



Just when we researchers thought we had a pretty good grip on this measurement thing, along comes Web 2.0 to blog us on the head and throw us sideways.

It's an exciting and bewildering time. Things are moving so fast that it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Michael Wesch of "The machine is us/ing us" fame – more than 6.5 million views on YouTube – lends some comfort: "You should never feel stupid in this environment, because we're all stupid in this environment."

Having said that, budgets are – or will be – moving into this space faster than you can Twitter about it. We need to be ready to measure in a (non-stupid) meaningful way.

But what on earth should we be measuring in this relatively shiny, new world of Web 2.0? What should we track and how will it help us? What will Web 2.0 research gems look like?

What to measure?

On the surface, what to measure is an easy enough question to answer. Once the marketing objectives have been defined, then just measure how well the brand tracks on those measures. Well, of course!

But wait a minute. That assumes you know what you're trying to achieve in this space: what the marketing objectives actually are. More fundamentally, it assumes you know what brand equity in the Web 2.0 environment even looks like.

And this is the crux of the matter. With Web 2.0, brand equity is for the most part defined by the community. Heavens,

MEASURING IN THE DARK OF WEB 2.0

IT'S HARD ENOUGH FOR MOST TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WEB 2.0 IS, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST, LET ALONE MEASURE MARKETING ACTIVITY. THE ONLY WAY TO LEARN IS TO DIVE IN, ARGUES KATIE HARRIS.

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Consider also that any given community's needs and expectations are evolving: the Web 2.0 environment is constantly refreshing and reloading itself. What people Digg, either figuratively or literally, one minute is buried the next. By the time we try to distil the elements that drove the Digging, people have moved on to something else.

But, in the midst of this exciting uncertainty – or perhaps because of it – there are some urgent Web 2.0 – let's not even mention Web 3.0 – questions burning ulcers into the guts of the marketing world.

No one wants to be left behind or possibly worse, get it wrong. How can the potential of this untamed, unbridled world *nonpareil* be harnessed?

Burning questions

You get that it's not going away and that you need to be a part of it. So how can, and should, your brand ride this digital/social media wave?

You get that it's not about monologues any more, but conversations. So what's the best way for your brand to start or be part of a conversation?

You know that if you don't join the conversation, it'll happen without you: web-whispers behind your back. But is blogging, vlogging, Twittering, Plurking, LinkingIn, Facebooking or MySpacing for your brand?

What to do?

You can't just read up on this stuff –

although it's useful to do so. Reading isn't enough because successful Web 2.0 case studies have a very limited shelf-life. By the time you read about it, it's probably going to be just that little bit yesterday.

But more importantly, developing strategies from a text book case study is unforgivably limiting in this context.

It's virtually impossible to know what's possible. Indeed, the exciting thing about Web 2.0 is the potential to stretch, and even create, new boundaries.

Again, that's quite a shift for the way we think about marketing.

Get jiggy with it

The very best, and possibly the only way to really understand the world of Web 2.0 – and what constitutes meaningful measurement – is to get involved.

Become a participant. Wander the web. Weave your way through a community of blog rolls. Leave a comment. Twitter. Get a feel for the fussy, yet forgiving nature of Web 2.0 etiquette. In essence, in case you haven't already heard the phrase, join the conversation.

This kind of participation will give you the understanding you need to develop relevant strategies and in effect, relevant measures.

What I'm suggesting isn't new. It's still all about understanding the market. It's just that to do so in a Web 2.0-savvy way, companies, brands, marketers and researchers need to get more involved than perhaps we're used to. <

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