

16 January, 2009

# Today's Tabloid

PERSONAL NEWS FOR [darmano@earthlink.net](mailto:darmano@earthlink.net)

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## The Collective Is The Focus Group

JAN 08, 2009 10:50P.M.



We've been thinking about the current economic climate and the pressure, not to mention scrutiny digital (if not all) initiatives are currently under. Digital by definition is highly measurable, which can increase the focus of ROI (return on investment) for project before it ever gets off the ground. The challenge however is that there is so much to learn from initiatives that launch—insights can be applied directly to that project, or indirectly to something else. In addition to launching our own initiatives as organizations, we realize that companies may not see the advantages they can have simply by listening and potentially participating in what we like to think of as “The Collective”. Every day, millions of people are talking about what they care about, and your products and services are most likely part of that story. Download our POV

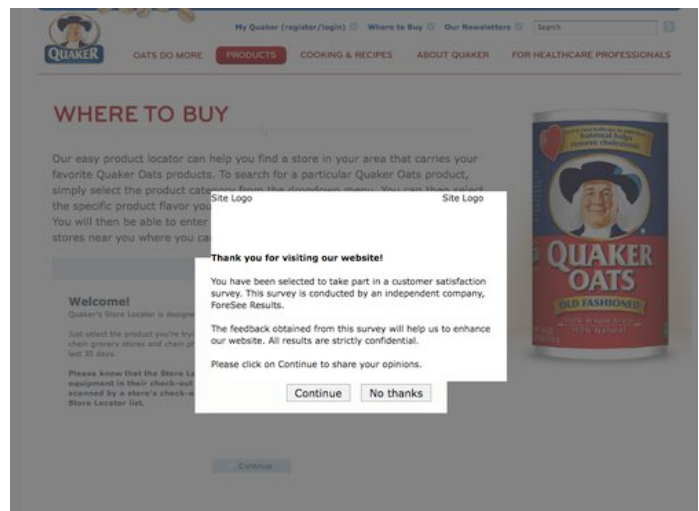
on “The Collective Is The Focus Group” and let us know what you think about what we have to say about tapping the collective for insights. Is this something that can yield a real return? You can also see a version of this article on BusinessWeek.

The Collective Is The Focus Group

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## A Disturbance in the Flow

JAN 06, 2009 09:37P.M.



Today I found myself browsing the Quaker Oats Website. I'm adjusting my diet and wanted to look up some nutritional information. Being that I work in the interactive industry, I started browsing the site a bit more because I liked the design of it. The navigation was clear and intuitive, the photos and type were easy to read and visually pleasant. And then it happened...

**BLAM!**

The “invitation” to take a survey. Except it's never really an invitation now is it? Now, I want to be fair—marketers have a job to do and surveys can provide valuable data that we need to help market the products and brands we represent. I totally get the business challenge. But it is a business challenge. The average user doesn't care about surveys, and brands don't typically benefit from them because they can be seen as a nuisance. Still, it's commonplace and we see this all over the Web, not just the Quaker site.

The problem with surveys is that they create a “disturbance in the flow” not unlike a “*disturbance in the force*” to quote a bit of popular culture. So we've got a marketing, design and experience problem on our hands here. How do we include surveys without disrupting the entire experience. Especially when it's a good one? It's like the equivalent of settling down with a good book or television show only to have someone slam the book shut or stand in front of your screen.

I have a few ideas—maybe a window that floats off to the side, or what if the site could detect mouse movement toward the browser bar and only serve it up to you then (that would indicate you were about to leave). But these are just some initial random thoughts and I know a few smart people read this blog. So what do you think? Is there a way to serve up surveys or polls without disrupting flow?

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#### EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## 2009 Predictions: Rough Seas Ahead

JAN 01, 2009 09:58P.M.

I thought 2008 would be a non-year for events, at least as far as technology was concerned. I was off on that prediction — there were a few notable points (such as an attempted Yahoo! takeover and the iPhone 3G launch). I played it “safe”.

This year is different. “Safe” isn’t an option. This isn’t going to be an easy year, folks. It’s gonna get ugly. That’s how I see it, anyway...

### US Patent and Trade Office Lawsuit

I’ve had a long-standing issue with the US Patent and Trade Office: namely that it doesn’t actually serve its purpose very well. Sure, it allows people to register new ideas, but the way its organised allows for a considerable amount of abuse, and it’s getting worse.

If you look at the Microsoft vs. Eolas issue a couple of years ago, it was a sure sign that things would get worse. Eolas was the first major success of what is now known as patent trolling — people who acquire patents for the sole purpose of suing someone else for not getting a license to use the idea. This has led many companies to patent ideas just so they won’t get sued by someone else (Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft, and IBM do this extensively).

I think the problem’s actually gotten so bad that someone — maybe the EFF, or possible even Google itself — will launch a lawsuit against the USPTO, and demand that changes are made to patent law. They will say the rules will need to be changed, and that patents can’t be held by holding companies (thus creating the patent trolls), and that you have to show progress on your patent (the whole point of having one) in order to keep it.

Okay, yes, this is more of a hope than a prediction, but I truly believe that it’s coming.

### Yahoo! Disintegration

Yahoo! is still a favoured company of mine. I would have liked to have worked for them (Secret Desire #43), had they not ended up where they are now. Microsoft is just waiting for the right moment to snatch up a piece or two, Google will likely acquire a couple of things (I recommend

Flickr and Yahoo! Answers, should the inevitable happen), and the rest will end up in other various hands.

It’s not that I don’t have faith in Yahoo! being able to turn itself around, it’s just that blood has hit the water, and the sharks are circling. It’s just a matter of time ... unless Yahoo! pulls out a previously-unknown trump card, that is.

### President Obama Live-blogging

Obama was big news in 2008. I think he’ll continue being big news by doing something no other President has done — continue to tell people what he’s doing through his own channels. Already there is much talk about him having to give up his Blackberry (Presidential emails are archival material — Bush gave his email up for the last 8 years), and even though his Twitter account hasn’t shown any updates since November, I think he’ll take the bold move and slide out update notices every now and then.

Frankly, that’d be a really smart thing to do. Connect with your younger constituents, give them a direct feedback loop (comments are a powerful communications tool), and engage people in the operation of your country. Given the state of the economy, engagement might be the single most useful tool Obama has in his utility belt.

### Offshoring Increases

And back to the economy again. This one I see as more of a trend than a prediction, but I’m going to cover it with a couple of important notes/beliefs. First, offshoring will continue heavily for services, especially in the technology arena. But they won’t go to places you normally think of — namely, India.

Dissatisfied with a poorer-performing solution going through India, people will be looking to Eastern Europe, as well as Central and South America for less-expensive, but more flexible solutions. Be it call centers or actual technology development, people have already found these places to be diamonds in the rough, and it’s only time before exploitation turns into profitable partnership.

### Google Monopoly Investigation

Everyone’s gotta have the long-shot, right? This is mine. This year, Google will be formally investigated by the Department of Commerce for monopolistic practices, notably within the field of online advertising. (This harkens back to the attempted deal between Google and Yahoo!.) It won’t be a significant investigation — it will be started as a low-key issue — but it’ll snowball into something larger before it’s conveniently tied up and forgotten.

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## EXPERIENCE MATTERS

# 2008 Prediction Recap: History Repeating

JAN 01, 2009 08:41P.M.

A year ago today, I put on my prognostication cap and looked to what we'd see in 2008. At the time, I declared that I was playing it safe, owing to "not seeing any change". Well, when you play it safe, you'll probably get things more right than wrong.

In that sense, I did pretty well for predicting. But that's also like saying the Dallas Cowboys will probably win against your local high-school team — not really cheating, but going with the obvious.

That said, I'm still going to go over what I said, and toss in some new commentary.

- *Silverlight*
- I'll go out here and say I was an ass on this one. I called out Microsoft for trying to create a "Flash killer", when all they were really trying to do is put in a rich-media aspect on their already powerful development environment. So far, Silverlight is waiting for its killer app, but it's certainly proven popular with some developers that I've talked to.
- *Bandwidth*
- I got this one wrong, by the looks of it. Broadband rollout in the US increased heavily, and seems to have a wide rollout in Europe as well. China remains a weird mix (high in major developed centres, but still low in rural areas), and that's about as far as I can get before stats become conjecture.
- *Mobile/Wireless (aka Impact of the iPhone)*
- This one is debatable. Although the 3G iPhone was a major hit, and was very quickly followed by similar devices, I still say the North American market is a disaster area. The oligarchies in the United States and Canada continue to charge outrageous fees for services (did you know that text messages are actually free to the carriers?), and you're limited to what networks you can use. So while the iPhone did bring some new toys to the sandbox, it doesn't change the fact that we're stuck inside it.
- *Device independence*
- This remains a lofty goal, and I hold that it will remain that way until someone figures out how to break the walls down.
- *China's rise in internet dominance*
- Another debatable one. Although China comprises the fastest rising percentage of users, they don't get to consume as much as others. The IOC made a serious blunder when they believed that China would change because of the Olympics, and the Great Firewall of China is back in operation. Still, the potential is huge.

- *Web 3.0*
- I'm so happy that I didn't actually hear anything about this during 2008, even with a visit to a Web 2.0 conference in San Francisco. Looks like clarity hit the industry, after all!
- *OLPC*
- Hard to say if this is an advancement or a setback, but orders for OLPCs are continuing with the request for Windows XP instead of the Linux OS. Hopefully this leads to greater global computing, and wider education, regardless. (Frankly, I didn't much like the built-in OLPC OS, so hopefully this makes things better overall.)
- *Open source continues to gain popularity*
- I underestimated this one. It's not about software anymore. People are open-sourcing just about anything, from software, to aquarium technology, to cars, to satellite technology. So here's a toast to open-sourcing as an alternative to patent trolls.
- *Exo-browser applications*
- Partial failure on this one. While I still say the emphasis remains on the browser, the reality is that the App Store for the iPhone and iPod Touch, and the widgets for things like the newer smartphones have a massive potential. If only there was a way to get out of the locked boxes and allow them to share apps across the platforms.
- *Google*
- Anyone else saw Chrome coming? I mean, truly saw it? Sure, there were lots of rumours, but when I caught wind that fateful morning a few months back, I was shocked. Told you Google would do something like that. Still the #1 search engine, and still (mostly) untouchable. Mind you, if the #2 search engine (Yahoo!) can take a severe beating from stock prices after a botched takeover, anything is possible.
- *Browser War*
- Despite Chrome's lauch, this is still correct — browser wars were (and still are) a non-event. About the only thing I got wrong was that IE8 didn't make it out into release before the end of the year. I'll take that as a good thing (namely that they're getting the bugs out).
- *Digital advertising*
- We saw some pretty innovative ideas in ads this year, from banner ads to interactive advertising on street corners, to (in some places) better mobile advertising support. The Great Digital Ad Confluence is still coming though, folks. Just wait...
- *We'll know everything about you*
- Apparently, thanks to some really sloppy security and skillful hackers, a lot of people know a lot more about other people. As far as marketing goes, it's still pretty much business-as-usual.

Okay, so there's the recap from last year. Overall, I think that's a passing grade. But who cares so much about a recap, when there are new predictions to be made?

Speaking of which...

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## Be Careful What You Ask For

DEC 30, 2008 04:28P.M.

Originally published at iMedia Connection

Depending on who you believe, ad spending in 2009 will drop anywhere from 3% (GroupM) to 6.2% (Publicis). The Internet, however, stands tall, with expectations hovering at an increase of 5% - strong growth in this market. Google "online spending," the returns are overwhelming.

The continued growth of online ad spending is surely driven by the channel's ability to produce measurable ROI. This, combined with the ongoing migration of consumers to the channel as a whole, is a winning formula for online destinations that, for a long time, have cried foul as it pertains to their share of marketing budgets. Well my friends, the time has come. Step up or step off.

With increased spend will come increased pressure. Words like "viral" and "buzz" could give way to words like "lift measurement" and "response." Each dollar that an advertiser puts on the web comes with it high expectations. They believe that one dollar can - and will - work harder for them than any other dollar they place.

As an industry, agencies, publishers and marketers alike must realize that this is not the Internet of 1999. Search has grown astronomically, yes, but more importantly are the strides the medium has made in creative execution. Go back to my last post on the message versus the medium - emotion, influence, authenticity and relevance drive the message. As you look to manage expectations, here are a few things to keep in mind:

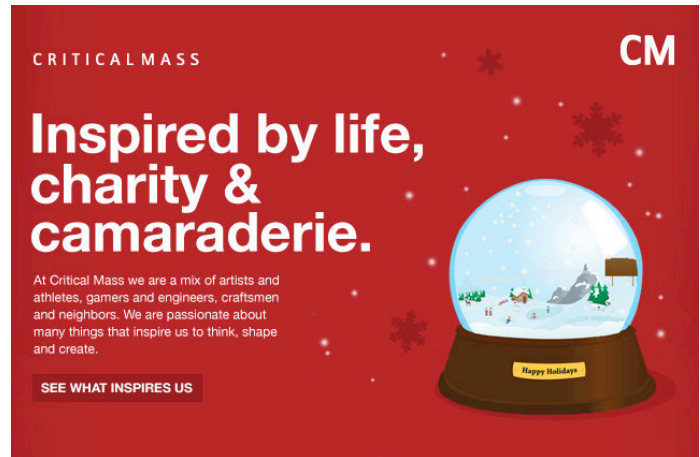
1. **It's measurement, not magic.** Work hard to define success metrics right off the bat so that you can manage expectations. Do your best **not** to measure online programs through some formula that equates anything to a GRP. Jeremiah Owyang wrote a great post on social success metrics that could be applied to all Internet campaigns.
2. **Push content, not just context.** It takes more to get a consumer's attention so the content has to be relevant. Align client goals against the audience and how that audience consumes.
3. **The environment IS different.** Don't just repurpose the offline creative for digital. It's a different environment. Treat it differently and ensure your client and/or agency understand that.

In a down market, the first reaction is to always cut the marketing budget. So far, the Internet is exempt from that rule. Let's make sure that is a good decision.

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## Happy Holidays from Critical Mass.

DEC 19, 2008 11:06P.M.



EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## No Free Lunch

DEC 15, 2008 06:00P.M.

Remember a time when you had certain freedoms and someone ruined it for you? I remember when I was in high school and we were allowed to leave the school grounds to go out for lunch. A lot of kids began skipping classes instead. You already know what happened. They stopped letting us leave. A few of the reckless ruined it for all. Corporate social media makes me feel like my "lunch freedom" was taken away, again.

The recently released Forrester study, Time to Rethink Your Corporate Blogging Ideas states, "Only 16 percent of consumers trust what they read on company blogs." Darnit. In the past year, we've watched 100's of marketers create branded blogs.

### What went wrong?

Many marketers weren't prepared. In short, they were used to pushing mass-media communications and were not ready for a dialogue.

1. Consumers caught on quick. They saw that many marketers weren't honest in their outreach. Blogs and branded communities were selective about what comments and criticisms they'd allow to go public. What's worse is that some of these "communities" didn't allow for comments at all. I don't need to tell you that using smoke and mirrors is wrong - we all know that.
2. Many marketers were lit on fire. Build a Facebook application. Create a YouTube branded page. Commercial messaging flooded the platforms, and marketers weren't equipped or ready to take on

such a responsibility. I can't tell you how many articles I've read in the past year – from some of the greatest minds in our industry – that say “go out and try it – it's free.” Now we'll all pay for it.

### **Is Social the wrong way to distribute my brand message? What do we do next?**

Don't give up. Social media is more important to your brand now more than ever. Don't let the ADWEEK sound bites scare you away. Dive deeper. The approach is easy. It's the execution that takes effort. The Forrester study gives some reasons for when and how to blog for business. You can read those for a start, if you need direction. However, I think there are 4 fundamentals to remember when you want to use social to enhance the consumer experience with your brand.

1. Don't make assumptions. Listen to communities to understand their needs and their current perceptions of your brand. If you aren't ready to invest in listening, you will not succeed. No exceptions.
2. Social media should not be done in a vacuum. Set goals that ladder up into overarching business objectives. Calculate the monetary and human resources you need to put against these goals to help prove ROI for across channels.
3. Add value. Don't create a branded community unless it aligns with insight and brand strategy. Start with existing communities and reach out to your brand ambassadors to help amplify a message they already believe in. Aid their efforts by providing them with information, tools and buzz worthy information.
4. Don't forget the loyalists you already know. People rarely align a social media kick-off for a CRM initiative. Start with your champions. Listen to them and learn how to scale their brand evangelism.

It all comes down to being committed to the consumer. There is no free lunch in social media.

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#### EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## “The Dark Knight” Taps Into Social Media

DEC 11, 2008 09:48P.M.

To promote the box office smash “The Dark Knight,” DVD released December 9th, 2008, Warner Brothers created a first-of-its-kind social media microsite. This new site provides many assets of Batman-themed tools for fans to use on their profiles across the social web - Facebook, MySpace, iGoogle, Twitter and blogs. The social media microsite invites fans to express their loyalty to one of the key characters in “The Dark Knight” - Joker, Batman or Harvey Dent - using an assortment of cool, creative customization tools, including everything from a profile picture

creator, widgets, downloads, site skins and site customized peel backs (my personal favorites are the widget and the skins). Check the “Dark Knight” microsite out here.



Other social media marketing tactics for the film have included a number of microsites and a takeover of the MySpace homepage. One interesting interactive feature that's been generating a lot of buzz involves “committing” a friend by placing a photograph of their face on the body of an insane asylum inmate.

So it's true - social media marketing is a great way to generate news about your business or products. But as we can see from the examples above, it isn't just about having a Facebook page or MySpace page. There are several different social media tactics promoting Batman.

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#### EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## What Brands Can Learn From a Wiener

DEC 10, 2008 12:09A.M.

Originally published at AdAge DigitalNEXT

I know what you're thinking. “Not another recession article - ugh.” Well it's not, really.

Several weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go for a ride in the world-famous Oscar Mayer Wienermobile. Actually, I went on several rides, and it started with getting picked up at the Las Vegas airport, no less. Right off the bat, there were several things I noticed as I approached the giant wiener on wheels. It was surrounded by a crowd. Everyone was taking pictures, talking to each other about it and, of course, smiling. Just take a look at my own behavior as I sat inside of it. I was instantly transformed into a child. Which isn't really hard for me because I'm a kid at heart, but as we drove around I noticed that the Wienermobile had this effect on virtually everyone.

We rode on the Strip, where cops on bicycles stopped us to ask for “wiener whistles,” and made a stop at Zappos, where we witnessed full-grown adults literally skipping around the Wienermobile as they sang, “How I wish I were an Oscar Mayer wiener.” On the Las Vegas Strip itself, where there is no shortage of photo opportunities, people stopped in their tracks, fumbling to get out their cameras before we passed them

by. Toward the end of my trip spent in the Wienermobile, several things become clear to me. For starters, the Wienermobile teaches us about what it means to produce a “social object,” as prominent blogger Hugh McLeod puts it. It’s an object that connects people, gets them talking and, more importantly, gets them sharing stories as I am doing here. Think about this lesson as it came before “social media” was ever invented.

Secondly, it is an experience. From the crafting of the vehicle to the whistles to the “Hotdoggers” who drive them (and undergo some serious training), everything about the Wienermobile is designed to be memorable.

Lastly, the model has become somewhat scalable. What started out as one Wienermobile has now grown to seven, which cover geographical regions of North America. And the Wienermobile has survived tougher times than our current recession. During World War II, for example, it had to be taken off the road due to gasoline rationing. Today it’s alive and well, and the latest addition is a more fuel-friendly version built off the chassis of a Mini Cooper.

But my greatest epiphany was this: had Carl G. Mayer, nephew of Oscar Mayer and creator of the Wienermobile, put his concept in front of a bunch of marketing executives, I’m not certain it would have ever gotten the green light to move forward. Think about it - if you never saw the Wienermobile in action, how would you estimate return on investment? I mean, it’s not actually selling hot dogs and it is dependent on fuel and maintenance. Aside from giving out coupons in front of grocery chains, how do you measure the ROI of something like the Wienermobile? How do you measure smiles? What do those get you?

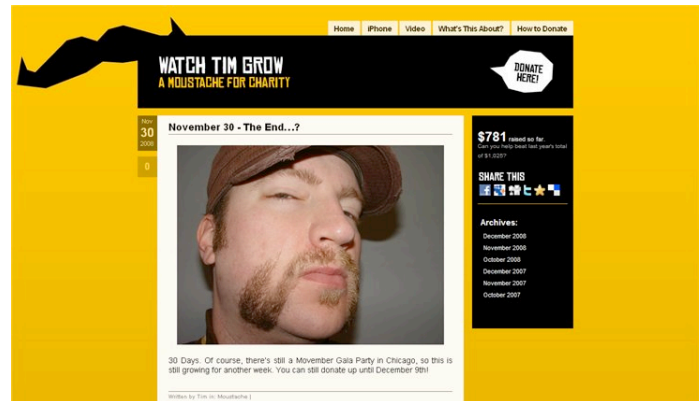
Well, I think they get you a lot. And I think Carl realized something that maybe today’s cash-strapped CMOs might not. A brand like Oscar Mayer isn’t just selling hot dogs - it is actually selling smiles. Like the ones at a baseball game or family grill-out or a party. Wieners are a commodity. A winning brand is not. And the Wienermobile helps take Oscar Mayer out of the commodity game and into a game where brand affinity matters and leads to sales.

At Critical Mass, we think about experiences like this as extraordinary. And extraordinary experiences are practically recession-proof. The Wienermobile has gone “2.0” with an account on Twitter and even a blog. Let’s see if those smiles can translate online, since affinity has a way of translating to sales offline.

## EXPERIENCE MATTERS

## Fundraising 2.0

DEC 03, 2008 08:26P.M.



Today marks the end of Movember, a moustache-growing fundraiser our offices participate in. For a month, guys like myself shave clean and grow a moustache while raising funds (and awareness) for prostate cancer.

Though for a very good cause, I knew the economic downturn was going to make collecting donations rather difficult. The economy is making people think twice about their money, and the novelty of doing Movember a year ago wears a little thin. So how do you improve your reach and the possibility of collecting donations over the course of the month?

**Constant updates.** Entertain your friends, family and colleagues with progress on your efforts. I’ve created a blog to show progress each day and provide detailed information about the fundraising effort. Not only is it a simple site to set up (and *free*), I’ve also found a plugin to make my blog formatted for the iPhone for those who want to track my ’stache from their mobile.



**Go social.** Instead of walking door-to-door or calling up friends, there are much easier methods to get the word out. Update your MySpace photo. Post the direct donation link on Facebook. Create a response video to the official fundraising video on YouTube. Update your LinkedIn status. Tweet away with Twitter. Spread the word on multiple networks with an AddThis button. If your social network is active, other users will catch all of your notices in their feeds.

**Focus on the micro-interaction.** The Salvation Army now accepts online donations. Political campaigns like President-elect Obama's are using mobile applications and social media feeds to raise money. Gone are the days of hoping to sign people up on paper or depending on ringing bells outside of stores. Small donations are now easier to make than ever.

The key is that all of these methods are free or accessible to anyone. Most likely, you already have a few of these networks set up. So far, we've raised over \$3,000 this year and donations are still being accepted until December 9th.

Thank you to all of those who have already donated!

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