

Digital threat becomes an opportunity

Television and print are merging with digital platforms to create multimedia campaigns. How can digital agencies and more traditional players make the most out of the new environment? **Danny Edwards** reports

If there is one issue that has been at the forefront of the advertising industry's collective consciousness over the last few years it is to do with the word "digital". It seems that advertisers, agencies and media owners have embraced it and been scared off by it in equal measure but whichever group you are in, there is no denying that the word and all it represents is here to stay.

With the value of internet advertising set to overtake that of TV by 2009, according to a report by the Internet Advertising Bureau, and the mobile phone becoming, if not man's best friend, then certainly someone he likes to spend a lot of time with, the digital revolution is in full swing. The question is how do advertising agencies make full use of the digital capabilities on offer and who has the right approach?

What everyone aims to achieve is a successful multimedia campaign: one that crosses platforms to reach consumers on TV and in print as well as on digital platforms. Successful examples include the work for the Xbox 360 game Halo 3, which included both memorable TV spots and films seeded on the web, as well as the Cadbury Gorilla spot which started life on TV but had that "forward on factor" which saw it being sent from inbox to inbox.

"For me, 360 campaigns are the great campaigns," says Jimmy Maymann, chief executive of GoViral, a digital media agency. "They are the ones where you're not just thinking about how the idea will work as a TV spot but how it might work on a social networking site like Facebook or how it can work with a tool like [social bookmarking service] del.icio.us."

The bigger question is, what is the creative approach to a multi-platform idea? And what platform, if any, takes precedence?

"I think that sort of thing is challenging a lot of creatives to think about how they approach their work," says Maymann. "There's no doubt that TV commercials have been the priority. And I'm not saying that traditional media is going to go away, because of course it's still very important, but we need to open our minds a little bit and consider what it takes to cut through some of the new channels."

Much has been made of the new digital agencies taking on the established, tried and tested TV and print agencies. But are the digital agencies able to compete on the ideas front and can the traditional agencies catch up technologically? What's becoming apparent is that for either to succeed, there needs to be a meeting of minds.

Hugh Todd, creative director at agency JWT London, says: "Collaboration, someone told me, is the word of the future." Todd, like many, thinks that the description of his agency and many others as traditional is misleading. "We don't necessarily want to accept that term because everyone needs to be adopting new techniques, new ideas and everyone needs to evolve. And if we can't do something in-house then, of course, let's open our arms to welcome new ideas from outside agencies."

Top tips

- Get a great idea. Matt Buels, managing director at production company, Hungry Man, says: "Traditional, digital or otherwise, you always have to start with a great idea."
- Make sure the execution is good. Just because it's not on a big screen is no excuse for it to look shoddy.
- Use the medium. "Digital campaigns can provide so much more depth and detail," says Buels. "There's not enough time to do that on TV."
- Don't get wrapped up in technology. "Make sure your idea works with the technology you're using," says Neil Dawson, creative director for Philips at DDB. "Don't just use it because it's there."
- Beware the length. "Just because you've got all the time in the world," Dawson explains, "it doesn't mean you have to use it."
- Make it infectious. If no one wants to watch your ad and send it on to others it'll never be truly viral. **DE**

Mark Whelan, creative director at Cake, a brand entertainment agency, says that there is a key difference between what his agency and a "traditional" agency does. "Traditional agencies produce advertising and what we do is produce content. Advertising is a TV commercial, a radio commercial, a printed poster, but what we do is create content which can be a TV show, a live music event or a digital asset which might be a computer programme or a widget."

Saying this, though, Whelan and his team, while maybe having a different end product, use the same routes to get there.

They collaborate with advertising production companies, more traditional creatives and the best person for the job.

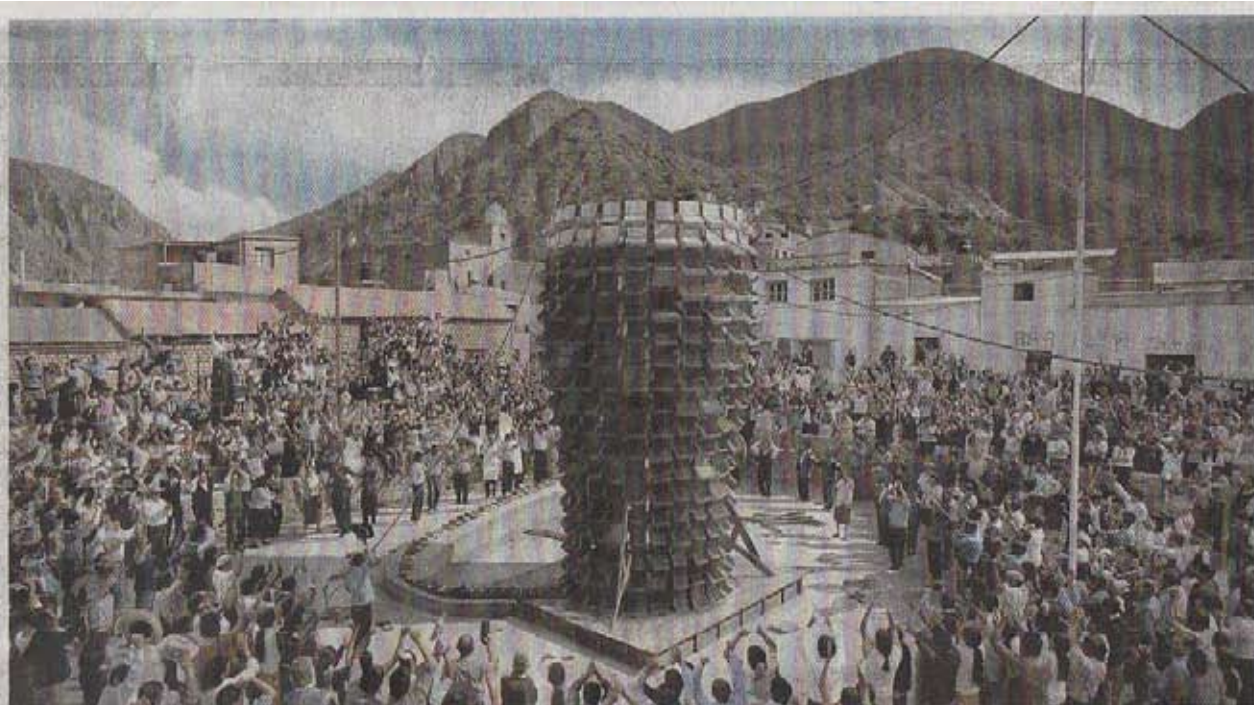
"The process of who comes up with the idea, who presents it to the client, that's exactly the same, but the nature of the work, the output, that's changed to match the appetite that's out there. That's the difference," Whelan says.

The general feeling on how digital creativity will progress is one of co-operation and of employing media neutral ideas. Maymann says: "It doesn't matter if something goes in a website, or a social networking site or if it goes on TV. We just need to engage people and we need to do it in different ways."

"We're now told to think in terms of media-neutral ideas," says Todd. "[Sony's] Colour Like No Other, [Guinness's] Good Things Come to Those Who Wait, can all be adapted for any platform and it can all work and it's really exciting. You just have a different-shaped lay-out pad."

Weblinks

Go Viral: goviral.com
Cake group: cakegroup.com
JWT: jwt.co.uk



Both Sony (top) and Guinness have produced campaigns that adapt well for use across different platforms Fallon, AMVBBDO