

Every good strategy begins with an articulation of the future...

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TNS wrapped up its 2013 breakfast series in early November, with Rosie Hawkins, global head of Brand and Communication, visiting from London to challenge delegates to think differently when considering the future of marketing.

Hawkins believes the future of marketing is here now, and quoted science fiction writer, William Gibson, who stated, "The future is already here - it's just not evenly distributed". She added that every good strategy begins with an articulation of the future, in terms of what needs to be done, what role needs to be adopted or what service needs to be provided that will afford an organisation a place in the future. This comes, first and foremost, from gaining understanding of and insight into the consumer.



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Consumers have, on the one hand, never been more available, given the numerous touch points they interact with and how much information this provides. However, on the other hand, they have also never been more elusive due to the sheer amount of data this produces and the need to sift through it all to create meaning.



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In order to begin to use this information to understand consumers and their wants and needs, Hawkins explored the importance of context from several different perspectives, because "context is king".

To begin with, the context of the internet revolution has meant a change in everything from attention spans, to language use, and has seen a rise in the need for instant gratification and the prevalence for multi-tasking, especially with the addition of a second screen into much of our media viewing.

At the same time, higher internet penetration and its associated higher levels of social media interactivity also enable inherent human behaviour. Hawkins pointed out that human beings have always had a desire to connect and socialise, we are now simply provided with another channel to do so. With this in mind, it is important for marketers to remember that the consumers they are targeting are still the same people, they are just interacting in a different way. It is this different way that marketers need to consider, because it affects the way in which they can and need to listen and interact with consumers, as well as the way they themselves behave in the digital space, which also affects the brand personality.

Building on the way in which social media has caused people to interact differently with one another and with brands, comes the idea that they are also interacting with media in a different context. Given the proliferation of media platforms, such as the growth in uptake of mobile and social media, as well as the mere choice of content available, audiences are becoming more and more fragmented. In addition, as already mentioned, the majority of people watching television are interacting with a second screen at the same time - and this interaction may or may not be related to what they are viewing on the 'first screen'.

The challenge here for marketers is to develop communication for the second screen that links with the first screen so that consumers are interacting with your brand in both spaces. There is the additional challenge to consider ways in which a campaign can be translated effectively to connect with fragmented audiences, as well as how one campaign can be pushed across various channels in the way that is most effective for each channel.

One particular channel that plays an important role in consumers' lives and thus should certainly come into consideration for marketers, is mobile. It is common knowledge that most people have their mobile phones with them most if not all of the

time, making this channel particularly useful, especially considering that there are more iPhones sold each day than babies born. In rapid growth economies particularly, mobile is also often the first and only means of engagement with the internet, so brands hoping to engage with

these markets need to start with mobile, as opposed to simply converting their desktop websites or campaigns to mobile. It is, however, beneficial to think about aspects such as peaks and troughs in mobile use during the day, and on different days during the week, which differs from country to country. In Russia, for example, there is a spike in mobile use during commuting times, whereas in South Africa mobile use is consistent throughout the day, with a dip only during the evening commute. Hawkins emphasised that brands need to consider when it is likely that their interaction with consumers might be invited or rejected, as well as times when they might be missing out on the opportunity to engage.

The mobile context in which marketers find themselves is also linked to a changing retail context. Hawkins used the example of a 'virtual supermarket' set up in a South Korean subway. Instead of having to make an additional stop at the supermarket on the way home, commuters can simply use their mobile phones to photograph the images of the goods they need, which are posted on the subway walls, and have the goods delivered to their doors. This certainly enhances the lives of these consumers, but Hawkins also pointed out that this has implications on 'bricks and mortar' retail. This highlights the importance of understanding increasingly high consumer expectations and demands, and being competitive in offering these.

With regard to consumer expectations and demands, as well as behaviour, it makes sense to look at the data context we are operating in, too. As alluded to earlier, the amount of data available to marketers about consumers is significant, with every click, purchase and Facebook 'like' providing more information. The question is what to do with this information. Hawkins discussed that big data is incomplete and behavioural data is context neutral, so the challenge remains getting to consumer truths.

It is possible to lose sight of core consumer truths and what it is your brand stands for when bombarded with big data and the pressure to move to digital. Hawkins suggests "remembering what we already know and challenging what we think we know". This means keeping in mind what your brand is all about, while at the same time applying new thinking to old methods when it comes to finding out more. According to Hawkins, many traditional research approaches are flawed because they tend to measure the wrong things. For example, consumers might be asked exactly where and when they saw certain brand communication, when in reality this matters less than whether or not they can recall the communication and how effective it is.

She explained that market research started because the data needed to make decisions was rare, but now survey data is just one of many different inputs. This speaks to a need to change thinking from being survey-focused to being information-agnostic and open to trying out different channels, depending on your needs. This can result in more relevant questions (and fewer questions generally) being asked, at a time and in a place which is more convenient for respondents, and resulting in improved responses and validity.

With all of this in mind, Hawkins believes there are several implications for organisations. She advises to never stop predicting the future; to remove digital, mobile and social media silos from your business and integrate them into all aspects of the business; to plan for the disruption of retail; to buy or build the skills to turn big data into small data; and to work on understanding how people tick - because this is still a competitive advantage.

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