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## The top ten marketing trends for 2008

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*In 2008 marketers should avoid over-hyped opportunities and focus instead on measuring their campaigns' success, one satisfied customer at a time, according to Drew Neisser, CEO for US-based experiential marketing agency Renegade.*

Neisser has published a 'top ten' of marketing industry trends that will be worth considering during the coming year, including:

1. **Time to go green**

A "green" plan is no longer a luxury, or an option. Every day, another venerable brand commits to a sustainable future. While there is much "green washing", rating services such as *B Corporation* will set standards that will have major companies fighting to prove their greenness. Expect to find a new seat being formed in the boardroom: Chief Green Officer (CGO).

2. **Ads in the great outdoors**

This year's surprise was the rebound of out-of-home advertising, growing faster than any channel except the internet. Outdoor reinvented itself as a technology-rich means of engaging, entertaining and educating commuters. Mini Cooper tested RFID-activated billboards with personalised messages aimed at Mini drivers, a customised approach that linked old (outdoor) with new (online) transforming an integrated media platform into a cult-building club. So called "narrowcasting" video networks continue to sprout, enabling marketers to put their messages in front of selective targets - from health clubbers, to deli shoppers, movie-goers and pet owners to elevator riders. Innovations like these will drive out-of-home advertising to new heights.

3. **Getting in on the game**

Gaming now permeates just about all of society, creating fresh ways for marketers to connect. Millions of non-golfers are swinging virtual clubs as Nintendo's Wii transformed video games. Senior citizen centres bought Wiis to entertain guests and connect with grandkids. MTV invested US\$500 million in online games, on top of the millions it spent for AddictingGames. Even B2B marketers will be smart to give gaming a fresh look while blending in messaging, training or recruiting.

4. **Mobile: I can hear you now!**

This may be the year in which mobile deserves a closer look as technology improvements create new opportunities. Bluetooth-enabled phones have made it easier for marketers to provide contextually relevant information; the Air Force set up Bluetooth transmitters at racetracks to reach potential recruits. Apple's iPhone partnered with Google and Yahoo to enable ad-supported programming. Cellfire enlisted a million people to receive coupons for anything from burgers to videos. Mobile marketing can deliver highly personalised, and useful, information when and where needed and as long as marketers don't spam, mobile marketing may be the missing link in personalised communications.

5. **Join the club**

Wise marketers will capitalise on the growing appeal of social networks. Besides the obvious market leaders (MySpace and Facebook), social networks exist in niches from teens (e.g. Pizco and Tagged) to seniors (e.g. Eons) to photographers (e.g. Flickr), do-gooders (e.g. AllDayBuffet) and even B2B (e.g. LinkedIn and Plaxo). This list is almost endless. Chase's partnership with Facebook has helped make its "+1" credit card the card of choice among

college students. Marketers will be smart to create a social network, or take an existing one and make it physical (for example, Second Life held its first offline convention in 2007).

**6. Rise of the widget**

Mini software applications (known as "widgets") can provide unprecedented access to hard-to-reach targets, as Facebook and MySpace can attest. Even Microsoft's Windows Vista supports user-written widgets natively. According to ComScore, some 220+ million consumers were using widgets as of May 2007. For example, iLike, which allows Facebook users to share iTunes playlists, grew to over 10 million users in only 10 months. Slide, which creates slideshows and embeds them in social network homepages, claims to be the largest personal media network in the world, reaching 120 million viewers monthly. That's just the beginning of the widget avalanche.

**7. Roll the video**

With 70% or more in broadband penetration in the US, streaming video is a "must" marketing tool. eMarketer reported that 123 million Americans watch a video at least monthly, and three-quarters tell a friend about them. Whether a B2B or B2C marketer, video is an enormous opportunity to engage, educate and entertain (those being the new "Three Es" of successful marketing). Lots of brands are producing instructional videos to help customers install or use their product or service. Others create pure entertainment, hoping to build brand affinity or drive traffic. But the ubiquity of video is not without its challenges: With 7 million hours of video online, getting through to the right consumers requires high quality storytelling and judicious editing.

**8. From behavioural to contextual**

Marketers will add behavioural targeting to their contextual search efforts. AOL believes in the future of behavioural targeting, having spent some US\$275 million on Tacoda Systems, which claims to reach 120 million people in 31 discrete audience segments each month. eMarketer predicted that behavioural targeting will increase ten-fold over the next five years, growing from US\$350 million to US\$3.8 billion in advertising spend. A test that Renegade ran for Panasonic yielded 50% more imminent buyers of a particular consumer electronics product, making it far better than a simple search-driven strategy.

**9. Focus on the experience**

The need to focus on integrated marketing approaches is not new, but what will be new next year is how brand experiences will move to the top of the integration priorities list, becoming the driving force of marketing communications. Events and online initiatives were once treated as below-the-line after thoughts, but marketers increasingly realise that interactive brand experiences can be far more effective than advertising and should be the starting point of a customer conversation.

**10. Marketing as a service**

For years, marketers have been more concerned with what they say than what their target hears, resulting in seemingly endless monologues. Those marketers who continually support their customers, providing actual value through each communication, will be the most successful in 2008. The value exchange can take many forms, but only if the marketer understands the needs and aspirations of the customer - and then commits to a genuine dialogue at every point of contact. The HSBC BankCab, which provides free rides to HSBC customers in New York City, is one example of marketing as service, transforming customers into brand evangelists with every free ride. Marketers who treat marketing as a service and deliver real value to customers and prospects alike will undoubtedly triumph.

Neisser notes that, while his golf scores are thoroughly unpredictable, his annual predictions have been far above par for the past five years.

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