

In-store's vital statistics

New Chair of retail marketing trade association POPAI, Brid Bickerton, looks at how in-store is set to finally get the measure of above-the-line.

Brands have for some time now faced a growing problem. It wasn't that long ago that families used to ritually gather around the square box which took pride of place in the corner of the lounge. Back then, communicating with consumers was so much simpler – a feeling of certainty, control and a captive audience for your message. Things have changed though.

We now live in a confusing world of limitless digital channels, constantly migrating viewers, an almost unbearable saturation of media 'noise', and a growing shift of power towards consumers, with the advent of user-generated content. Developing relationships with consumers has never been more challenging.

It's a reality that has seen many brands questioning the effectiveness of traditional 'mass' media and looking to re-direct marketing budgets, but also asking the question, 'What's the alternative?'. To those who work in the retail marketing industry, the answer is a straight forward one: in-store.

For several years now, marketers have been constantly referred to surveys which show over 75% of shopper decisions are made at the point-of-purchase. After all, it's a captive audience, predisposed to spend their hard-earned money – not in a few hours, or the next day after seeing the latest multi-million pound creative offering to promote tomorrow's 'must-have' product on TV – but right there and then. So why haven't brands wholeheartedly embraced the power of in-store before now?

It's true that the retail marketing industry has always felt aggrieved by having to survive on the scraps of marketing budgets, rather than brands and retailers taking more informed decisions on spend levels, as they would, say, for TV, print or outdoor; and rightly so. Spend by brands in-store still only represents around 10% of total marketing budgets. But the fact of the matter is that, whilst finding the perfect formula for communicating with an increasingly illusive audience is rarely achieved by marketers, measurement still remains King. And, to date, that has been something which the retail marketing industry has been unable to provide. With TV networks able to present established metrics on audience, reach, opportunities-to-see and frequency, it is little wonder that in-store has been unable to compete on an equal footing.

But things are changing. Not only are retailers, brands and media planners crying out for comparable in-store metrics – a currency to accurately measure the effectiveness of PoP – but those companies working within the industry also sense a genuine opportunity for in-store to at last take its rightful place at the heart of the marketing mix.

Led by POPAI UK & Ireland, the MARI (Marketing at Retail Initiative) study – part of wider research being carried out around the world including the US – will for the first time provide metrics consistent with other advertising media, ensuring that in-store as a medium can truly engage marketers, as well as shoppers. The study will also offer valuable insight into the effectiveness and relationships between the extensive range of in-store communication tools available to marketers, from fixed to permanent, semi-permanent and temporary PoP, at shelf, category and store-level.

With initial pilot studies within major FMCG retailers already completed and others planned, this is an exciting time for everyone involved in the industry. The results of the programme will establish a new language for the accountability of PoP, giving everyone involved in promoting retail marketing the tools they need to stake a strong and irrefutable case for placing even greater confidence and spend in the medium; one that is finally set to be recognised and embraced as an integral part of building brands and developing lasting consumer relationships of the future.

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