

# The Majority Report

Digital media played with Tom Cruise's head in *The Minority Report*. It can also play well with today's frazzled shoppers.

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On the one hand, shoppers today are more harried than ever and appreciate nothing more than *efficiency*. On the other hand, shoppers are more harried than ever and appreciate nothing more than *relaxation*.

As we pursue the creative potential of "Just-in-Time Television" at retail (see: the *HUB*, March/April '06), we need to be mindful of these two related, but in some ways contradictory, features of shopper behavior. The same shopper who wants to get in and out of the supermarket or drug store as quickly as possible might also want to kick back and relax at a favorite bookstore or coffee shop.

The way we communicate with that shopper must align not only with our own marketing objectives but also with his or her prevailing frame of mind. Our job, as marketers, is to do as much as we can to make sure that we are helping our shoppers get exactly what they want, when they want it.

That may be obvious, but it is far from easy. We've all heard about teenagers and multi-tasking — doing their homework while listening to music while instant messaging with their friends while talking on their cellphones while watching television. For some reason they can't seem to do all of that while cleaning their rooms or unloading the dishwasher — but that's not the point.

The point is that this type of activity is no longer limited to teenagers or young adults. We are *all* multi-taskers now. Walk down any street or into any store and you will see any number of people — of all ages — talking on their cellphones or instant messaging their friends while also filling their gas tanks, checking out some new CDs, shopping for blue jeans or buying a loaf of bread.

This divided attention is a big challenge for any marketer trying to communicate a message and sell a product or service at retail. It is a big challenge because we are now competing for our share of attention against cellphones and other

handheld devices that, frankly, are more interesting to many consumers than any ad or promotion that might cross their paths.

Unless, however, the guy checking sports scores on his cellphone while filling his tank with gasoline starts laughing because there's this really funny video playing on a small screen sitting on top of the pump.

He's watching a series of short sight gags, mixed in with a Pepsi ad, reminding him that refreshment is only 50-feet away. This puts him in such a good mood that he forgets all about the \$98.72 he just paid to fill up his Hummer. He decides to go spend some more money on lottery tickets inside the convenience store — and while he's doing that he calls up two of his buddies and tells them about this hilarious video he just saw at the gas station.

A similar effect is happening down the street, at the local CD retailer. Business hadn't been so good there lately, what with so many kids downloading their music online nowadays, instead of buying them as CDs in stores. But things are hopping — almost literally — now.

In fact, the store is just about packed with young people. They are there because their friends told them about this incredible interactive video display, created by a company called Reactrix Media Systems, that's built into the floor. It uses infrared sensors and special "visioning technology" that makes videos respond to their movements and gestures. It's so cool that most of the kids don't seem to mind that the videos are actually advertising.

The coolest part, of course, is that many of them are buying CDs that they probably never would have known about if it hadn't been for the buzz about the in-store, interactive video.

The gas-pump video works because it makes an otherwise mundane task enjoyable, memorable and, most of all, buzz-worthy. The in-store interactive video works because it adds entertainment (and buzz) value to what otherwise is a

progressively irrelevant retail experience. Both concepts pay out by generating purchases that otherwise are unlikely to have ever occurred.

In fact, they both pay off a phenomenon that's familiar to anyone who has been involved with marketing through retail. Numerous studies have shown a direct correlation between the length of time and the number of dollars a consumer spends in a store; the longer you're in the store, the more money you spend. It's almost a law of nature.

It's a concept that works well for retailers like Starbucks and Barnes & Noble, where a respite from hectic schedules is often the main attraction. Other retailers, such as the Gap, are now trying to make a similar idea work for them by installing comfortable leather couches and offering reading materials.

Screen-based media may or may not be part of that mix, but it certainly should be. The purpose may not be even to run ads. A couple of years ago, Song Airlines opened boutiques that were intended to give people a sense of what it's like to fly on one of their planes. Among other things, the sensation of clouds floating outside airplane windows was created using digital media.

More recently, J.C. Penney did something similar to herald the launch of its new flagship store with a temporary "pop-up" shop in New York's Times Square. Andy Warhol-style posters and other museum-like displays were featured on flat-panel monitors to create a certain atmosphere. Visitors were invited to play games, download music, and, yes, order J.C. Penney products using internet-connected kiosks. Commercials also played on plasma-screen TVs.

Mike Boylson, J.C. Penney's chief marketing officer, told *USA Today* that the experience was "like a commercial you walk into." Hopefully that's not how shoppers viewed it because they might not like that idea. More likely, they appreciated J.C. Penney's attempt to be entertaining and rewarded the retailer by placing a few orders on those handy kiosks.

That's fine for a department store like J.C. Penney's. Many people see shopping

for clothes as a form of entertainment anyway. The story is quite different across town, at the supermarket. Shopping for groceries, for most people, is something short of relaxing. It's a job that most people just want to get over with as efficiently as possible. The chances of anyone stopping to watch a funny video or play with a technology are not very good at the grocery store.

Pete Blackshaw, chief marketing officer of Nielsen BuzzMetrics, wrote an interesting article about the future of television at retail for ClickZ.com in which he quoted this observation made by Bill Deneen, a former media researcher:

*"Shopping involves continuous visual scanning of the environment, where television tries to lock your gaze... It can't be an important part of the in-store experience."*

One might argue that any medium capable of locking your gaze would be a good thing, but Bill's point is well taken. Some of the early attempts at coupon-dispensing kiosks in supermarkets failed because shoppers didn't slow down long enough to use them. Many shoppers were moving so fast that they didn't even notice that the kiosks were there at all.

Even Wal-Mart TV, currently considered by many to be the gold standard of television at retail, is now re-considering "advertising" within its stores. As Wal-Mart chief marketing officer John Fleming told the *HUB* magazine: "The ways in which we can get information to consumers, and also create and enhance their shopping experience, can be taken to a whole new level as we utilize (Wal-Mart TV) more effectively."

As with so many other aspects of marketing, the key is try to work with consumer behavior instead of trying to disrupt it. Today, most shoppers are in even more of a hurry; many are calling home for a pantry report while they're filling their baskets. That might sound like yet another challenge, but it's actually an opportunity.

A company called ScanBuy is developing software that converts any camera phone or PDA into a bar code scanner. This enables shoppers to get all kinds of information about the product via wireless internet connection. In the case of a

pharmaceutical that might be information about its indications, or with a food item it could be recipes that might be saved and printed out at home.

Perhaps it calls up a coupon or another call-to-action. Potentially, the shopper could access price comparison information—the product's availability and price at other stores around town—very similar to the kinds of price comparisons we can already make when shopping online.

Or, a small, shelf-edge screen plays a message including a number the shopper can call to take advantage of a special offer, or get a loyalty card, truly paying off the concept of "Just-in-Time" television. It's certainly not hard to see a good number of us integrating our cellphones and PDA activities into our shopping habits, provided it adds value and helps us have a more satisfying journey through the store.

We are only beginning to explore the creative opportunities of digital media at retail. Already it is clear that the possibilities are many, and the potential is far greater than simply treating retail as if it were just another place to run television commercials. Lots of people made that mistake in the early days of the internet—thinking it was just another form of television, when clearly it is much more than that.

The greatest opportunity is to use this digital media at retail to build shopper loyalty by creating memorable experiences, and helping shoppers do whatever it is they set out to do.

Next time, we will take a closer look at the linkage between "Just-In-Time Television" and loyalty programs at retail. ■

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