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**From Banners to YouTube: Using the Rear-View Mirror to Look at the Future of Internet Advertising.**

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## **Abstract**

In twelve short years, Internet advertising has evolved from banners to experiential promotions. In the beginning advertisers viewed the Internet in similar ways as they considered traditional media (television, newspapers, magazines). The idea of using a new medium like an older one, was described by McLuhan's concept of the rear view mirror. This article describes the history of Internet advertising from 1994 to 2006 by looking back to understand the future direction of Internet advertising.

## **Introduction**

In 1994, the World Wide Web began to be used as an advertising medium. Similar to billboards along the highways, advertisers began placing banners on the “Information Highway.” In the twelve short years of Internet advertising, the medium has evolved from placing banners in electronic space to creating highly experiential campaigns. By looking backwards at the evolution of Internet advertising, we can begin to understand the future direction that Internet advertising is taking today.

Looking backwards to understand the future is an idea that relates to McLuhan’s concept of a rear-view mirror (McLuhan, 1964). We tend to envision our new technologies through the view of older technologies or a “rear-view mirror,” ironically, “through the lenses of the very media they were designed to replace” (Levinson, 1997, p. 126). We walk into the future thinking about the past. For instance, the automobile was originally called the horseless carriage and the telephone was first called the talking telegraph. “In each of these cases, the proximate effect of the rear-view mirror was to obscure some of the most important revolutionary functions of the new medium” (Levinson, 1999, p. 174). In essence, the rear-view mirror is “the fact that new media look backward for content and meaning” (Grosswiler, 2005, p. 256).

For McLuhan, the rear-view mirror was a way to think about the present and future. For instance, his term “global village” is an attempt to understand electronic media by looking backwards to tribal cultures. The World Wide Web is a technology that can be viewed in terms of the rear-view mirror. The billboards on the information highway are reminiscent of the billboards on the physical highway. In fact, Al Gore was thinking about his father’s contributions to the physical highway systems when he coined the phrase (Wiggins, 2000). E-mail is a parallel to traditional letters and the postal system. Television, newspapers, and radio stations

attempt to use the digital Web in a similar fashion as their analogue counterparts. By becoming aware that the rear-view mirror can blind us to the essence of a new medium, it can become a tool for examining how a new medium can be evolving into the future.

### **Banner Advertising**

In the beginning, advertisers thought that banners, similar to highway billboards, were the advertising vehicle of the Internet. HotWired introduced banner advertising in 1994, and many people think they were the first, although they did not invent banners. Chris Hurwitz created the first interactive banner ad for the game pong. The banner enabled the user to play a modified game of table tennis, which was similar to the game itself (Jaffe, 2004). At that time, consumers thought that banners were an intrusion and they complained about the time it took to download the material. Not to mention that prior to the development of the commercial Web in 1994, the Internet had been primarily an academic system. Commercial messages in the form of banners occasionally appeared in newsgroups and often appeared in proprietary services such as America Online and Prodigy. Yet, they did not commonly appear on the Internet itself.

In 1994, HotWired rounded up twelve sponsors for a 12-week sponsorship at \$30,000 each. Traffic was tracked on the ads using in-house software. The initial advertisers included Sprint, IBM, Volvo, AT&T Corp. Club Med, Zima, and Coors Brewing Company (see Reidman, 2000). Because there was a lot of buzz around the site, being on HotWired was making an advertising statement. Looking forward this could be considered the beginning of Internet viral marketing. According to Sharon Katz from Ogilvy and Mather, for IBM's purchase of banners was more of a first move than a deliberate plan. No one understood the power of the Internet, "but the buy made some rudimentary sense, she recalls: A computer with a modem connects people to HotWired, and IBM makes computers, she reasoned" (cited in Riedman, 2000, p. 106).

Advertisers believed something was going to break. “When traffic on the Internet exploded, many early true believers prayed that banner ads would be the salvation of marketing on the Web” (Goldberg, 2000, IQ40). Their thinking was framed in their understanding of older media.

It was several years before academics began to explore banners and their relationship to advertising. According to Dahlén and Bergendahl (2001) banner advertisements fell into the two general areas of expressive and functional. The authors argued that “there is a difference between informing and transforming on the web, which is important for marketers to consider” (p. 190). Functional and expressive products are categorized by the motives consumers have for buying. “Functional products are subject to negative motives whereas positive motives characterize expressive products” (p. 192). Consumers relate to the two types in different ways and they respond to advertising differently. To this day, banner advertising remains an important advertising outlet on the Web.

### **Cookies and Corporate Websites**

While banners had been used successfully as an advertising vehicle, technology advanced, and in 1995 a number of new applications appeared on the Internet, including cookies and corporate websites. Cookies personalized Web pages and could be used to identify users and track customers’ movements. The invention of cookies created a stir on the Internet. Consumers were concerned about their privacy and DoubleClick began to track the activities of users through their use (DoubleClick, 2005). In 1996, privacy became a central topic of concern for Internet users. Consumers begin to circumvent cookies with software programs (Morrissey, 2005). Looking forward, people were concerned about their privacy rights. To help solve the cookie problem, Bell Lab’s Information Science Research Center introduced new standards for cookie technology to protect the rights of individuals.

As cookie technology tracked the whereabouts of Internet users, corporations began creating websites (Digital Commerce Center, 1997). CBS launched its site and ESPN SportsZone was also online. Banks were some of the early entrants to the online world. Internet banking started with the Bank of Boston and home banking (Bronson, 1995, May 22). Other advertisers with sites included Maytag and United Airlines. Banners were “believed to be the most common way to draw consumers into a target site and engage them with a brand or product” (Cho, 2003,p. 201). Corporate websites lasted the test of time by pulling more viewers in 2006 than prime time TV shows and print magazines (Neff, 2006, December 4, p 1). Although, corporate websites initially represented a throwback to print-based advertising, the addition of interactivity brought a new dimension of involving and engaging with consumers directly.

In this digital age, keyword searches have also become embedded into the new technology. In 1995, Info Seek introduced the concept of targeting advertising to keyword search queries. Keywords became a new way to promote brands on the Internet given the consumers prolific use of search engines. Proctor and Gamble registered 184 names relating to their different products. Keyword searches and interactivity routed themselves firmly as key concepts for Internet advertising.

### **Push Technology**

In 1996, *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* started their interactive editions and Microsoft debuted the ezine, *Slate*. However, most organizations were still thinking in terms of old media. PointCast started its client-server application to “Push” news and information to users. Conformed thinking like a broadcasting model, Push was designed to broadcast or push messages to users instead of interactively letting them self select information. Push became a hot topic when it was featured on the March 1997 cover of *Wired Magazine*. Push exemplified the

idea that people look at new media through the lens of an older one, in this case television and radio. Advertisers thought that users would passively receive information on the Internet. Although it was hyped to be a new form of media (see *Wired*, March 1997), Push technologies essentially were broadcasting and broadcasting was not to be the main future of advertising on the Internet. The future lies in the interactive features of the network.

In addition to the interest of Push Technology, 1997 was the year that systems for tracking Internet advertising began developing. Nielsen Media Research started compiling data for its for online ratings model. The Internet Local Advertising and Commerce Association was formed (ILAC), and PointCast Inc. contracted with the Audit Bureau of Verification Services to perform the first-ever audit of Internet traffic.

### **Pop-Up Advertising**

As advertisers began counting users and tracking where people went online a new style of advertising was beginning to emerge. In 1998, the Interstitial or pop-up ad appeared on the desktop<sup>1</sup>. These ads that appeared in a separate browser window were not embedded in another website (Kay & Medoff, 2001). Whilst banners are like real estate on a website, while pop-ups are independent of the site and appearing separately on a users screen. Pop-up ads and push technologies were thinking backwards to traditional broadcast media. A pop-up was like a commercial interruption. It forces the user to close the window before it would disappear on the screen.

Pop-ups became a common form of online advertising, just like banners. Over the next few years, a number of companies added to pop-up technology, including Omnicom and Unicast. Unicast's technology was a Superstitial pop-up window that cashed its content to a consumer's hard drive and appeared only when the content was fully cashed. The difference was that it



displayed streamed imagery with no visual break-up of video content (Greenberg, 2000). Similarly, Omnicom's technology displayed cartoon-like characters on users' screens. Clicking characters revealed promotional opportunities appeared. "Placed on a computer's hard drive, the [advertisement] spots are presented at set intervals. Ads will also play over the next generation of Ericsson wireless phones that are equipped to receive Internet content" (Hill, 2000, p. 5). First considered an eye sore, pop-ups gained acceptance over the next few years. One journalist asked: Should we "pull the plug on pop-ups?" (Blackshaw, 2003). But, as the future revealed, that never happened. Advertising technologies continued to develop that looked toward the future and beyond the banner.

### **Stickiness and Web Communities**

In 1998, an interactive journalist began to see the Internet for its future. Connie Guglielmo began to look at the stickiness of Web communities and their potential for developing customers. She stated: "On the Web, the best customer is a sticky customer, a consumer who has developed an affection, affinity or addiction to a site that compels him or her to return there often" (Guglielmo, 1998, p. 35). The power of communities, a subject we return to in 2005, was becoming noticed. "Virtual communities capitalize on the interactivity and many-to-many communications potential of the Web (Holland & Baker, 2001, p.40).

Similarly, interface designer, Jakob Nielsen said: "The *Web is not like TV*. Most fundamentally, the Web is a user-driven narrow-casting medium utilizing low bandwidth with high flexibility, whereas television is a broadcast mass-medium utilizing high bandwidth with little flexibility" (1997, para. 2). These observations foresaw the potential of the future of social networking. Yet it still took a few more years before advertisers would stop looking backwards.

By 1999 advertising on the Internet began to change. While banner ads and search results were becoming more advertising-sponsored, rich media was becoming a new topic of interest, *Newsweek* unveiled online community features on its website, and shopping bots were a topic of interest. In 1999, only 10% of Internet advertising was in a rich media format and that number grew over the next few years. @Home released a study that reinforced the argument for advertising and rich media to create more effective campaigns. Rich media tended to look toward television as a model, and when Internet videos reach the quality of television commercials it becomes a newsworthy event.

The idea of community, however, really looked toward the future. When using discussion forums “marketers should focus not only on ‘transactional’ but also on ‘relational elements’” (Chiou & Cheng, 2003, p. 51). News media tended to think of themselves as content providers and user-generated content did not fit their idea of media content. In the new world of the Internet, user-generated content, once considered secondary, would become central to current approaches. Building relationships would become more important. Online communities would have “greater credibility, relevance and ability to generate empathy—that leads them to be more effective than marketer-provided information in generating product category interest” (Bickart & Schindler, 2001, p. 36). For instance, *Newsweek* as a good example was looking forward when it developed its first online community (Gilbert, 1999).

Another future development was shopping bots. These software robots (bots) could search “the Internet for the lowest-priced item in a particular category” (Riedman, 1999). “Business agents help to build customer loyalty by personalizing the seller’s service and streamlining the consumer’s interaction with the website” (Redmond, 2002, p.57). While the technology can be used to help users find lower prices it doesn’t always factor into consumer

practice. Although bots are forward-thinking, they are not part of the normal shopping experience for the majority of consumers. Not all new inventions easily become part of buying behavior.

### **Back to the Banner**

In 2000, Barbie banner ads were popular and Erwin Ephron of *Advertising Age* wrote: “The Old Media are worried about the New Media. . . The New Media are worried about advertiser dollars. . . And advertisers are worried about where to put those dollars that don’t buy enough TV anymore” (Ephron, 2000, p. 52). Banner advertising was improved in several ways. First WinWin.com was launched to enable sponsors to reach consumers with banners that were targeted to their interests (Wiley, 2000). Second, Expand-o was introduced, a technology that allowed Web advertisers to include some of their web content in a banner ad. While banner advertising was a rear-view mirror concept, there were some new ideas in 2000, including the terms multitasking, loyalty marketing, and viral marketing (Barlow, 2000; Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

Multitasking was doing several things at the same time. For instance, parents often saw their teenagers watching TV, listening to I-pods, and doing homework all at once. Loyalty marketing was building and maintaining a relationship with the customer. Online communities established by marketers can become a “positive and durable part of its customers’ lives” (Barlow, 2000, 46). Customer relationships could be maintained through the Internet with the simple tool of e-mail. “The Internet’s power to create, sustain and leverage such communities of customers-both online and offline- will become an increasingly powerful marketing tool” (p. 46). Loyalty marketing looks forward to the potential of marketing through online communities. Finally, a concept that looked forward was viral marketing.

Viral marketing, “using customer communication as a means or multiplying a brand’s popularity through customers spreading the brand name” (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004, p. 39) was established with the Anheuser-Bush “Wassup” campaign. “Although the ads originally launched on TV, the campaign gained momentum on the Web with lightning speed” (Bannan, 2000, p. IQ20). Users began downloading the commercials from the Web and they sent them to others online. “Online [word-of-mouth] is facilitated through a variety of tools such as weblogs, bulletin boards, chat rooms, discussion forums, and instant messaging” (Sun, Youn, Wu, Kuntaraporn, 2006, para. 41). The success of this campaign made other advertisers want to try going viral. Companies focused on viral campaigns by setting up tell-a-friend-type promotions. The most common type of delivery method for viral marketing was e-mail. The threat of spam threatened to interfere with the delivery of the messages. The solution to this problem was to find a balance between content and caution. The message had to be clear without upsetting consumers. “Retailers and advertisers need to learn how to incent people without incensing them” (p. IQ20). Companies were also beginning to specialize in viral marketing campaigns.

As viral marketing was beginning to take root, users flocked to news sites on the Web to find information about the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. The number of people going online to check news, increased dramatically. While the number of online users increased, interactive agencies were scaling back and regional headquarters were closing. However, one new firm, Danilo Black was looking toward the Latin American market. The new firm wanted to help Latin American clients move into the online market (Mack, 2001).

### **Brand Relationships & Rich Media**

In 2002, advertisers began to look more closely at the consumer and their online purchase practices. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) was a conventional communications vehicle that made it possible to understand consumer insights when purchasing products. Academics (Thorbjørnsen, Supphellen, Nysveen, & Pedersen, 2002; Matwick, 2002) were also researching brand relationship quality (BRQ) and relational norms. As marketers became more research oriented, creative directors became more daring in their use of Internet advertising. BMW released a series of films on the Internet using well known actors and Frito-Lay took its TV advertising online to offer teens the chance to view its commercials. Streaming media was now the new force in Internet advertising.

Broadband reaches an 18% penetration and TV-quality ads were now playing on the Internet in 2003. Paid search has grown to nearly \$1.6 million and the number of consumers using pop-up blockers increased. 2003 was a turning point year because advertisers such as Gap, Absolut and Nike were pioneering different creative approaches to their websites by using Flash and Shockwave. Broadband acceptance enabled advertisers to use more rich media in their campaigns and the social networking sites called MySpace and Second Life were launched.

By 2004, streaming media was popular, advertisers could now display full screen commercials on the web, 3-D images were incorporated into banner ads, search advertising moved forward, Burger King launched its “Subservient Chicken” online campaign, behavioral targeting developed, and blogs were becoming high profile. AT&T, Pepsi, Honda, McDonald’s, Warner Brothers, and Vontage begin testing a new video-commercial technology on the Web (Mack, 2004). TV’s dominance as a delivery medium was being directly challenged because more targeted commercials could now be shown online at a fraction of the cost. Additionally, animated banners could display 3-D graphics to attract more attention.

Search advertising also moved forward. More mainstream brands were using search and “Juniper research reports that 76% of marketing executives who have used search engine marketing rate it as more effective than banner advertising” (Karpinski, 2004, p. 22). Search providers “improve search’s relevance and reach” (p. 22). A competition for the best-performing keywords heats up during the holiday season (Oser, 2004, p. 4).

## **Blogs**

While search advertising heats up, Burger King was serving up a new type of interactive advertising. The “Subservient Chicken” campaign appeared online and it won the gold medal at the Viral Awards (Anderson, 2005). “Within a day after being released, the site had a million hits. Within a week, it had received 20 million hits” (para. 2). This viral campaign was popular with bloggers, the technology on the site enabled users to type in nearly anything and get a response from the chicken. Interactivity became the centerpiece or starting point for the success of online campaigns (see Oser, 2004a). Buzz became a new term to describe what people were saying on blogs. But, most important there was the realization that consumers were in control of content on the Internet (Thompson, 2004). “Agencies should not see the power shift to consumers as a crisis but rather ‘the world’s biggest opportunity,’ said Kevin Roberts, worldwide CEO at Publicis Groupe’s Saatchi & Saatchi” (cited in Thompson, 2004, p. 1).

As consumers began to control content, advertisers closely watched as Nike began using blogs as a marketing tool to promote its indie-film series “The Art of Speed.” (Oser, 2004b). Peter Blackshaw, chief marketing officer at Intelliseek stated: “Consumer adoption of blogs has been on a steady rise for two years or so and marketers have realized that you can’t ignore them, because they tend to disseminate information so fast” (cited in Oser, 2004c, p. 3) Advertisers realized that blogger’s influence on public opinion was something that they could not ignore.

However, blogs could be a risky business. For instance, Audi was the sole sponsor of the jalopnik blog, which ran the risk of criticizing their products. “You’ve got to rethink the structure of media at its most fundamental level” says blogger Jeff Jarvis (cited in Taylor, 2004). The fundamental level is interactivity and engaging consumers with advertising.

In 2005, interactivity was being fully realized by advertisers (Oser, 2004a). Advertising shifts to the idea of engaging with brands and inviting people into the consumer experience. This was called permission marketing, “databases of customers who agree to receive marketing messages with low-cost, customized e-mails that attempt to slice through advertising clutter, attract increased customer support, and change behavior” (Tezinde, Smith & Murphy, 2002, p. 28). Young people are doing more word-of-mouth advertising and advertisers began promoting their brands in video games. Additionally, Podcasts and RSS feeds, which include marketing messages, were being received by consumers. Brandimensions began to collect buzz data on the Internet and YouTube was launched. In 2005, banner ads incorporate rich media by adding video previews. Movie studios and television networks were the champions of this new approach (Morrissey, 2005). Advertisers now marry the branding elements of television with the interactive features of the Internet. “The reinvigoration of banner ads could [lead] to a creative renaissance on the Web” (p, 12). However, creativity begins to take a different turn with the success of the social network, MySpace.

The campaign of the year was Audi’s experiential “Art of the Heist,” an all-inclusive campaign for the A3. This interactive campaign used all media, including the Internet and face-to-face events. Consumers played the game and the campaign generated considerable traffic to Audi dealers nationwide. Numerous changes in advertising took place in 2005, and this trend continued into 2006.

Social networks changed the landscape of the Internet in 2006 and advertisers were keenly aware of this change. Computer networks linked people together into social networks. It had taken the advertising industry ten years to realize what academic researchers knew in 1996: “Information is only one of many social resources exchanged on-line. Despite the limited social presence of [computer-mediated-communication], people find social support, companionship, and a sense of belonging through the normal course of [computer-supported social networks] of work and community, even when they are composed of persons they hardly know” (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gualia, Hathornthwaite, 1996, p. 220). For-profit networks, such as America Online, had structured commercial interactions before 1996. Now the rest of the advertising community began exploit these possibilities, especially with the formation of YouTube.

### **YouTube and User-Generated Content**

In 2006, advertisers began looking forward, J. Walter Thompson and HuffingtonPost.com created video ads that were designed to be easily forwarded through e-mail exchanges. Additionally, advertisers could now sell virtual products in Second Life, as this alternate world became more populated (Rubel, 2006, Nov. 27). User-generated content was the new trend in 2006. Dove solicited ads from consumers and they turned user-generated content into advertising content, which was broadcast on YouTube. Finalists in the competition would win tickets for the Academy Awards, where the spot was broadcast (Neff, 2006, Dec. 14). Advertisers now had a new Internet option: “Wait until their commercials make it onto YouTube and hope they go viral. YouTube actually encourages this—so long as the free posts are accompanied by paid versions” (Garfield, 2006, p. 266).



Following the trend in developing user-centered content, Microsoft explored ways to let users pick which ads to view and social networking sites explored ways to let users have a say over which brands appear on their content pages (Morrissey, 2006, April 10). The goal was to eventually let users create their own ads, This new form of advertising was to steer users toward advertiser-sponsored communities and to build viral-driven, two-way communication with consumers. To begin this process a growing number of brand profiles appeared on social networking sites. “Nearly every movie released these days has an accompanying MySpace page, where users can choose to be “friends” with, for example, Ricky Bobby, Will Ferrell’s character in the [movie] Talladega Nights. Over 25,000 have already done so” (Morrissey, 2006, Jul 24-Jul 31).

Advertising on social networks had become a top priority for online marketers” (Carlson, 2006, para 4.). Social networks showed the real nature of the Internet as vehicle for advertising. YouTube videos by users and advertising agencies are now embedded in social networking sites. When advertisers stopped looking in the rear-view mirror and began recognizing the true nature of Internet communications, they found that advertising was now an embedded form of communication on the Internet. There was no real difference between a product page and a personal page on social networks. Advertising now reached a point in which it was entwined with reality. Individuals were now branding themselves like commercial products. Advertising is no longer in the hands of agencies, individuals are now branding themselves (see Grossman, 2006/2007)

### **The Rise of the Personal Brand.**

The recent shift in online advertising methods has also seen a dramatic rise in the importance of the personal branding (Peters, 1997). In certain respects this can be seen as a return to the

roots of consumer use of the internet pre 1995, dominated by the personal web site or page. This is a good example of rear-view mirror thinking. Organizations were noting the popularity of social networks as a means for communicating benefits of products and services through word of mouth where consumers themselves were sponsoring the message. This is forward thinking, but companies were faced with a difficult dilemma; to what extent should they use these social networks to advertise their goods and services, and how. Concurrently, consumers are increasingly aware of the need to build an online construction of themselves that enhanced or mirrored their physical presence. A number of tactics were being pursued that the researchers have noted over the past year (Shepherd, 2005; Montoya, 2003).

### **Personal Websites**

First was the personal website. Perhaps this was the most popular of tactics available to consumers is the construction of a personally branded website. Over the past few years there appears to have been a meteoric move away from html software packages and hand coded script to the use of more user-friendly web based platforms such as word press. Interestingly there have been further developments in the use of the personal website with more consumers using established social communities such as Facebook and MySpace to represent themselves with the minimum of effort. Increasingly consumers are representing themselves across multiple social network platforms where social circles are not necessarily exclusive to one particular platform or another. In contrast, users are using many different social network sites.

### **The Social Network**

The rise of the online social network represents another leading means of branding oneself personally electronically (see Grossman, 2006/2007). Consumers appear to hold perceptions of favorability and or exclusivity toward particular platforms. For organizations this represents the

challenge of gauging their target markets opinion as history in the peer-to-peer file sharing market suggests migration happens regularly, and with much speed. Which social networks you are members of a network that also speaks toward the type of digital citizen you are. Facebook for instance is reminiscent of college, LinkedIn with that of working professionals, and MySpace with a broader network representing a wider society. Once again, organizations are faced with the challenge of consumer acceptance regarding what is considered a legitimate use of the platform for promotional purposes. Whilst it is generally seen as acceptable to promote oneself in a social network – indeed one of the primary purposes of engaging with a social network in the first place, the corporate use of social networks has been widely dismissed, thus far although this may be expected to change with the increased popularity of such corporate sites as LinkedIn (Copeland, 2006). Increasingly consumers are also branding themselves in social networks with the comments that they leave others in commercial and personal spaces. What you say to others is as important a reflection on your brand as what you say about yourself in your own space. One way to have your own space is to start a blog.

### **Online diary / blogs.**

In 2006, we saw the continued rise of consumer blogging. Blogging appears to be one of the most virulent means of promoting or branding oneself online (Hoppough, 2006). Social communities surrounding bloggers have also been seen where individuals regularly contribute to others as a means of increasing awareness and generating content. With this rise we have also seen an increase in consumer empowerment. Examples of problematic relations between companies and even political parties and their consumers were widely evident (Melillo, 2007). One such example was Nintendo's release of the new gaming platform the Wii. Within weeks of its launch blogs began to report problems with the hand held controllers causing physical damage

to consumers. Similarly, examples exist in the motor industry (crushmy307.co.uk), Sony's graffiti campaign for its Play Station Personal (PSP), Dells recall of its laptop batteries, and the warranty surrounding Apples Ipod range. Companies are increasingly faced with negative effects of consumer empowerment online, particularly those campaigns that are viral and spread quickly. Similarly they appear unable to use blogs as a means of promoting their offerings with a number of high profile cases where consumers retaliated. One way to represent yourself without the fear of retaliation is search engine representation.

### **Search engine representation**

Personal branding has also seen the rise in the importance of effective search engine representation. This has given rise to the popular phenomena know as 'googling oneself'. Where an individuals online representation (be it a blog or personal website) is categorized in the more populous websites is of importance. Research consistently shows that individuals using search engines tend not to browse more than three pages. Some research suggests that consumers are increasingly reticent to scroll pages. Where your brand stands with regard to search engines is therefore critical. Similarly your reputation in search engines is also important to those wishing to positively brand themselves online. What others say about you is also an important reflection of your brand. Increasingly consumers are monitoring search engines to ensure consistency in their brand image. One way to control your image is to create an avatar to represent you online.

### **Avatars**

The visual representation of oneself is also increasingly key to personal branding online given the increasing popularity of three-dimensional virtual worlds. The use of avatars, graphical depictions of oneself or ones personality are perpetuated by the ability to post pictures on social network sites, personal web pages or blogs, and communication networks such as

instant messaging facilities like AOLIM, MSNIM and Skype and of course popular worlds such as SecondLife and World of Warcraft (Hemp, 2006). Interestingly consumers appear divided on the nature of their representation, whether they use real pictures, or images of other items. The nature of avatars of course says a great deal about ones depiction of self. This therefore needs to be managed effectively.

### **Representation On Commercial Sites**

With the rise of the personal wish list consumers should also be mindful of the image they portray in the goods and services that they covet. Similarly, the messages they leave on their consumption habits of goods and services also needs examining. One increasingly popular feature of e-retail sites is the ability to leave comments on their consumption experience. This can again say a great deal about your personal brand. The rise of internet television has also impacted upon a personal branding strategy. YouTube and GoogleVideo are two examples of sites that have seen dramatic increases in consumer use (see Garfield, 2006). What you watch as evidenced by the comments you leave or the ratings you confer about content in this domain again says a great deal about your personal brand and your ability to represent yourself. Organizations have been slow to adopt these new channels as a legitimate means of presenting their offerings. Consumers have remained largely dismissive of such attempts as represented recently by political parties for instance.

### **Use of Email**

Whilst new technology has spawned new opportunities to brand oneself online, email still represents one of the key vehicles for doing so. Your email address says a great deal about your personality, key features include ones birth year, ones name, or ones favorite activity or brand. Similarly the signature of your email represents another means by which you might effectively

manage your personal brand. Increasingly consumers are using quotes to represent themselves and their beliefs. They are also increasingly demonstrating their adoption and use of new technologies by including such details as social networks that they are members of and their range of alternative communication platforms (such as voice over IP telephone details, instant messaging handles, and personal web sites or blogs).

## **Conclusion**

Since 1994, with the wide scale introduction of the World Wide Web, Internet advertising has gone through many changes. Originally advertisers had a rear-view mirror attitude that looked at Internet advertising like older forms of advertising, such as billboards, commercials, and direct marketing. When we look at the Internet as a interactive rather than one-way flow of messages, new types of advertising begins to appear in the form of blogs, viral marketing, experiential advertising, YouTube, and social networking. These later types of advertising campaigns all require interactivity. But, the biggest change in advertising is the idea of user-generated content. Soliciting users to create advertising campaigns instead of controlling campaign messages is the most forward thinking of all the new advertising methods. This idea alters our notions of what mass media is all about because messages now come from the once passive audience that watches television commercials. As an interactive medium, user-generated content, viral marketing, social networks, YouTube, and experiential advertising look to the future and reveal the ways in which the Internet should be used in the future of advertising.

What of the future of the individual where advertising is no longer in the hands of organizations. Individuals have now taken control of the media and they are promoting themselves along with their coveted goods and services. Personal branding is similar to product branding. It is making people aware of “You,” the theme of *Time Magazine*’s person of the year.

We are now an interactive integral part of the advertising process with our YouTube videos and user-generated advertising campaigns.

**Notes:**

1. The chronology used for this article was based on information from the Digital Commerce Center, DoubleClick, Worlddata. *Advertising Age* and *Adweek*.



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