

Marketers are relying too heavily on data

The global chief marketing officer for Patrón Spirits International, Lee Applbaum, talks about how to deliver creative and beautiful marketing and not rely only on data and the next 'big thing'.

 By Louise Marsland ^{8 Feb 2018}



Lee Applbaum, global chief marketing officer, Patrón Spirits International.

■ What would you say are the key trends for 2018 in your industry?

The continued explosive growth of social and digital media. Our brand, like most, had the vast majority of our investment in traditional media, i.e., out of home. But the last couple of years, we have been leveraging social media as a key conduit for content creation and syndication has been an overwhelmingly vast component of our media mix. The ability to deliver tailored and bespoke content to customers, tweak it, redeploy it to make it more impactful, is extraordinarily attractive for us. It is no surprise that we, and other brands, are continuing to do that.

We were one of the first brands to use the Oculus VR platform to create authenticity in our stories: our ability to transport consumers to Mexico where we make our products through VR and Oculus has been very powerful. It creates a visceral experience. We found VR to be very powerful and were one of the first brands to invest with Amazon on Echo.

Another consumer trend is voice activation. We are finding ways for brands to engage with our consumers via voice activation. We have invested in that. I believe very strongly in innovative technology with voice activation.

We are dipping our toe now in augmented reality. AR, social media, innovative technology - all of these things will continue to be important trends in media and marketing. There is no proverbial silver bullet. No one magic wand you can wave. A careful assembly of innovative marketing technology; earned media through PR continues to be important; brand activation and engagement... all of those things together are recipes for success. We need to find ways to continue to cohabitate with our consumer and our mission to look for ways to intersect with our consumer.

■ Your 'game changer' trend for this year?

In the 'silver bullet' category of game changer, there is not going to be a single game changer. The continued iteration of existing technologies, like VR and AR, will have a higher degree of stature. With social media, brands will continue to more effectively listen to the social conversation and better drive engagement. For a long time on social media, brands would talk about social media, but what matters is how those people engage with you. Brands that have the intelligence to really focus on engagement and how consumers are engaging with you, not just how many are paying attention. When marketers chase the game changer, they tend to throw a ton of money after something, that doesn't merit that kind of investment.

■ What do you hope to see more of in 2018?

I think from the media and technology side, I don't know that there is anything really that is necessarily glaring... I'm often fond of saying that media companies will always talk to us about data data data. We have more data than we know what to do with - it's about being smarter with the data we already have. I would love to see output data that is more effectively curated.

for me and makes it more actionable, to be honest with you. What is absent is how effectively we use all those things. I think technology and innovation have moved faster than marketers' ability to fully leverage it. Brilliantly talented engineers are coming up with things – amazing innovations – but as marketers we need to find a way to effectively leverage them.

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■ What can we leave behind in 2017?

I think, I'm a little bit of a broken record in general... we are so hammered now with so much rich data that we can get from all these technologies and media platforms, that we have spent a lot of time as marketers in dissecting those segments - we are more alike, as consumers, globally. Marketers have begun to lose gut instinct, relying too heavily on data to tell us what to do. For all of those wonderful tools we have and technologies, humans haven't evolved that much.

We can't trust technology to do it all for us. The best marketing still comes from the gut. I'd like to see a return to more marketing that is creative, beautiful marketing, supported by analytics. It's what I really believe.

■ How do you still show growth during a recession?

Every economy has gone through boom and bust, and everyone has weathered it and luxury brands have weathered it. With the wide spectrum of luxury brands, one of the beautiful things of spirits, is that they are attainable and affordable luxury. I'm naïve in thinking that a R75 cocktail isn't a lot of money, but it is an affordable luxury when it is compared to a Hermès handbag or a Porsche car. It's an affordable indulgence and reminder that the good things in life can be enjoyed in tough times. If times are tough in an economy and you want to have a nice dinner at home or out, or you want to just meet up with friends, doing over a cocktail is something that has been happening for hundreds of years. We are somewhat insulated from an economic downturn. It is a reminder of good times.

■ The biggest disruptor in your industry in the past year?

I don't think there is a single biggest disruptor - that's a good thing. Smart marketing has always been quite complex, a more holistic approach to the consumer, no more disrupted media, than there is one disrupted brand. Netflix is a massive disruptor to the broadcast networks, but in marketing and media, it's very fickle and subjective. That's a good thing. It forces us to be more holistic and integrated in our marketing. But we are very very complex, this is about human beings, convincing a consumer to give you share of wallet, it's very complicated.

■ If you were a brand, what would your slogan be next year?

“There is no silver bullet”.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mix magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: Business magazine; Editor: FMOG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.
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