenges for the 21st Century.

Alas, things aren't that simple anymore, but perhaps they never were. Traditional communications planning models rely on the basic assumption that the consumer is passive:

- 1) Communications are work in a unidirectional fashion, from the brand to the consumer
- 2) Communications are primarily brand to consumer (B2C), not consumer to consumer (C2C)
- 3) Consumers go through the funnel in a linear fashion

The traditional communications planning approaches have been adapted over time to better reflect the changing active nature of the consumers:

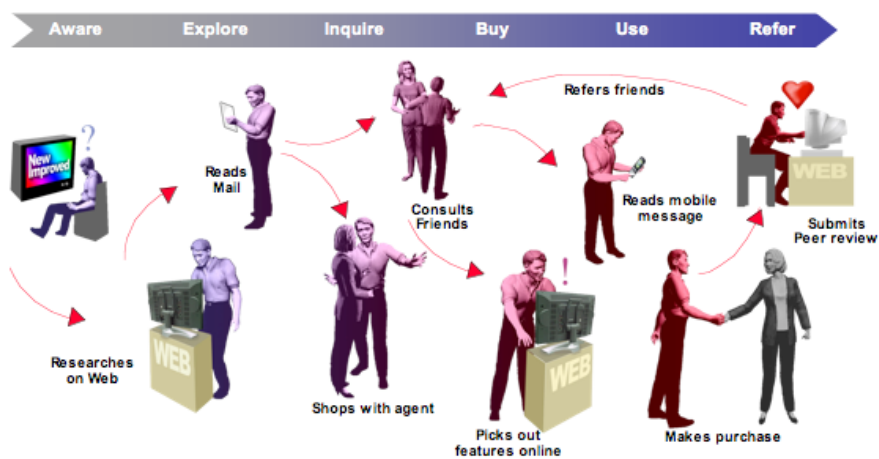


Fig. 2: The Retail Consumer Journey  
 Source: From the 4 P's to the 4 E's, Brian Featherstonehaugh (2008)

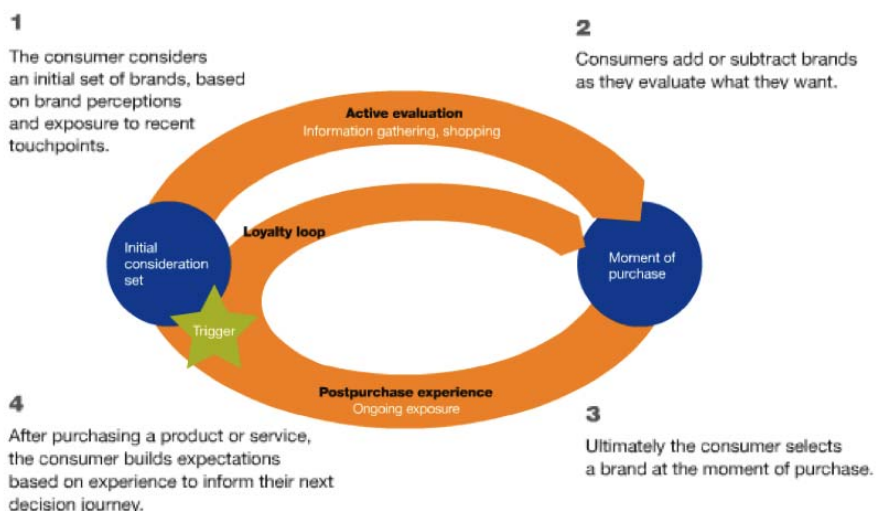


Fig. 3: The new consumer decision journey.  
 Source: D. Court et al (2009): The Consumer Decision Journey; McKinsey Quarterly

Both of the models above reframe the consumer as an active participant, someone who does their homework, widening their set of considered brands (as opposed to narrowing them) before making

a choice. Featherstonehaugh's model even allows for C2C communication, showing how a consumer shares their experience with others.

These models are not always incorrect, but they are ultimately still reductive. In fact, there are an infinite number of ways that a consumer could encounter a brand and a similarly infinite number of behaviours that could result after that encounter:



*Fig 4: Consumer journey from purchase to WOM  
The consumer journey as the opposite of a funnel. In store marketing drives purchase, product design enhances experience, which is then communicated via word of mouth. This process could work equally well in reverse.*

I believe that by putting one or two overly reductive consumer journeys at the centre of communications planning we are missing a trick. Clients need to move away from these traditional approaches, to re-organise the process and the participants in order to provide multiple routes to success that are reflective of consumer behaviour.

### **It's not who should do communications planning but how**

With so many possible ways to reach consumers and so many potential consumer journeys, communications planning is clearly a complex business, but who should do it? Mitchell and Maex have coined what they call 'math marketing', the principle of intelligently leveraging huge amounts of data to plan and execute modern marketing campaigns<sup>3</sup>. The answer to the question 'who' should do communications planning is defined by the characteristics of the perfect math marketing partner:

<sup>3</sup> C. Mitchell and D. Maex (2009): Organising for Math Marketing.  
Source: <http://thedoublethink.com/2009/08/organizing-for-math-marketing>

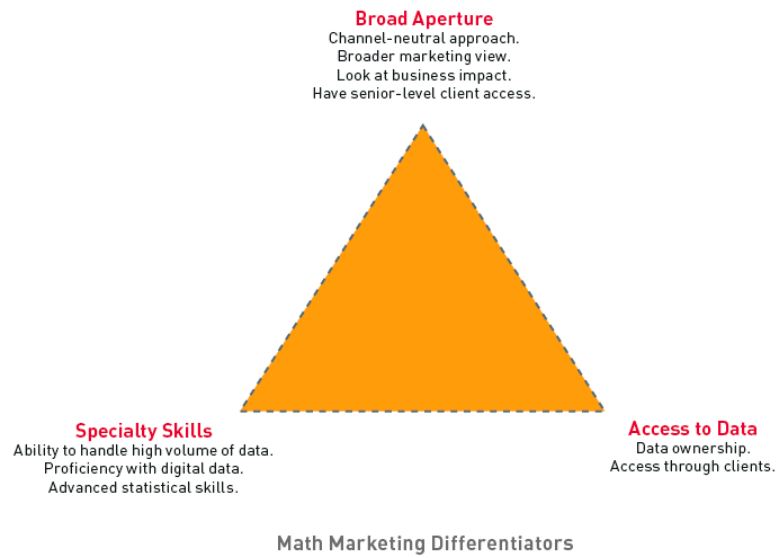


Fig 5: The Perfect Math Marketing Partner

**Broad Aperture**

The ability to look at the marketing landscape in its entirety.

**Specialty Skills**

Such as econometric modelling, data mining, statistics, Web analytics, online ad serving competencies, quantitative market research techniques, dashboard and visualization technologies, and social media analytics.

**Access to Data**

Needed to create a single-customer view that combines media exposure and interaction with search, website behaviour with transactional and demographics data, all in one place.

Interestingly, Mitchell and Maex conclude that no one agency type is close to achieving the right mix of skills to deliver this advanced form of marketing:

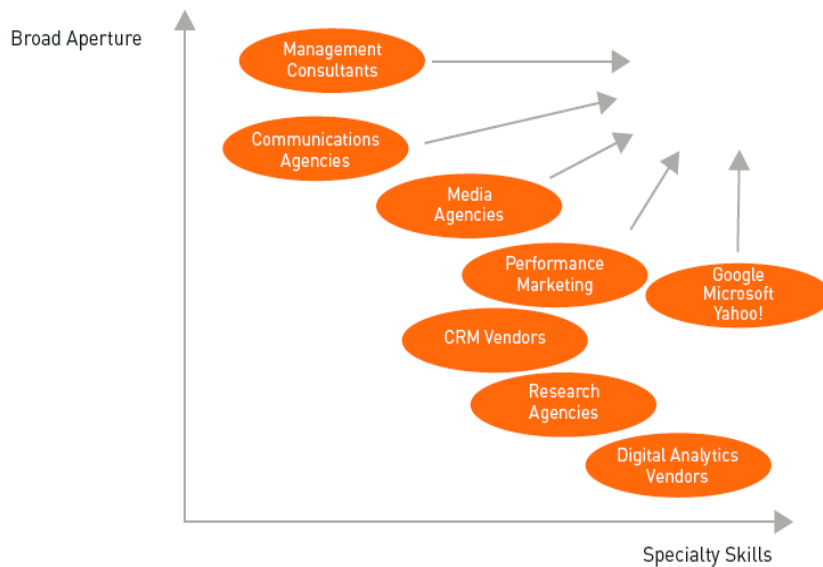


Fig 6: Math Marketing Skills

It seems that, for now at least, we are all destined to work within inter-agency teams to best deliver against our Client's communications planning needs.

I believe that almost all agencies associated with communications (and some that are currently not) hold a piece to the communications puzzle.

I believe the more pertinent question facing our Clients is not who to involve in communications planning, but when to involve them and how.

I believe that Clients should take an approach to communications planning that is characterised by the following:

- Being reactive to (rather than predictive of) consumer behaviour
- Providing consumers with multiple routes to purchase
- Providing real time feedback for optimisation

The model proposed in this paper outlines how a Client might tackle this approach, and what (and by extension who) would be needed at each stage. This model is designed to tackle the basics of communications planning outlined at the start of this essay that will now be tackled in turn.

- Who to communicate with – target audience + social profile
- Where and when to communicate – communications (placement)
- How and what to communicate – communications (ideas)

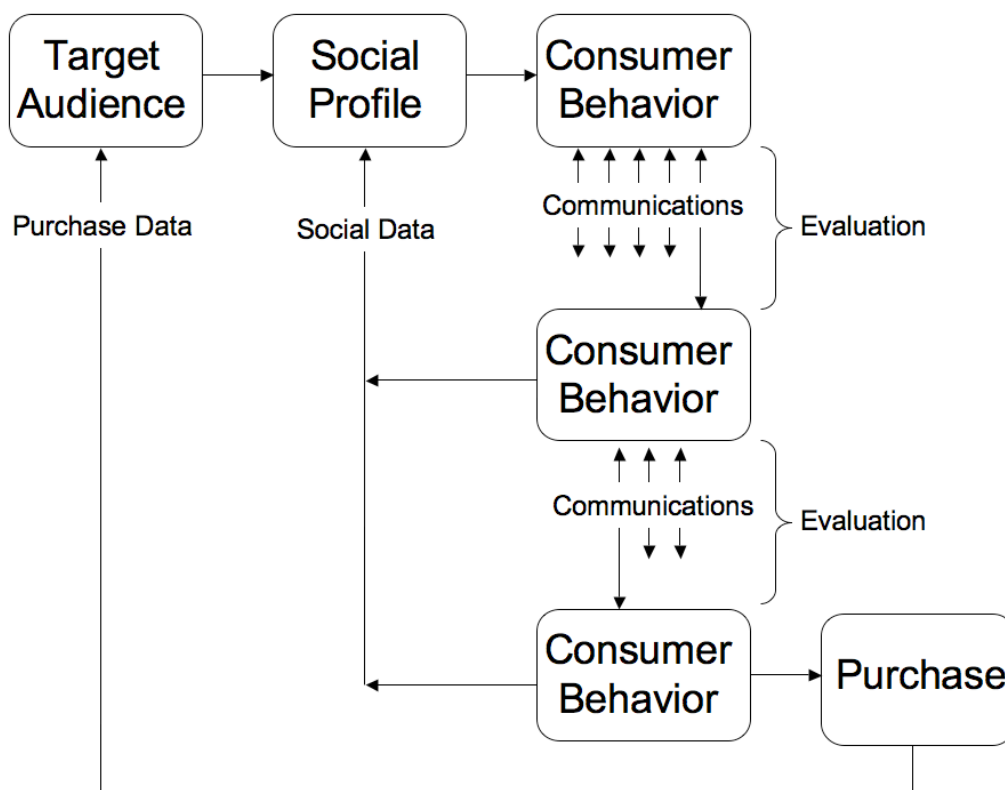


Fig 7: Communications Planning Model

## Who to communicate with

### The target audience

The target audience for the intended activity would be defined much in same way as it is today, i.e. Client segmentation studies informed by primary research, overlaid with sales and purchase data.

### The social profile

Leveraging the target consumer's social profile is absolutely key to this communications planning approach. Your social profile (or social graph) is who the internet thinks you are, it is the sum of who you know, how you know them, your social network activity, uploaded content and search terms. Some of your social profile is already in the public domain:

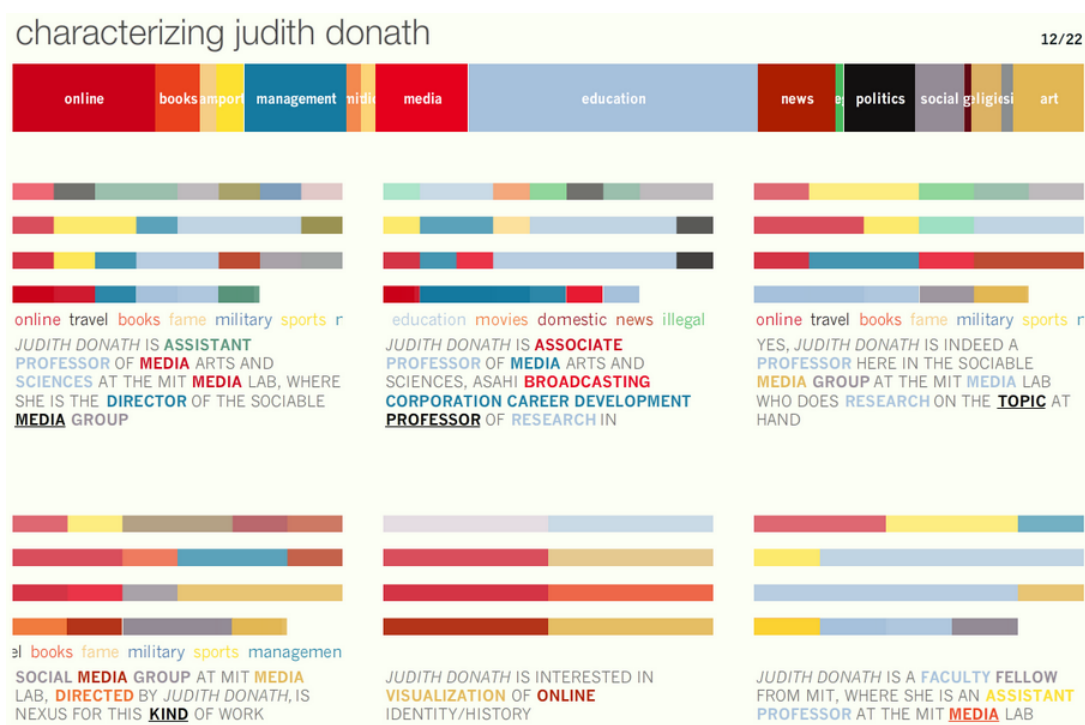


Fig 8: MIT 'Personas'

MIT Medialabs 'Personas' trawls the internet for mentions of you and categorises them, this is an example of one of their employees.

Source: <http://personas.media.mit.edu/personasWeb.html>

'Personas' does a great job of showing what your public social profile might look like but what about your private one? Lets start with Facebook, it knows a lot about you, it knows your demographics, it knows who you know, it knows how you know them, it knows your activities and interests, pretty much everything a marketer might care to know. But all this is private, or is it?

The latest development, Facebook Connect, allows unrelated websites full access to a consumer's Facebook page (permission based). Let's start with what third party applications can tell me about me when I give them access to my social profile:

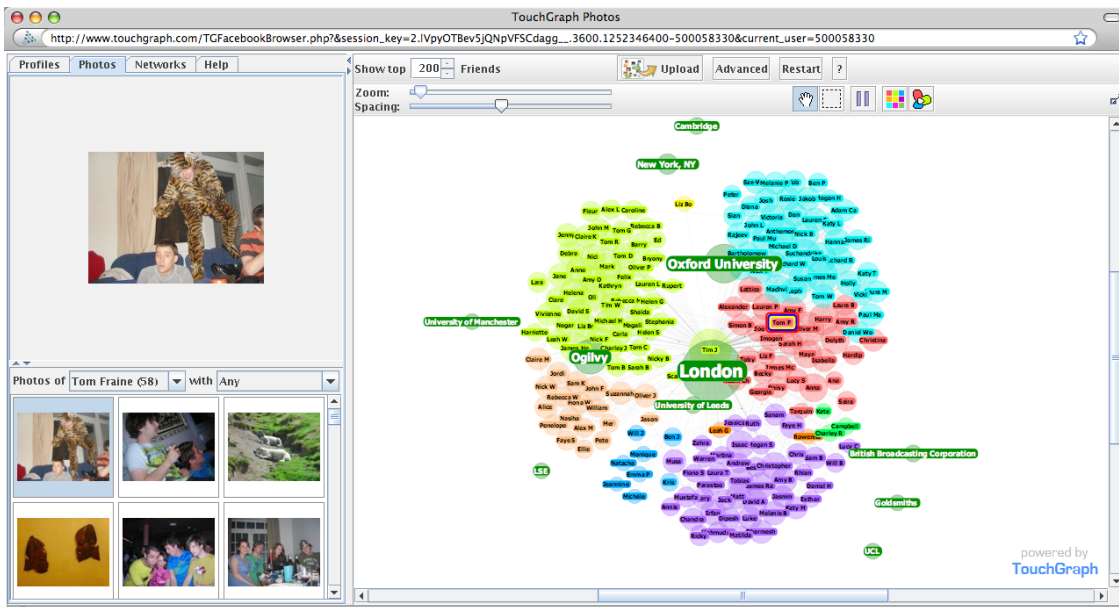


Fig 9: Touch Graph

An application that looks at all my Facebook friends and shows me how I know them and how they know each other. The colours represent different categories of relationship, i.e. school friends, family, work friends etc, whilst the people closest to me (in terms of having similar friends) are shown closer. The graph can also be used to explore friends' photo uploads by clicking on their names.

Source: <http://www.touchgraph.com/TGFacebookBrowser.html>

Visualising data in this way is kind of interesting but the real power of it lies in using your social profile to personalise the experience of another site, this has led to some pretty cool ads already:

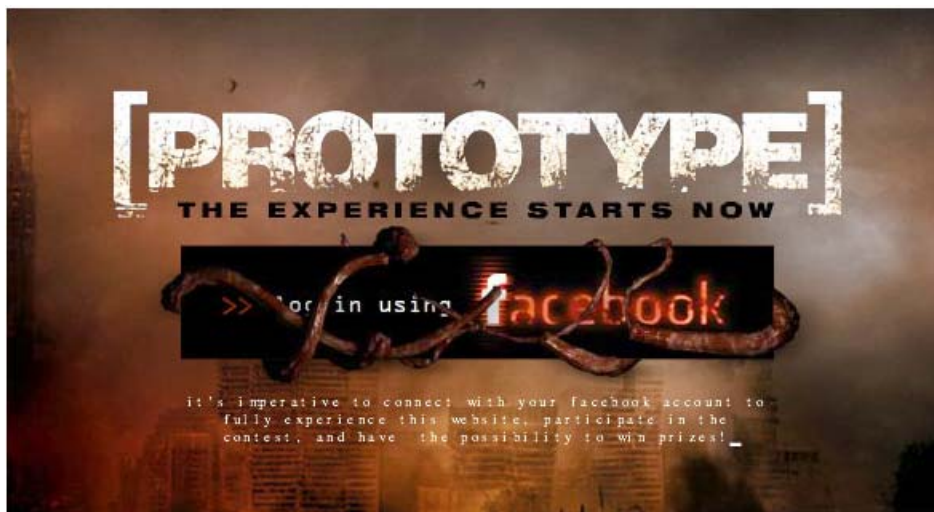


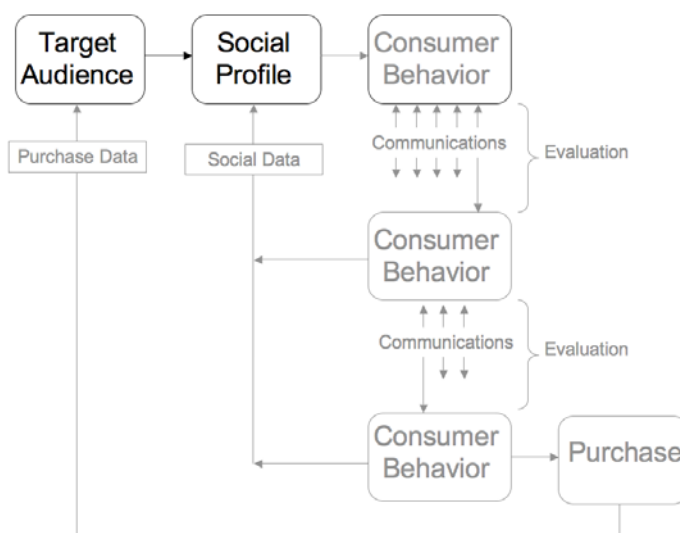
Fig 10: Prototype

This site is a promotion for the "Prototype" video game, once you connect with Facebook, the Prototype Experience pulls in photos and other information from your profile in order to customize the trailer and insert you into the video game's world. The site adds a viral element by asking you to "infect" your Facebook friends for a chance to win an Xbox 360.

Source: <http://www.prototype-experience.com/>

This isn't just a Facebook thing, all social networks, from Bebo to Flickr, even your search history could be used to personalise the experience of another site. As our media continues to be delivered digitally all audio/visual/digital media will be able to be filtered via our social profiles. . Nor is this just an online thing, as the usage of mobile Internet increases (a quarter of all Facebook users already connect via mobile<sup>4</sup>) our social profiles become mobile and personalisation gets another layer - location. Finally, social profiles will not be linked to a single website or data source for much longer, [OpenID](#)<sup>5</sup> is an initiative to tie all your various accounts and logins into one secure and convenient place. Targeting consumers in this way helps us reach the right people amongst ever fragmenting populations.<sup>6</sup>

Who to communicate with = target consumer + their social profile



Defining a consumer by their associated social profile will allow Clients to better target their communications, the first stage of communications planning, requiring the following expertise:

Who to involve and how:

Task	Skill Set	Expertise
Segmentation	Quantitative segmentation skills	Research agency + Client insights manager + brand planner
	Qualitative segmentation skills	Research agency + Client insights manager + brand planner
	Purchase data analysis skills	TNS, Dunhunby, IRI and their online equivalents + Client insights manager
Social Profile	Social data understanding – designing the right social profile for the audience	Social media owner + brand planner
	Algorithm design to recognise the appropriate individuals via their social profile	Social media owner + search engine (e.g. Google)

<sup>4</sup> Techcrunch blog via <http://www.techcrunch.com/2009/09/03/about-a-quarter-of-facebook-users-connect-via-mobile-phones/>

<sup>5</sup> OpenID eliminates the need for multiple usernames across different websites, simplifying your online experience. You get to choose the OpenID Provider that best meets your needs and most importantly that you trust. At the same time, your OpenID can stay with you, no matter which Provider you move to.

<sup>6</sup> JM Dru (2002). Beyond Disruption: Changing the Rules in the Marketplace.

## Where and when to communicate

### Portable social profiles and the personalisation of everything

The traditional communications planning approach is predictive. Planners take an educated guess that their prime prospect will be in a certain place, doing a certain thing, at a certain time and place marketing efforts in the path of these prospects. This leads to inefficiencies, no guess is ever 100% accurate.

I believe communications planning should be a reactive process based on the consumer's social profile and behaviour. Here's an example of how this could work for a media owner such as Amazon to personalise your experience:

- Products recommended not just as a result of past Amazon purchases but anything found on your social profile
- Reviews from people you know at the top of the list
- Consult any online friends at the point of purchase and chat with them about a product without leaving the page.<sup>7</sup>

As traditionally offline devices (portable music players, TV, radio etc.) become more integrated, our social profiles will become an entry point to all the content we encounter. There will no longer be a BBC, an Amazon or an iTunes, there will only be *your* BBC, *your* Amazon or *your* iTunes which will be completely personalized to you. The Washington Post has already started doing this:

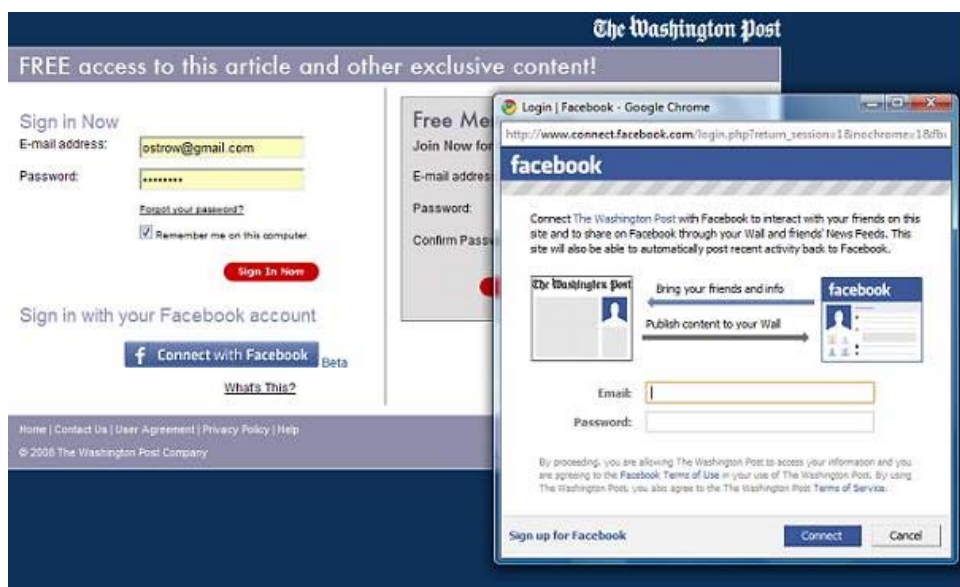


Fig 11: Washington Post launches Facebook Connect  
This provides better ad targeting information from user profiles, as well as increasing traffic by syndicating user actions (like commenting) back to Facebook, or by personalising news based on age, location, interests, or work.  
Source: <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

<sup>7</sup> Razorfish (2009): Portable Social Graphs – The Potential  
Source: <http://www.slideshare.net/shivsingh/portable-social-graphs-imagining-their-potential-presentation>

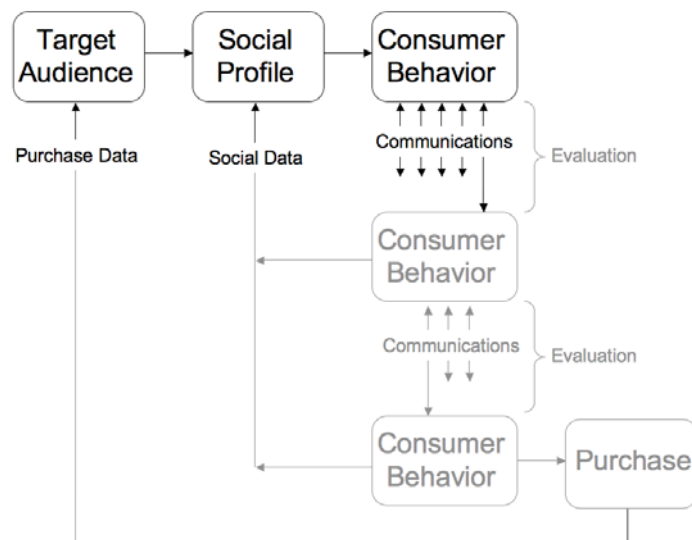
This is great for media owners, but there are also huge implications for 3<sup>rd</sup> party brands:

- Fully targeted brand activity
- Direct links to social media functionality (become a fan, direct user to brand event page, allow easy sharing of brand content)

Accessing the internet via a mobile device will add a further layer of personalization – not just based on who you are (your social profile) but also where you are, known via GPS location.

Communications planning in terms of where and when will no longer be a question

Clients should take the reactive approach of delivering communications based on the consumer social profile (who) and behaviour (what they are currently doing, i.e. ‘where’ and ‘when’).



Who to involve and how:

Task	Skill Set	Expertise
Serving personalised content based on social Profile	Algorithm design - recognising consumers' social profile	Search engine (e.g. Google)
	Serving personalised content	Media owner

What about events, sponsorships and in store?

We'll come back to this after we have considered 'how and what' to communicate.

## How and what to communicate

### The changing consumer and the need to deliver 'fast and tangible' brands

We are becoming impatient consumers. The 'net generation' expect things to be tangible and fast, they expect return immediate and real results from their actions. This is true for the jobs in which they work, the hobbies they pursue and the way they choose to interact with government, why should brands be different?<sup>8</sup> This contrasts with the traditional branding approach, which aims to drive preference by constructing intangible values over a long period of time. Brands should provide something beyond a message, brand activity that the consumer can 'do' something with, the more social the better.

This approach to communications would mean providing idea 'chains' that experiment with various consumer journeys. Each link in the chain should provide the consumer with something tangible and ideally of social value. Linking brand communication directly with the consumer's social profile makes this possible, here's a hypothetical example:



Fig 12: Tangible and fast

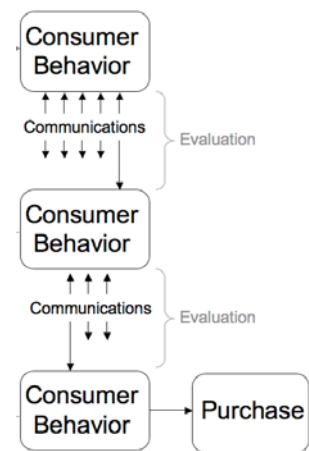
These idea chains do not all have to be online. Events, in store and other forms of traditionally offline marketing could act as a trigger or catalyst anywhere else along the chain. The key point is that consumer interaction with the activity is somehow added to their social profile so that the idea can be built into a chain, mobile will be key for this task.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> D. Tapscott (2008): Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World.

<sup>9</sup> "Shoppers will soon be able request information via their mobile phones that provide product advice, help consumers' make choices and make it easier to find what they are looking for" – Source: M. Egol and C. Vollmer (2009): Major Media in the Shopping Isle; Resilience Report, Booz and Co.

### Starting many fires

Mark Earls makes the point that it is almost impossible to predict what ideas will catch on. Just as we have no way of really knowing what journey consumers will go on to purchase our brands, we have no real idea of what ideas will attract them until well after they have launched. These leads us to Earls' 'starting many fires' approach - starting out with as many small ideas as possible and building on the ideas that catch on. As many little consumer journeys or 'ideas chains' should be experimented with as possible in order to provide consumers with multiple paths to purchase



### Fanning the flames

McKinsey suggest allocating 20% of marketing budget to experimentation to ensure marketers consistently innovate and learn. What this often means is that Clients use innovation budgets to explore new ways of building on the established brand campaign. The approach recommended by this paper would be to launch as many small but scalable, 'idea chains' as possible and build the most successful over time into bigger/more expensive expressions. Success of the Nike idea chain given above might result in investing more behind footage (i.e. investing in ATL media spend) or football which might ultimately be expressed in the form of sponsorship.

### Sponsorships

Large scale sponsorships remain one of the most tangible ways to for consumers to interact with brands, but they are also extremely time consuming and expensive forms of marketing<sup>11</sup>. The proposed channel planning framework places sponsorship as one of one of the most evolved expressions of an idea that has already caught on.

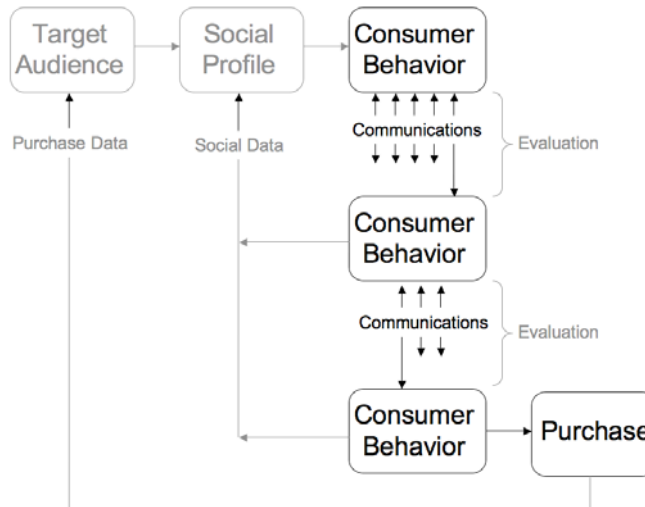
### What and how to communicate

Three principles:

- Try lots of small 'idea chains' to and from purchase
- Give consumer's something tangible at each stage
- Build on the 'idea chains' that work

<sup>10</sup> M. Earls (2009); Herd: How to Change Mass Behaviour by Harnessing Our True Nature

<sup>11</sup> H. Edwards and D. Day (2007): Creating Passion Brands: How to Build Emotional Brand Connection with Customers



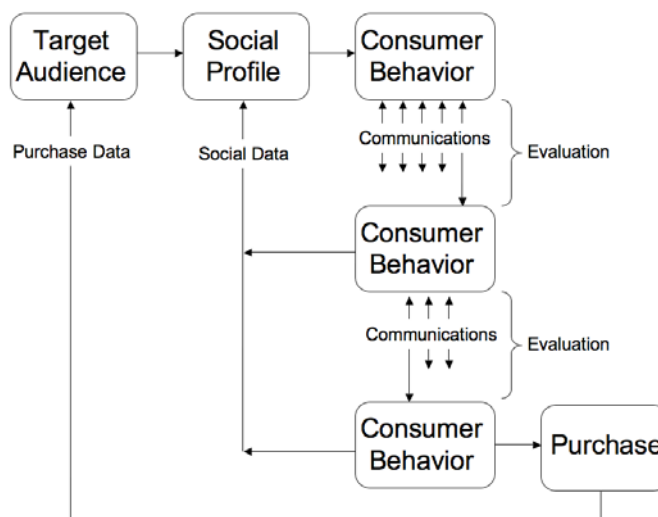
Owners of the consumer insight will be powerful in this area but as there is no one 'big idea', only lots of small ones, no one agency should necessarily dominate as all ideas start small and the successful ones built on.

Who to involve and how:

Task	Skill Set	Expertise
Creating 'idea chains'	Consumer understanding Cultural insight Brand understanding Creative craft skills	All types of creative agencies, PR agencies, media agencies
	Creative execution and technical skills	Production teams (internal or external), media owners
	Channel understanding	Media agencies

**Feedback and evaluation**

Constant evaluation and feedback is at the core of the proposed channel planning framework:



Who to involve and how:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Skill Set</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
Evaluation of idea chains in order to optimise	Objective setting	Content originator + Client
	Communications Evaluation	Channel specific data agency + Client + content originators
Feedback from consumer behaviour used to add to the social profile, helping identify them for future communications	Social data understanding – designing the right social profile for the audience  Algorithm design skills to amend target profile	Social media owner + Brand planner  Search engine (e.g. Google)
Purchase data fed back into the quantitative consumer definition	Purchase data analysis	TNS, Dunhunby, IRI and their online equivalents + Client insights manager

**Conclusions**

I believe that:

- Communications planning has become too complex for one agency group to manage for the time being, as such everyone will have a part to play
- It's not who should do communications planning but rather the approach we should take to use people in the right way at the right time
- That Clients should take an approach to communications planning that is characterised by the following:
  - Being reactive to (rather than predictive of) consumer behaviour
  - Providing consumers with multiple routes to purchase
  - Providing real time feedback for optimisation

2,358 Words (excluding footnotes)