

# THE RISE OF ULTRA-TAILORED ADVERTISING

With the average individual exposed to thousands of advertising messages every day, brands struggle more than ever to have their voices heard. Faced with this information clutter, one largely adopted strategy has been the strengthening of the relationship between brands and consumers. In the near future, new technologies can be expected to take this strategy to a new level with ultra-tailored advertising. Tailor-made advertising will allow brands to relay the most relevant and compelling advertising messages to the right audiences. Three major factors in the rise of tailor-made advertising will be the development of microtargeting, the adoption of proactive marketing, and the popularization of augmented reality advertising.

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**A**dvertising golden age. The term sparks a very specific mental image: old fashioned typewriters, smoky meeting rooms, and corner offices overlooking Madison Avenue. But the time has come for the industry to shake itself out of an unhealthy nostalgia and claim the term for its own. The 60s may have been the glorious age of consumerism, but we are incontestably living **the golden age of creativity**. Some time between a Think Small headline (Volkswagen, 1959) and a Think Different tagline (Apple, 1997), the Idea was propelled to the rank of advertising's superstar. Some creatives would even have you think that the right Idea can pull an advertising campaign out of the bottomless pit dug by a terrible product or a bad brief.

New technology, forever advertising's partner in crime, constantly redefines the limit of what is possi-

ble in advertising. Pizza deliveries by drones? Sure (T + Biscuits for Domino). Billboards that change air into potable drinking water? Done! (Mayo DraftFCBand for the University of Engineering and Technology of Peru). A magazine ad. that can be used to keep track of your kids at the beach? No problem! (FCB Brazil for Nivea). «As long as there is an idea, there is a way» seems to be the industry's motto.

The motivation behind advertising's obsession with creativity is the overload of information faced by consumers. With the average individual exposed to thousands of advertising messages every day, brands struggle more than ever to have their voices heard. Add to it the abundance of business competitors with the exact same offering, and it becomes clear why brands rely more and more on creative advertising and new technologies to build exclusive (and some would even say intimate) relationships with their consumers.

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## MICROTARGETING

For the last three decades, brands' defense mechanisms against a market saturated with information and competitors have largely depended on differentiation strategies. Unique brand positionings and bold core values act as hooks that allow a brand to stick in

the consumers's minds and hearts. Because strong opinions induce strong adherence, differentiation has become a means toward strengthening the relationships between brands and consumers. Like art and social movements, brands brandish fearless manifestos that impact all aspects of their communication. They do not just sell products and services anymore, they sell lifestyles and rally around them those who share their values. Nike, Adidas and Puma, for example, all sell sport goods of comparable quality and prices, but no one would ever confuse one for the others because in reality Nike sells self-empowerment, Adidas self-fulfillment, and Puma urban performance. Targeted



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*"In the near future, new technologies can be expected to dramatically impact the industry on three major levels: microtargeting, reactive marketing and augmented reality advertising, thus initiating the era of tailor-made advertising",* gâteau confectionné à partir d'une photographie transmise par un client de la marque OREO.

marketing supports this differentiation effort by allowing brands to reach the right types of audiences through the right mediums.

However, market segmentation is about to enter a new age: the age of microtargeting. Political advertising already ventured into such territory with encouraging results during the 2004 United State presidential election. By coupling ultra-sophisticated voter databases with predictive analytics, the Republican Party was able to relay the most relevant messages to groups of individuals categorized by known opinions and predicted behaviors.

Microtargeting is also a growing reality in advertising. On one side, announcers are less and less inclined to invest in massive online ad. placements with hard to assess results. On the other hand, online marketing services have been able to track consumers's online activities with increasing success. With the rise of online database giants like Acxiom, it only takes a small step forward to imagine a future where online ad. placement services will be able to sell packages of individual ad. spaces. An online marketing service with the right algorithm and access to individual customers's demographic and behavioral data would be able to put together packages of individual ad. placements. Each placement in these packages would be defined by three essential components: the time and the place the message is displayed, and to which particular consumer. These media plans would have the advantage of always being relevant to the brand and to the targeted customers, and able to instantly readjust to individual customers' behavioral fluctuations. For advertisers, this opens the door to ultra precise and responsive online ad campaigns that only target the desired customers. A camping goods brand could, for example, buy an ad placement plan only targeting «Outdoorsy, crafty and politically conservative 20 to 35 year old females», and be assured that **each individual in the package sees the ad at the optimal time and place for it to be positively received.**

This gives rise to a whole new challenge for advertising creative teams: how to preserve brand consistency while fully taking advantage of an ultra specific ad. placement plan when designing online ad messages.

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## REACTIVE MARKETING

Another ongoing evolution of the industry is the growing reactivity of the brands. The 21st century's social media boom has deeply transformed the way brands handle their communication. Not without a few expected missteps on the way, brands are gradually stepping away from the traditional one-way communication to consumers and are opening themselves to **a bilateral conversation on social media.** Through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and the plethora of ever

blossoming social media platforms, brands and consumers are now able to communicate in real-time. This shift marks a renewed effort from brands to tighten their bonds with their consumers. Stepping away from the historical advertising paternalism is a sensible move for an industry faced with society's growing mistrust of advertising.

Today, a brand can be a friend like any other on Facebook: social media allow a brand to develop an online persona and make consumers forget they are interacting with a corporation and not a physical individual. Online, brands come down from their pedestal so that consumers can finally relate to them. By giving brands voices, social media make them lovable, making their bond with their consumers a strong argument against competitors and market shifts. Maintaining a bilateral conversation on the social media has many benefits, but it requires a continuous presence. Brands have to act and react in real time if they want to stay relevant online.

A prime example of reactive advertising is Oreo's Superbowl tweet. February 3rd, New Orleans. The 49ers play against the Ravens at the 47th Superbowl. The Ravens are leading 28 to 6 when the lights suddenly go out. Within minutes, Oreo posts its now famous tweet: «You can still dunk in the dark», jokes Milk's Favorite Cookie (at least according to Oreo's packaging). Seven perfectly timed words, and Oreo and 360i (the advertising agency responsible for the tweet) come out as the real champions of the game.

What remains to this day the most striking effort of the brand in terms of timely social media usage is far from a simple stroke of luck. The brand stands out by its dynamic social media presence. It successfully manages to involve itself in the conversation. The brand takes stands on gay rights, public breast-feeding or Great Britain's royal baby, and it feels right. Most of the controversy sparked by the brand's stances have to do with customers's personal convictions rather than with Oreo's legitimacy on those issues. Another more local but just as impressive example is Tipp-Ex's response to La Redoute's photobomb in January 2012. This time again, a few clever words: «On redoute tous de faire des erreurs», published on social media hijacked the conversation in favor of a brand. What at first glance could appear like two examples of juvenile tong-in-cheek impertinence is in fact the result of a conscious effort to broaden a brand's spectrum of relevance.

Consider Nike. The company may sell sport equipment, but its influence goes well beyond sportswear. Nike's philosophy resonates in the way its consumers approach a job interview, an exam or a first date. The tagline «Just do it» is not just a call to action — it's a lifestyle that consumers either adhere to or not, and for those who do, it influences way more than their daily exercise. By broadening its spectrum of relevance and influence, Nike has earned the right to

voice its opinion, thus building itself into an institution.

But in a society increasingly geared toward social media interactions, reactivity might no longer be enough. The inevitable emergence of companies able to accurately identify upcoming trends in different subsets of the population will allow brands **to act ahead of the trends**. By monitoring the occurrence of certain key words on social media platforms and in online exchanges and content, brands will be capable of anticipating the next big conversations. However, coherent proactivity can only come from a solid brand personality. One crucial component of a successful social media presence is maintaining brand consistency. More than ever, brands will need to determine clear core values, craft a unique voice and define what they stand for before entering the social media game. Brands want to make sure that they stand on the same side as their consumers before taking a position on a potentially polarizing issue. Another essential component of a successful social media presence is creativity. Brands cannot just get away riding a wave of borrowed interest, to get the consumers' attention. Creativity and relevance ensure that the audience will voluntarily come to the brand (or think it did).

The study of the style of advertisements over the last sixty years shows that straightforward headlines and visuals have been gradually replaced **a clear evolution toward subtlety** with more and more enigmatic messages. One of the main reasons for this evolution is that advertising's survival rests on perpetual evolution. With time, the human brain grows used to a certain type of advertising messages and becomes able to identify and discard them more quickly and easily. When the style of advertising messages keeps on changing, the brain has to make more of an effort to process and discard the messages. Ads with intriguing visuals and enigmatic headlines are one of the latest advertising trends. They have the advantage of looking like mind bending puzzles. The longer a consumer has to think about an ad. to understand it, the longer it sticks into their mind. Because, after a few seconds of reflection, the brain is rewarded with the satisfaction of solving the equation, it subconsciously associates the brand with a positive feeling. Moreover, in such mind-bending ads, the final selling argument comes from the consumers, who through the process convince themselves of the product's benefits. These ads take a step further in tightening the bond between brands and consumers. By blurring the lines between where the advertising message ends and the consumer's thoughts begin, they initiate what could be considered a symbiosis between brands and consumers.

## AUGMENTED REALITY MARKETING

While this symbiosis is already underway, **future technology developments will make this transformation even more pronounced**. In June 2013, Jang-Ung Park, a chemical engineer at the Ulsan National Institute, and a group of research organizations including Samsung, announced their goal of developing a smart contact lens. Not the recently unveiled Google Smart Contacts, able to monitor blood sugar variations in diabetic patients, but a wearable display capable of supporting a fully operational computer. At the same time, all over the planet, research teams reported their latest progress in developing brain powered devices. It doesn't take much of a stretch to imagine a future where brain powered smart contacts would be as mundane as iPhones.

Technology experts such as Colin R Blackman have predicted a gradual merging of existing technologies into new multipurpose devices since the late nineties. If the technological **convergence trend** progresses as expected, smart contacts could become the first ultra-intuitive and integrated super device, making other devices unnecessary. Coupled with microtargeting strategies and proactivity, such a device would offer the most intuitive and non obtrusive advertising platform to this day. It would also open the door to mainstream augmented reality advertising. Currently the most popular augmented reality filters are smartphones, but an integrated super device would turn augmented reality into a major advertising platform by making the filter always present in front of the consumers' eyes.

Creatively, it stresses the upcoming need for a technology capable of creating multiple versions of an advertising message. In practice, it could mean **a creative team working on an original advertising message**, and a program that could generate numerous ultra-tailored variations of this original message to fit a variety of individuals and situations.

Brands able to track individual behaviors, anticipate social trends and make a direct link to the consumer's brain could be the future of advertising. In the next decades, technological advancements will make tailor-made advertising possible. Emergent technologies applied to advertising and marketing can always be expected to rise a few concerns and criticisms, but **ultra-tailored advertising would prove beneficial to both brands and individuals by making advertising messages more relevant than ever to consumers**. From a creative point of view, this is both exciting and challenging as the industry will have to find a way to take full advantage of ultra customizable advertising messages while preserving brand consistency.