

re-set

Chief Executive's Statement



Jeff Immelt of GE first coined the phrase, “Re-set World” to describe a business environment turned on its head by the credit crunch and subsequent downturn. Immelt was not talking primarily about Communications. But he could have been. At Chime we believe that Communications is one of the areas of business activity that has been “Re-set” more rapidly and completely than any other.

Overview

What does the Communications Re-set look like? The simple answer is that it looks increasingly digital. Of course, the internet was around long before the credit crunch but the last two years have accelerated its role in Communications and its impact on brands and reputation. Today the web is the distribution channel through which brands and products are consumed as well as communicated, a social channel through which reputation is created and enacted, a channel for immediate measurement and dialogue, a means of distribution and transaction and a channel that demands rapid responses from all communicators be they individuals, brands, companies or countries. The multi-functionality has changed the way that Communications approaches the internet; it has also triggered important changes in the way other channels are used.

Take the introduction of multimedia newsrooms across both TV news channels and national newspapers, which deliver stories in different forms, through different media channels at different times of the day. The approach that works for TV won't necessarily work online; the strengths of a radio discussion are

very different to those of mobile channels. All are more likely to be consumed at different times. Recognising the differences between the channels and the value that each can bring to a story is now central to all communication plans. In a fragmenting media universe, the ability to communicate a message irrespective of format and channel has become the goal.

Integration

Advertisers and advertising agencies have long spoken of the need for creative ideas that can transcend one media channel or another. They haven't always acted like they mean it. All too often, a 'Big Idea' has come to mean a big TV ad with other formats tagged on. In the Re-set World this is simply no longer an option: building a campaign around one dominant channel simply misses too many consumer contact points. In a recent piece for the advertising trade magazine, Campaign, VCCP's Stu Parkinson argues convincingly that even those at the cutting edge of digital advertising must remember the importance of ideas, experiences and connections that work across channels. We would cite O2's communications as a perfect example of that approach.

Chime's purpose is the business of building brands and reputations and this happens through conversations. Today, the dialogue is more prominent than ever; and because of the internet, it is also vastly more measurable. Increasingly the objective of Communications is to build social participation with and around a brand rather than simply delivering a fully formed brand message to consumers. Aleksandr, the computer-generated Meerkat used by VCCP to promote compare-the-market through Twitter, Facebook and (yes) TV, provides a great example.

Re-set reputations

In the Re-set World, brands and corporate reputation cannot be separated. Consumers can no longer be expected to focus on the former while conveniently ignoring the latter. Toyota was able to track the impact of its product recall through the increasing number of Google searches for rivals General Motors and Ford. The brand of Manchester United has been subverted by fans angered by their perceptions around management of the club. The Re-set world of

“...growth and opportunity is testament to the modern communications strategies that each of our divisions pursued in advance of the credit crunch, and the swiftness with which they are responding to the challenges of the Re-set World.

communications is about customer participation as much as customer satisfaction.

Sustainability, which cynics once predicted would disappear from the agenda at the first sniff of a recession, has instead seen its scope and significance hugely expanded. Sustainable businesses are no longer seen as ‘green’; they are well-run businesses, and it is well-run businesses and brands that consumers choose to align themselves with in the Re-set World. Transparent, credible sustainability is today as important to brand success as the size of a media budget. Unilever has recognised as much with the introduction of its brand footprint strategy, drawing clear connections for consumers between governance and the products they choose.

Re-set opportunities

The Communications Re-set has brought disruption elsewhere. And with that disruption comes opportunity. The importance of brand experience in engaging across fragmented media channels is helping to drive the growth of our Sports Marketing division, as the tangible connections delivered by sponsorship are given global reach through the power of the internet. Emirates’ hugely successful strategy of supporting the passion drivers (usually sports) for different communities around the world, HSBC’s exceptional activation strategy for the Lions rugby tour of South Africa: both show the rapidly accelerating importance of brand experiences that stand above different formats.

The government work conducted by Chime agencies such as Bell Pottinger Sans Frontières is also taking place against the background of a Re-set World. Today it is the developed world that must deal with perceptions of debt and instability, whilst developing economies appear poised to take advantage. Our involvement with countries such as Bahrain is very exciting in this regard.

Research, meanwhile, is re-inventing itself to suit the demands for dialogue, accountability and actionable insight. Today it must provide clients with immediate benefits in increasing the efficiency of campaigns whilst providing foresight around future trends and opportunities.

These are just some of the ways in which interpreting the Re-set World is helping to keep Chime ahead of its competitors as we strive to deliver our brand promise of ‘the Modern Communications Group’. The growth that the Group has delivered over the last year has been achieved not despite the Re-set World but because of it. The core strengths of our approach will enable Chime companies to continue to take a leading role in re-interpreting Communications and helping clients to meet their challenges in the years ahead.

Christopher Satterthwaite

Chief Executive
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