

Is everyone on the same page? Tactics for integrating your online marketing efforts

The phrase “online integration” has been bandied about for years, but it appears that few companies really understand and implement it successfully. In fact, many don’t have a clear definition of what integration actually entails. Having migrated from direct mail to the Internet back in 1995, I’ll give you my perspective on the positives that can result from an integrated online program, as well as the negatives that will occur if you don’t have such a program.

Nowadays, most direct marketers are using, or plan to use, some or all of these online marketing tactics:

- ✓ paid search engine marketing,
- ✓ organic search,
- ✓ e-mail,
- ✓ Web promotions,
- ✓ banners,
- ✓ shopping engines,
- ✓ affiliate networks,
- ✓ performance advertising,
- ✓ individual product or service landing pages or mini-sites,
- ✓ cross-linking between company owned sites,
- ✓ text links,
- ✓ blogs,

- ✓ e-mail newsletters,
- ✓ contextual marketing,
- ✓ webinars, and
- ✓ e-books.

It would further be logical to say that many people within your company work on these various promotional methods, and perhaps you use one or more outside firms on an outsourced basis to implement them.

You therefore can conclude that the likelihood is very high that in many companies there is little or no coordination between these online activities, and as a result, this often leads to mixed marketing messages, conflicting promotions and consumer frustration.

Given these circumstances, talk with all participants in your online programs about what’s necessary to reach the goal of integrating all your online activities, and show the positives that integration brings. The key characteristics of integration are:

- ✓ consistent messaging;
- ✓ consistent look, tone and feel;
- ✓ consistent offers;
- ✓ consistent pricing; and
- ✓ consistent graphics and copy.

Clearly, I’ve used the word

“consistent,” well, *consistently* to drive home a point. Joined with three other words, the magic formula for successful integration is:

I = 4C

Integration = consistency * communication * coordination * control

The four Cs of integration easily are defined:

Consistency, so consumers get the same message in all channels.

Communication, so everyone managing online programs is on the same page.

Coordination, so all of the internal and external participants in your online programs work hand in hand.

Control, so your brand is protected, and external forces work with you, not against you.

Consistency in online channels is so important because consumers get confused and frustrated easily when inconsistent things like this happen:

✓ They receive an e-mail with one offer, and when they click through to the provided URL, the offer is nowhere to be found.

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✓ They have expectations set by search engine copy, but the site isn't what they were looking for.

✓ The price for the same product is different depending on where the product is advertised.

✓ They get an e-mail announcing a new product, only to visit the site and find it's on backorder or discontinued.

✓ An out-of-control affiliate runs unapproved copy, changes an offer or provides an incentive to an offer without approval.

Consumers used to be forgiving when these kinds of things happened offline. Store clerks could soothe customers, and they'd keep coming back. But on the Internet, they're not nearly as tolerant. Competitors are just a click away. That's why everything you do online needs to be fully integrated, or else you'll lose customers and profits to those firms that are consistent across all online marketing efforts. Here, a step-by-step plan for achieving synergy in your online efforts.

STEP 1

Put Someone in Charge of Integration

First and foremost, you need someone to get his arms around everything you're doing online in a very organized and disciplined manner. That person may need to interview several co-workers and superiors to determine what they're doing online and how they are doing it.

The goal is for this person—let's call him your chief integration officer—to understand, record and compare all your online activities, looking for inconsistencies in messaging; offers; pricing; copy and graphics; tracking and reporting; and consumer experience.

Once you're armed with lots of

detail about all of your online efforts, you're ready for the next step.

STEP 2

Develop a Set of Rules

Once your chief integration officer has reviewed all your online activities and determined where the inconsistencies lie, he needs to draft a set of rules that covers:

Logos—Distribute a set of approved logos in various sizes, indicating that only these may be used in online advertising.

campaign deadlines.

Offer—Develop a set of approved offers and expiration dates, and note when and where each offer can be used.

Price—Create a process by which all pricing issues are disseminated to all online managers, and a system to regularly check that pricing is consistent across channels.

Communications—Determine how people in your company will communicate with each other regarding questions and issues that arise during the execution of campaigns.



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All creative that points to the landing page—banners, pop-ups, e-mails, text ads, etc.—needs to be consistent in look and feel, message, offer and call to action.

Slogans—Handled in the same way as logos, including rules for how slogans can be set up, such as using bold face, italics, underlines or quotation marks.

Graphics—Rules governing which graphics can be used, and a strict policy that any unapproved graphics cannot be used.

Copy—Establish a central clearinghouse for copy and provide all online managers with approved copy. Set up a schedule so copy can be approved in advance of

Schedules—Make sure everyone working on any online campaign has a complete and accurate schedule of all campaigns, deadlines and objectives, so everyone knows what the other online groups are doing.

Tracking—It's critical to have a plan in place that tracks every online campaign and correlates expenses with each campaign to sales and profits.

Reporting—Establish a distrib-

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Online Campaign Comparison Matrix

Type	Campaign	Exposures	Period	Cost	Orders	Revenues	Cost per Order	Profit Loss
E-mail	Holiday free shipping	2MM to list "A"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$10,000	157	\$7,850	\$63.69	-\$2,150
E-mail	Holiday free shipping	2MM to list "B"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$8,000	202	\$10,100	\$39.60	\$2,100
SEM	N/A	15,500 keywords, 2 engines	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$22,800	865	\$43,250	\$26.36	\$20,450
Banners	Holiday free shipping	500M on network "A"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$1,200	39	\$1,950	\$30.77	\$750
Banners	Holiday free shipping	1MM on network "B"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$3,000	85	\$4,250	\$35.29	\$1,250
Banners	Holiday free shipping	2MM on network "C"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$5,500	102	\$5,100	\$53.92	-\$400
Shopping	N/A	1,500 keywords, 1 engine	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$2,300	84	\$4,200	\$27.38	\$1,900
Pop-ups	Holiday free shipping	2MM on pop network "A"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$4,000	128	\$6,400	\$31.25	\$2,400
Pop-ups	Holiday free shipping	4MM on pop network "B"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$9,500	199	\$9,950	\$47.74	\$450
Pop-ups	Holiday free shipping	10MM on pop network "C"	12/1/05 to 12/31/05	\$18,350	303	\$15,150	\$60.56	-\$3,200

Source: SendTec, Inc.

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ution list of those people who should receive reports on daily activity so decisions can be made based on results.

STEP 3

Implement the Rules

Rules are only as good as their implementation. It's probably a very good idea to have an integration kickoff meeting where the importance of integration and the four Cs are driven home by someone at the C-level or by the president of your company. It's that important. Integration leads to increased sales and profits; reduced calls by frustrated consumers; and a better consumer experience across the board.

Every online manager benefits from programs that work together, not at odds with each other.

Determine ROI for Online Tactics & Make Hard Decisions

After you go through about three months of accurate tracking and reporting, you'll be in a posi-

tion to review all online activities, compare them against each other, and make some decisions based on ROI metrics. While you may now evaluate individual online campaigns in a vacuum, being able to do an apples-to-apples comparison makes a lot of sense. You may find you're underspending on programs that are very profitable or overspending on some that don't warrant it. You should end up with a comparison matrix that looks something like the chart above.

As you can see from this fictitious example, search engine marketing (SEM) is far and away the clear winner, followed by the shopping engine test. E-mail, banners and pop-up ads have mixed results, illustrating that within a given type of ad vehicle, some placements will work and others won't.

If I were reviewing the numbers, I would:

- ✓ See how much room there is to grow with SEM and shopping engines.
- ✓ Isolate the e-mails that work and bump up the quantity on them.

✓ Do the same with banners and pop-ups as with the e-mail efforts.

Understand How One Tactic Affects Others

Everything discussed up until now is pretty much science and numbers. Understanding how one online vehicle can impact another is more art than science.

While each ad placement is fairly easy to track, it's much more difficult to track the impact of one online vehicle on another.

For example, let's say you're handling organic search in-house, and using an outside agency for paid SEM. Assume you have 2,000 keywords and most of your budget is in Google and Yahoo! Your SEM program is generating a steady, positive ROI.

For one, 24-hour period, you notice a spike in clicks and conversions associated with some of your keywords. You want to know what caused it, so you can make future SEM decisions based on that information.

Let's say that in that 24-hour

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period during which SEM activity spiked, your e-mail manager dropped 10 million e-mails to your in-house lists and rented lists. After the e-mails reached their destinations, sales went up, then back down to normal levels.

If you have an integration plan within your company, you may communicate what happened to your group, and you'd all attempt to measure direct sales from the e-mail blast and sales via SEM that probably were caused by the blast. If you can find a way to do this, that's a home run. That's integration.

For most companies, however, there may not be much communication between online channel managers. It's possible that the SEM manager might simply say nothing and take the credit for

the spike, attributing it to optimization or whatever. Further, the e-mail manager may conclude the mailing wasn't profitable, since he can't account for search-driven sales because no one told him about them.

It came to SendTec for a cost-per-acquisition (CPA) campaign, which we executed, acquiring new customers within the target cost-per-order. As we continued to execute the CPA campaign and drive a signifi-

Proper integration helps you compare your online campaigns to determine when you're underspending on programs that are very profitable and overspending on some that don't warrant it.

Integration Case History

One of SendTec's clients works to drive a high volume of subscriptions through online chan-

nel volume of new customers, we discovered that the client also was running a campaign through an affiliate network that gave all the business to a com-

pany that was approaching the same publishers with whom we already were working. As a result, the non-integrated campaigns were running side by side and being offered to the same publishers, causing a litany of problems.

Publishers were being pitched the offer from two different sources, which created a bidding war to determine who it would be placed through. This caused the overall CPA to go higher and higher, creating a situation where the client was, in essence, bidding against itself through the use of the two parties in the same space.

The company working through the affiliate program used different, more attractive offers to encourage publishers to take the offer through them. However, these specific offers should not have been placed in this specific channel, resulting in the client

having offers running that did not work in this area from a profitability standpoint.

The CPA landscape became a confusion of different offers and varying payouts.

Volume began to dwindle as publishers stopped giving precedence to our control offer as the standard bounty and began looking to run different offers and push for higher bounties.

We explained to our client the pitfalls of what it was doing and how an integrated campaign would turn things around. The client agreed, and our "online hazmat" team straightened things out.

Today, there is one consistent voice in the marketplace for this client, and the CPA effort is producing a healthy volume. Only certain, approved offers are available, and bounties have steadied to the target allowable. The client is happy, and the

nightmares are gone. Integration done right really does work.

No Time to Waste

Surely by now you can see the upsides of formalizing an integration strategy and the down sides of not doing so. Advertisers have integrated efforts for years with their offline advertising. Now it's time to put the principles to work for all of your online efforts. **||**

Irv Brechner is the chief marketing officer of SendTec Inc., an online and offline customer acquisition company. He pioneered one of the earliest landing pages in 1996 and started one of the first performance advertising networks. Prior to specializing in online customer acquisition, Brechner spent much of his career in direct mail list building and advertising. He can be reached at irv@sendtec.com.