



From Mass Media to Gravitational Mass Media

By Brian Monahan

Executive Summary

Capturing attention in the on-demand, dynamically-served media world is the defining creative challenge of our era. As **expected**, audience fragmentation and user control are undermining the cost efficiencies that mask the tremendous untargeted “waste” of mass media. **Surprisingly**, the audience engagement enabled by the very technologies that erode mass advertising audiences result in superior media cost efficiencies. Web 2.0 technology enables Brands to attract their own audience. The ability to attract and nurture communities presents a tool for brands to counteract the forces undermining the efficacy of their traditional advertising investments. In difficult economic times where every marketing dollar must be stretched, brands must wean themselves from the addiction of mass media and move towards *Gravitational Mass Media*.



The “Laws” of Gravitational Mass Media are:

1. Audience fragmentation is correlated to findability. Audiences will continue to fragment as search and navigational technology improve.
2. People attract people.
3. The law of “perpetual publishing” says that audiences will keep the content fresh if the container is properly constructed.
4. Brands get what they give—yes, our metaphor spans physics as well as Karmic laws!




Gravitational Mass Marketers leverage the above forces to create a portfolio of evergreen, niche media assets that replace the need to purchase distribution from stand-alone media companies.



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The Problem Addressed

While aggregate consumer time spent with media is up 13% since 2000 (“UM Media In Mind”) the symptoms of media fragmentation are familiar:

-  Average US network primetime ratings are less than half of what they were 15 years ago (Nielsen Galaxy Explorer)
-  The average US HH now receives 120 TV channels, up from 40 in 1995 (Nielsen Media Research)
-  64% of US HHs have Internet access (*Magna Global On Demand Quarterly*)

Mass-marketer media flowcharts are now so dense with the number of media vehicles required to cover a target audience that they are illegible. Combining so many media vehicles unavoidably increases frequency and makes incremental reach very expensive. In addition, the “non-working” cost to develop this stack of materials and to manage all the moving pieces is skyrocketing.

More importantly, success is increasingly unpredictable for the highly-customized, multi-media way brands now go to market. The old weight levels do not seem to be achieving the desired business results—be it because the delivery models are unequipped for the plethora of media vehicles, media inflation prevents brands from running as many impactful TRPs, or because consumers have become inured to advertising. To compensate, brands are pouring millions of dollars into elaborate tracking and optimization mechanisms. Advertising budgets are shifting to more defensible bottom-of-the-funnel activity like search advertising.

At the same time that mass audiences are harder to accumulate, content has become much easier to distribute. Hosting one million streams of a 30-minute video only costs a few thousand dollars. All that separates consumers from digital content is the Google search box. Sharing digital content is as simple as forwarding a link. Human interconnection has been turbo-charged by the “graphs” of social networks. One can now navigate content and passively share choices with friends with no additional action required.



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The Problem Addressed, Continued

The democratization of content distribution has enabled legions of new creators to flood the Internet with the “long tail” of content. But in this world, the average YouTube video has less than 10 viewers, 90% of Facebook applications have under 50 installs, and the average blog only has a handful of readers. Very few digital content creators generate enough audience to warrant multiple sponsors. The simple math of production costs divided by audience generates high CPMs. If a single sponsor is going to take on such a CPM, they are going to require that the brand story be fully integrated into, as opposed to adjacent to, the content. The financial model of fragmented content creation must therefore be single-underwriter “branded entertainment.”

There is inherent tension between the messaging requirements of branded entertainment and that content’s ability to attract an audience. Creating an enduring content brand is extremely hard. Entertainment studios and ad agencies have very different business models. Studios are free to swing for the fences and be as creative as possible. Studios can accommodate a one-in-ten success rate. If agencies create a bad campaign they get fired.

The Solution

The creative handcuffs on branded entertainment make it unlikely that content will become a mass hit. However, universal distribution and never-ending findability mean that brands don’t need home runs—they can hit a bunch of singles. Developing a stable of wholly-owned, small scale media assets that throw off impressions for as long as they are maintained presents compelling economic rationale for how brands choose to invest media dollars.

Media assets where the audience refreshes the content and attracts other viewers can be described as **Gravitational Mass Media**. Newton’s law of gravity conveys that gravitational pull is equivalent to the density of the object. Rating, commenting, sharing, uploading, embedding are great ways to build audience engagement in content. The denser the core of this hive of engagement, the more people these communities attract. Flagship examples like Wikipedia, YouTube, and Flickr show that given the proper container, the audience will provide fresh and compelling content.





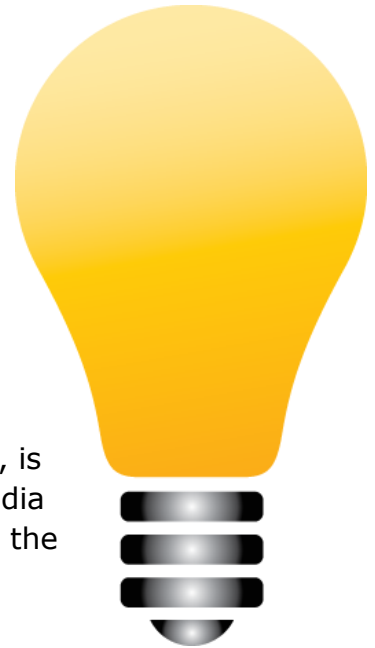
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The Solution, Continued

Gravitational Mass Media assets can take the form of hosted communities, groups within existing social graphs, widgets/apps, and/or viral/downloadable video/audio. The marketing industry has much to learn on striking the creative balance of user functionality and brand message. Early forays have usually erred in one direction or the other.

Our research has shown that even lightly branded assets provide a halo of good will towards a sponsor that actually provides utility. We have also seen that over time, cost-per-time spent, the most black-and-white metric of engagement, is more attractive for gravitational media assets than mass media commercials. The relative economics should only improve as the industry gets smarter about finding the creative balance between the audience and brand needs, fueling social interaction, and promoting the asset in the first place.

Some good examples of brand-created Gravitational Mass Media Assets are things like Microsoft's Channel 9, RedBull's "Roshambull" Facebook application, or Nike+ where product usage itself fuels gravitational media.



How to Execute

While social marketing does not deliver crushing reach like mass media, properly executed, it can result in media assets that continuously generate impressions over time. Like an annuity, a media asset generates impressions on its own. It continuously attracts new and repeat audience. The more people opt-in, the more the community attracts new users. This presents some challenges for a campaign-driven marketing world. What do you do with your installed widgets and social groups once the campaign has ended, the budget exhausted, and the team reassigned to new projects? One option is to sell ad space to third party advertisers and turn marcom from a cost center to a revenue source. While not insignificant, these organization challenges can be overcome if there is economic rationale.





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How to Execute, Continued

To take advantage of Gravitational Mass Media brands must:

1. Provide a dense core—provide a social object that people care about and give them the means to engage at a level of their choice.
2. Make it better together—give people a reason to contribute and invite their friends.
3. Own rather than rent—make sure that campaigns result in wholly owned assets with limited recurring usage or space rental costs.
4. Make it findable—search, viral, earned, and paid promotion are all part of the equation.
5. Build a portfolio of media annuities—cross-link them and consider monetizing through third party ad sales.

Gravitational Mass Media compliments, rather than supplants mass media. Any brand benefits from beginning a plan upon a “pedestal” of media assets. Finding ways to make use of the actual product social and shareable is the greatest way to reduce third party media costs. It is common practice for brands to first leverage delivery from their corporate web site. Gravitational Mass Media assets are analogous to syndicated version of the site.

Conclusion

As attention becomes our most precious commodity, brands and their agents are entering the publishing business. Renting attention by inserting commodity ads in stand-alone media will obviously have a major role for the foreseeable future. But the relative importance of mass marketing will diminish as Gravitational Mass Marketers invest in media assets. Gravitational Mass Media assets yield an audience dividend that is hyper-targeted, tuned to the brand message, and provides true utility to the user. Most important, these capture attention at an amortized cost that is more efficient than commodity mass media advertising.

For more information, please visit www.gravitationalmassmedia.com





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