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Brand Integration Story

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97% of customers expect their interactions with companies to be consistent and seamless, regardless of which medium they are using*.

In today's world of converging technologies, consumers are in the driving seat and brands need to conform to the way they see the world.

The explosion of media outlets in recent years has created much confusion and in some cases depression for marketers and brands. Focusing on the key channels which resonate with audiences has become far more chaotic. But for the consumer, the world has become far easier: more choice; more value; competitive customer service; honest reviews. When I recently bought a new laptop, all I did was go onto Google and search customer and journalist reviews, looked at demos, compared prices and made an informed decision (after a final discussion on Twitter). For consumers the world has opened up, but become smaller – therefore brands have to be clear, concise and integrated in their stories – it's too easy to confuse your consumer brand story if you have multiple propositions.

The importance of a clear coordinated PR message is more important than ever for two reasons - the status of PR integration within the marketing mix and secondly today's economic environment.

PR is 'hot' at the moment - we're being invited to the grown up table. I can see this from: the Resonate/VCCP joint venture in ICON; us helping VCCP put PR at the heart of the agency; that PR has been accepted into the Cannes Lions – the holy land of advertising (albeit a slightly odd, don't quite know who you are or what you do kind of welcome!). Becoming closer results in pressure to align communications and share the creative process. As a PR person, the advertising creative process seemed a magical mystery – its not! But what it is, is fully resourced, concentrated, focused and importantly, researched. It is widely agreed that the integration and convergence of communications is all important, so it leads that the importance of the aligned message – across all disciplines is imperative.

Today's economic climate has created a new way for brands to communicate. The key for enhancing reputation today is to become a brand that people trust and will advocate that trust to others. We know that the most trusted form of communication is peer to peer advocacy or word of mouth (WOM) - this isn't new. But the economic climate is new

and this has created a paradigm shift, we've moved from a NICE (Non inflationary, constant expansion) era to THUD (Terror horror, uncertainty doubt).

It is this new paradigm which has created a greater relevance and need for on-line conversations supporting off line communication. Behaviour is changing: household budgets are being squeezed so consumers will be looking for the best deals; economising on going out will encourage more use of social entertainment on-line; on-line gives you the time to research reviews, prices and product specs. More and more direct sales decisions are therefore happening and influenced on-line, so, as with any sales journey, the message has to push your prospective customers in a linear direction.

For me, the most eye opening statistic which cements the importance of message alignment is that **67% of online searches are motivated by offline communications, and that 39% of those searches result in a purchase.

There are some simple rules one can follow to start the 'alignment ball rolling'.

Firstly – planning, planning and more planning! Only by understanding what's happening around a brand can you take all of its messaging needs into consideration. Secondly is to understand your target audience and how they interact with their chosen media. And finally a one size fits all message doesn't work – you have to think in terms of aligning the consumer outtake of your message rather than the language.

Our jobs as PR people is to build and manage brand reputations. Reputations are built around what you do, what you say and what people say about you. We can't control what people say when you're not in the room (although we can influence it) but at the least, we can ensure how we act and the stories we tell, are clear, concise and aligned across all our consumers touch points.

***Source: The Retail Business 2008**

****Source: Jupiter Research**