



2008 and the digital world

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Next year will bring some great opportunities but also one big potential threat.

In 2008 we'll see the gradual demise of the "10k spot". Most of us know that banner click-through rates are low, the creative opportunity is limited, and most consumers disregard them. Unfortunately too many agencies and clients have jumped on the digital bandwagon by simply spending more money and producing more banners. This model is an increasingly archaic approach to digital. 2008 will be the year most clients take a harder look at what they need to do to succeed online, which will benefit some agencies while threatening others.

The answer for many will be the need for more meaningful engagement with their online consumers. Clients and agencies are finally embracing the concept of utility maybe because our audiences are spending more time in environments like Facebook that aren't conducive to traditional online advertising. Nike + is an outstanding example. Is it advertising or is it a service? It's actually both. Expect to see a proliferation of similarly branded widgets and applications in 2008.

Video is also fundamentally changing the Internet. The technology obstacles are nearly gone, and rather than imported TV spots we're experiencing some sort of new-fangled mash-up between the emotive possibilities of video combined with the interactivity of online. Unilever's "In the Motherhood" initiative in the US is a great example: sponsored by Suave, scripted by real mothers submitting user-generated stories, produced and filmed in Hollywood, and broadcast via MSN to a loyal-following of online moms.

Beyond the Internet we may be finally turning the corner on mobile. The carriers are finally getting their act together, the demographics are turning favourable as a heavily-mobilized youth mature, user interfaces and handsets are improving, and there's a little thing called Android on the horizon. If anyone can finally realize mobile's potential it will certainly be Google.

The biggest possible threat to all of our current digital euphoria is a downturn in the economy. I've been in the digital business long enough to remember the 2001 crash. Faced with reduced advertising budgets clients simply swarmed backed to traditional, leaving a trail of tears in the digital industry. We're still paying the price with a substantial lack of talent begot from those forgotten years. The fundamental question this time around is whether clients will abandon their new-found faith in online if faced with a similar set of circumstances?