

Media Multitasking Brings Challenges And Opportunities For Marketers

Contributed by eMarketer
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Distracted consumers still give marketers multiple chances to make an impression

It's an age of abundant media, as digital channels add to the flow of content from which consumers can choose. Online video, social networking and other digital options are occupying increasing amounts of consumer time. Mobile technology is extending people's ability to access digital content throughout the day.

And television is as popular as ever, taking up the biggest share of consumers' time spent with media.

But there's a catch: multitasking.

“For marketers, the age of multitasking means consumers are available to receive multiple streams of messages at the same time,” said Mark Dolliver, eMarketer analyst and author of the new report, “Time Spent with Media: Consumer Behavior in the Age of Multitasking.” “But multitasking also yields an audience whose attention is divided.”

eMarketer estimates US adults crammed more than 11 hours of media content into an average day in 2011, double-counting for simultaneous usage.

For marketers, the downside of multitasking is self-evident: a distracted audience. But some experts, in interviews with eMarketer, noted a potential upside if marketers can come at the consumer from multiple angles at the same moment.

Opportunities arise in cases where multitasking builds attention around a body of content rather than dispersing it across unrelated activities. “When people sit down to watch a TV show and they have their iPad with them, they're not necessarily multitasking in contradictory ways,” noted Edward Boches, longtime creative director at the Mullen ad agency and now its chief innovation officer.

“I may be using my iPhone or my iPad to GPS a location that's in a TV show. Or I might be watching something and there might be a historical reference, and I'll quickly just Google something. It's not that I'm trying to do two or three different things at the same time. It might be that I'm using one device to augment the experience of another.”

Indeed, 19% of smartphone and tablet owners surveyed in Q3 2011 by Nielsen reported using their mobile devices to seek information related to a commercial. That dovetails with the findings of a Q2 2011 Ipsos MediaCT survey of online consumers. Asked about activities they engage in while watching TV, 16% of respondents in that survey said they go to websites for companies whose ads they've seen.

A brand that's prepared to meet the consumer on multiple platforms “with useful things to say in each venue” can engage an audience more deeply than ever. Compared to even the recent past, there's now more of a payoff for being smart and more of a penalty for being boring or irrelevant in one's messaging.

Sometimes, being smart will mean not imposing unduly on consumers with messages they don't need. In the age of multitasking, an essential task for marketers will be to make sure they're not wasting the consumer's time.

The full report, “Time Spent with Media: Consumer Behavior in the Age of Multitasking,” also answers these key questions:

- How much time are consumers spending with each medium?

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- What are the media elements most likely to divide consumers' attention when they're multitasking?

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- How are multitasking and time constraints affecting the way consumers take in (or don't take in) marketing messages?

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- How can marketers adjust their strategies to account for media multitasking?

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