

2011 Predictions

5 Areas for Brand Owners to Focus on in the New Year

New York (1 January 2011) Businesses that progress in 2011 will be those that craft a richer experience with the brand in the digital space. With distractions like device, interface, application, and platform, it's easy to lose track of the importance of a meaningful message and an on-brand journey. Therefore there are five related areas for brand owners to focus in 2011 and beyond.

1. **The journey defines the brand.** Brand owners need to be asking themselves: Is the digital experience delivered on brand? I don't mean usability (which ensures a user achieves his goal), but rather user experience. So, was the user *delighted* by his or her experience and was that journey reflective of what one would expect from this particular brand?

Interface draws an audience in, but the user's experience throughout the interaction is critical to the impression of the brand. Offline this would take the form of an on-brand experience: from the shop front to the merchandise, from the dressing room to the store employee, from the cash register to the packaging, from returns to the customer service hotline, direct mail promotions, and so forth.

Digital interaction needs to move beyond functional and branded look-and-feel to a full experience reflective of the brand throughout the user's journey. Is this the experience one should expect from this brand?

2. **Next generation convergence.** It's a term we've heard for years in regard to devices. When applied to brands, convergence does not just ask do different interactions *look* the same, but rather do different interactions also *act* the same? Whether your customer is engaged with the website, app, podcast or dashboard, the entire experience should be recognizable and reminiscent of all other previous points of interaction with this brand.

Ideally as brands launch new products or services, the consumer will intuitively adapt and adopt because he or she is programmed to know it from all other interactions with the brand.

3. **Personal access without the burden of ownership.** Spotify, Zipcar, cloud storage—all wildly popular despite the consumer ceding the privileges of ownership. Turns out we don't always need to own things; we just want to feel like it's *ours* when we want it and for the duration of the interaction. That can be achieved by weaving personalization and individual preference into the service or product.

Providing a feeling of "mine" could involve programming an individual's unique settings, but it also applies to smart services built in for general population groups. For example,

tying in related interests based on typical population profiles, providing alternative functionality for low-bandwidth locations, or recognizing special needs groups with features appropriate to their abilities.

4. **Getting to know the consumer.** One way to deliver that individual experience in a shared service is by capturing user preferences and tailoring the journey. Employing artificial reality (AIML) or intelligent behavior personas, a system learns the user and tailors paths, content, and experience to the level of a user type or specifically for the individual.

This personalized experience helps foster brand loyalty as the consumer feels that the brand gets him or her. Of course, consider your audience and don't end up defining your brand as "creepy." It's a fine line when employing artificial intelligence or behavioral tools—you have the opportunity to either delight or disturb with the uncanny knowledge of a user's behavior.

5. **It's the message not the medium.** It's easy to get caught up in the medium and forget content and message. Whether it's a social media opportunity or a 3D depiction, the content must be reflective of the brand. In fact we can argue that there will always be a new thing on the horizon—five years ago Twitter, iPads, and 3D television weren't on the scene, but the value and importance of what is actually communicated will never go out of fashion.

About BrandWizard

Headquartered in New York, with further presence in London and Zurich, we specialize in providing leading brand technology. From digital brand guidelines to eCommerce and social media platforms, our technology solutions turn our clients' online brand plans into reality. We've pioneered more customized and user friendly digital brand asset management systems for over 12 years, with over 250,000 users, working in over 65 client organizations, in 14 languages across 211 countries. BrandWizard is a wholly owned subsidiary of Interbrand – a leading brand consultancy owned by Omnicom Inc.

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