

Fish Where The Fish Are

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At the Asia Digital Marketing Association (ADMA), we've just finished compiling the third annual ADMA Yearbook and our heads are still bouncing around from the effort of pulling together 84 pages of data and insights in a clear and logical way.

Out of all the facts and figures about online marketing in Asia Pacific, one particular observation jumps out.

There is a mismatch between the online media people in Asia Pacific are consuming and the tools advertisers are using to reach them. Internet users are adopting new media faster than most of the advertisers who are trying to reach them.

Social media is a good example.

More than 450 million consumers across the region participate in social media and Facebook's Asia Pacific visitors to the site jumped 458% between mid-2007 and mid-2008. 48% of all South Koreans have a Cyworld account, and the site has slightly fewer than 18 million users, of whom 30% are in their 20s.

China's 51.com has 14 million average weekly unique browsers, and 150 million Qzone users actively update their accounts at least once a month. In the Philippines more than 74% of the online population participates in social networking; Friendster has 10.7 million subscribers and Facebook has more than 1 million.

And yet, when you look at the most frequently used online advertising tools and platforms, corporate web sites, rich media, banner ads, pop up ads, sponsored content, email and search continue to command the lion's share of online advertising dollars.

For all their popularity with consumers, participation on Twitter, Facebook, Friendster, Bebo, MySpace, LinkedIn and their Asia Pacific cousins does not yet prominently figure in advertisers' plans. It's time for marketers to fish where the fish are!

Online media is increasingly gaining the trust of consumers around Asia.

A recent TNS survey revealed that of the top twenty-five most trusted forms of both on and offline media, fourteen were online. And increasingly, the trusted online media include user generated content.

Overall, the third most trusted media is expert product reviews from websites, with consumer product reviews from websites at #5 and consumer opinions on blogs and message boards at #7 and #12 respectively.

Why are advertisers still predominantly using relatively conservative approaches when the internet changes continuously and offers so many opportunities for innovation?

Perhaps in some cases, advertisers may be concerned about the relative lack of control over their messaging and positioning on social media platforms, and in other cases they may not yet have discovered a credible way to connect with the community of their target customers online, but now brands MUST dive in and connect directly with consumers and their communities, as well as -- or in many cases instead of -- interrupting their online experience with advertising messages.

In the past year, the development of digital marketing took some exciting new turns, reaching not only new levels of growth and penetration, but also new levels of sophistication.

Marketers have an increasingly wide choice of platforms on which to engage their target customers.

Social media, blogs, mobile, and gaming are all under-utilized offer opportunities for innovation and brand differentiation online. Brands can either join the conversation online, or create platforms for communities to gather around their brand or their consumers' lifestyles.

Some of this new online communication looks more like public relations than advertising, and clearly the lines are blurring between sales promotion, customer relationship management and brand building.

Whatever it will eventually develop into, marketers need to jump in with more effort and more dollars if they are to catch the opportunity.

Take online gaming for example: in a survey more than 50% of respondents said "meeting other gamers online" was

important for their overall experience, and more than 60% of users said they also kept in touch with these friends on other social networking platforms.

The numbers for online gaming are big and growing. Games.com attracts nearly 200,000 unique visitors a month in Asia Pacific, each of whom spends an average 86.8 minutes on the site, and QQ.com Games in China draws more than 44,000 visitors monthly, each spending an average of 46.5 minutes.

Mobile continues to gain, both as a text messaging and voice call channel, but also for internet access. Asia Pacific (ex Japan) has 97.6 million mobile online gamers, with more than half of them residing in China.

There is 60% mobile phone penetration in the Philippines. Filipinos spend an hour a day chatting on their mobiles, and send the highest number of SMS messages per subscriber in the world.

Mobile site page views grew 1120% YOY. 2008 Asia Pacific-wide mobile data revenues topped US\$ 65 billion, and an estimated 473 million handsets were sold.

With usage of all elements of the online marketing mix growing and becoming more sophisticated, it's time for marketers and advertisers to bait their hooks and fish where the fish are.

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