

Web 2.0 to the marketing rescue

 By [Abey Mokgwatsane](#)

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On 21 June 2003, Miller Genuine Draft (MGD) was launched into the South African market, a day that has subsequently been named Miller's Eve. The launch night's objective was to create an intense experience for innovators and early adopters in the alcoholic beverage market and without doubt, this is exactly what was achieved - by using a completely innovative launch approach for that time.



Looking back

The brand team had gone against convention and spent 35% of the annual budget in one night, instead of launching with the usual ATL campaign. The launch events were staged simultaneously in hangars in Durban, Cape Town and Joburg and were linked via satellite, enabling the 5000 invited guests to share in the experience of the other cities. There were plenty of firsts that night, including 15 lucky guests who were flown in Lear Jets from their city's party to parties in the other two cities. An insert of the event was also flighted six-times, generating over R3.5 million worth of media value.

The launch strategy went against the conventional thinking of the day and it worked. MGD made it onto the trendsetter-list and is still one of the fastest growing premium brands in the South African beer market.

The launch's success proved that the guests influenced their network of friends to have a positive predisposition to MGD and even better, be a catalyst for trial.

Adopters of ideas

The marketing model that assumes that you can spread a brand message through activating a group of highly influential consumers is not new. In the writing *The Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett Rogers proved that adopters of new innovations or ideas, including brands, could be segmented into five groups; innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. The model resembles a bell curve with each group showing a different propensity to adopt new products based on their "awareness, interest, evaluation and trial".

Innovators within a category have a higher propensity to adopt new products versus the laggards that have the least propensity. The adoption profile of a consumer changes as the categories change. A teenager is a faster adopter of new cellphone technology like Mxit but a slower adopter of anti-wrinkle cream.

Most research that tests the effectiveness of Diffusion Theory is inadequate; qualitative methods are too expensive to provide statistically significant samples and quantitative methods are too broad to link back to the influencer group.

A break for diffusion theory

The advent of the Web 2.0 application of social networking has provided Diffusion Theory with a solution that should help it break into mainstream marketing.

At its core, Web 2.0 social networking, or rather the software that makes social networking possible, connects homogenous groups of consumers to each other to allow them to meet, chat, share and learn. There are countless examples of this world phenomenon, including MySpace, LinkedIn and Flickr to name but a few.

While previously it was difficult to track and/or test how a brand message moves from say innovators to early adopters, social networking software makes it possible and because it's online, it's scalable.

So what does this mean for marketers?

Real time tracking

To start with, Diffusion Theory can move from being just an interesting theory to one that can be tracked in real time. Marketers can now test the hypothesis that the theory makes by designing research that asks the right questions to the different Diffusion Model segments of the network.

Put simply, if consumer A, an innovator, is invited to an event where a new game console is launched, his influence can be monitored by asking his friend network, who are let's say early adopters, about the new game console. If he's truly an influencer, more often than not, his network will know everything about his new experience. If they don't, then his innovator status is brought into question. This need not be expensive: online tools and even cellphone technology make real time interactive data easily available.

There are then implications for the way marketers populate data too. It's no longer enough to get a name and a cellphone number. For the model to work we need to firstly ensure that the individual is correctly segmented in one of the five adoption segments and that secondly, his or her network is accurately mapped out too.

Cutting edge consumer connections

These are still early days. Best practice still needs to be developed for methods of compiling data, keeping consumers interested in being part of these networks and encouraging participation in the constant research to keep the model alive.

We are witness to a new era where Web 2.0 applications such as social networking offer opportunities for long-standing marketing models such as the Diffusion Theory. It'll be the marketers that capitalise on the conversion of these trends who will reap the rewards and remain on the cutting edge of real and sustainable consumer connections.

ABOUT ABEY MOKGWATSANE

Abey Mokgwatsane is group marketing director of VWV (tel +27 (0)11 799 2600 or go to www.vwv.com).

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