Capturing brand experiences as they occur allows brands to test and learn during a campaign cycle, as Wilkinson Sword proved with the German campaign for its new Hydro razor.

By Jo Rigny, MESH

The downturn in the economy is putting increased pressure upon advertising budgets, with the question moving beyond ‘tell me which 50% of spend is working’, to ‘tell me how to optimise spend while the campaign is live’. The traditional approach of ‘test and learn’ for the next campaign is fast becoming a luxury. Increased budgetary pressure and greater communication opportunities are leading brands to engage in real-time dialogue with their customers. This year during the Super Bowl, when there was a blackout, brands responded in real-time. Procter & Gamble’s Tide detergent made a rapid post on Twitter, ‘We can’t get your #blackout. But we can get your stains out.’ Mondelez uploaded an image of Oreo biscuits saying ‘you can still dunk in the dark.’ You can’t pre-test these fleeting ideas. It is the brand’s ability to respond to situations important to their customers that makes them feel in touch with their lives.

Real-time digital analysis offers opportunities to respond quickly to how messages are landing with people. How can we provide CMOs with a solution to this question across all their media investments?

We have been pioneering Real-time Experience Tracking (TM) (RET) since 2006, using mobile technology to capture brand experiences as they occur. Real-time Experience Reporters become the eyes and ears of a category and keep a diary of every experience they see, hear or participate in. Participants tell us what brand they experienced, in which channel (from a conversation, a Facebook post through to a TV sponsorship experience), how positive or negative they found the experience, and how likely it made them to choose or not choose that brand in the future. Either side of this Real-time Experience Diary, participants complete brand health surveys.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS

From the start, RET gave brands a 360 campaign tracking solution. The next challenge was to develop techniques to advise brands quickly and more accurately on how to ‘test and learn’ throughout a campaign’s lifecycle. In 2010, Cranfield School of Management and ourselves successfully applied for a Knowledge Transfer Partnership, based on a proposal to answer this growing business need. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships is a UK-wide programme helping businesses to improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK Knowledge Base. A Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) serves to meet a core strategic need and to identify innovative solutions to help that business grow.

With a statistician KTP Associate embedded within MESH Planning, we worked with Cranfield to develop an approach that would provide this pressing client need.

CAMPAIGN OPTIMISER

Campaign Optimiser (CO) was the first tool to come out of the KTP and focuses on how well each element of a campaign is performing, while the campaign is live. CO offers brands an alternative to pre-testing as it captures the real-time, real-world impact of a creative execution on brand metrics. Pre-testing is limited in the degree of confidence it can offer by presenting an ad to someone in the setting of an online or face-to-face survey, rather than the real-life context with competitor communications and news stories. Traditional ad-testing can help diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the creative execution, but it doesn’t quantify the link (if any) with actual changes in brand perceptions. Knowing an ad is significantly above norms for brand appeal doesn’t tell you how that translates into a shift in how many people say it’s a brand they love.

Campaign Optimiser was developed to answer just that question. The traditional route implies that a good ad is what caused that movement in brand love. CO quantifies that link and critically, it addresses the causality of movements – something that just isn’t possible with traditional tracking. This holistic approach also allows for a diagnosis of each campaign element – whether the brand is aware of what online activity it had on or not, it is still tracked and...
can quantify how each media channel has impacted on each metric. We look at the individual media channels and can analyse this across paid, owned, and earned experiences. More significantly, we can observe the multiplier effect of experiencing multiple campaign elements.

The accuracy and detail of the results has helped brands optimise campaigns as they roll out, as well as change the laydown of their future campaigns to ensure each touchpoint is as effectively used as possible.

When Energizer launched a new Wilkinson Sword Hydro razor in Germany, the team used the Real-Time Experience Tracker to measure the campaign. Over the course of the 20-week campaign, several bold changes were made based on the feedback provided on campaign efficacy. Key decision moments were identified before commencing the fieldwork where feedback would be provided for future campaign learning or to optimise in real-time.

There are two metrics that give a good guide as to the effectiveness of the campaign: the Reach per week is the percentage of people who have textured in this week and the Positivity is the percentage of textured experiences that are Very or Fairly Positive. Examining Reach per week in relation to media spend helps identify if the expected cut-through is being achieved and Positivity against benchmarks for competitors within the study as well as for previous similar campaigns. However, these metrics don’t tell you if the experiences have driven key brand metrics such as Consideration. This is where Campaign Optimiser comes in. All these approaches were used with Energizer.

The two key channels that impacted on Consideration to buy the new Hydro product were TV and Online. Posters did a good job of impacting on Consideration to buy the parent brand, Wilkinson Sword, but it was the TV and online advertising that drove product interest. This made sense because the posters simply announced that there was a new product being launched by Wilkinson Sword and encouraged people to look out for it. It was the TV advertising that explained the benefits of Hydro. Online had twice the impact of TV on Consideration and for people who experienced both TV and Online we saw a multiplier effect.

This collaborative and well-planned campaign resulted in investment being moved from press to online channels as we saw the limited impact of press on the young male target audience. We were also able to recommend continuing use of the TV ad with a cut-down 20-second version and 10-second tag-on. Normally we would expect to see some kind of wearout within six weeks of launch, but, in this instance, real-time engagement with the ad remained high. This second iteration worked even more persuasively than the initial launch ad.

In spite of the best laid plans, we still had to respond to a crisis part-way through the launch. The promotional offer proved so successful that retailers ran out of stock. We needed to take an immediate decision on whether to cut the TV advertising. In reading diary comments, we saw that while the advertising was attracting attention, it was leaving people wondering how to get the offer. We recommended that the limited remaining TV should continue to raise interest in the new product but that future launches there should be clearer calls to action.

The executives at Energizer calculated that the changes made a three-fold improvement in advertising cost-effectiveness and increased their revenue in the razor market by 10% in less than four months.

**REAL-TIME DECISION-MAKING**

Business is becoming less forgiving of failure to win first time. Our challenge as researchers and media planners is to provide brand owners with the tools to measure and reassess their marketing investment in real-time. We need to strike the right balance between allowing enough time for messages to land and not leaving too much time to elapse before we recommend change takes place. Campaign Optimiser provides clients with more than a gut-feel for what decisions they need to take in situ. We have secured a second KTP focused on data integration which will take us even closer to real-time decision-making.