



Avoiding digital waste

Construction marketing in 2011: easier to get connected, yes. But beware missing shots in front of your 'goals'

Taking an occasional step back and seeing a bigger picture is never a waste of time. Especially if it can help enhance the value you'll get from investment in connecting with your markets.

So spare a couple of minutes to look around your world of Building & Construction.

Which are your nominees for Vogue Word of the Year? The words you've noticed cropping up most often under various guises and in several contexts.

Significantly, there's one that would probably figure on many short-lists: **sustainable**

Today, you'll see it on websites, in ads and annual reports, on exhibition stands, in sales presentations and literature, and in much of the most recent legislation. And also across the full spectrum of marketing communications for the sector.

Sustainable solutions, policies, performance, designs, resources, commitments, environments, materials sourcing. All of them, in one way or other, pursuing or promising sustainability.

An important word, undoubtedly. *But how many different nuances of meaning does it embrace?*

The majority touch on environmental issues, of course. About preservation of resources, for example. Or the absence of damaging consequences, lasting or otherwise.

For many people, "sustainable" has arguably become a general alternative for "environmentally-friendly". This inevitably touches on global warming, carbon emissions and facing up to the implications of climate change – man-made or otherwise. Territory that can trigger lively debate about the reality of the threat, and the degree of its consequences.

But there is one interpretation of sustainability – one unifying goal – on which virtually everyone can readily agree:

The principle of **reducing and avoiding waste**.

It should be a no-brainer for everyone. An objective that's clearly desirable – commercially, ethically and logically. Because natural resources are precious and finite – or take time to replenish.

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The same goes for marketing budgets.

This is where we can point to the benefits of technological progress. We've come a long way from that familiar quote: *"Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."*

[For the record, the ghosts of (American) John Wanamaker and (British) Lord Leverhulme are still disputing who said it first...]

Thank goodness the old blunderbuss marketing strategies are long gone: saturating a given customer category with communications and hoping that a reasonable number find their mark.

Implicit waste factor? Extremely high – but, hey, that was the way back then.

Even when targeting precision improved, the time-lag between despatch and receipt of responses remained a fact of marcoms life, not just one of its interactive options. More of the right people were being found, informed and their interest aroused. But would that interest be sustainable? [There's that word again...]

Would interest last long enough to be acted on? How many good intentions would be wasted, falling victim to the frailties of human nature and the "I'll-do-it-later" syndrome?

Let's assume these newly-motivated prospects did use their reply-paid cards right away. Even so, none of those leads could be followed up until they'd completed the postal journey. Time taken, time passing – and the risk of interest losing some of its heat and momentum.

But we don't have to put up with that any longer because technology has marched on. Today we can have digital immediacy, including personalised one-to-one communications via your target customer's email inbox.

Now we can deliver precisely targeted messaging, with the facility for your targets to respond instantly via online links rather than via the outgoing post-tray. We have the chance to engage customer interest and make their consequent response action easy.

Implicit waste factor? Minimal....or, at least, it *should* be.

But 'waste hazards' remain, even now you are within digital 'touching distance' of prospective customers.

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Once you've validated and optimised your target lists, sending emails to the right people may seem 'easy' because it appears all you really need is message, e-address and the "send" button. As they say on *Top Gear*, "how hard can it be?" given that emailing is part of everyday life for most of us these days.

But consider this: while your message is one-to-one, it will nonetheless be fighting for attention in the destination inbox among a crowd of others. Many of these are likely to be among the 200 billion spam emails sent daily.

Even if the destination address spam filter is hyper-efficient, and gets rid of the waste-of-time rubbish, there's still no guarantee that the recipient will get your message.

Why? Because you firstly have to get them to open your email. The subject line is critical.

Get that wrong, and the opportunity to communicate will probably be over. So time and skill devoted to getting the subject line right – and avoiding the common pitfalls – is one essential to avoiding digital waste.

Technology may have made communications faster, but this progress has a flip-side: email browsers have much shorter attention spans.

It means your digital communication has little more than a micro-second to register its relevance for the reader among the crowd of other emails, and so earn its 'open-me' status.

But that's only one stage in the home straight to connecting with your target audience. Once email opening is achieved, there are two further pivotal needs to ensuring value from this communications effort.

The next essential is to persuade the recipient that it's worth devoting the time to reading your e-message. What they see, or read, must hook them in and hold them – or you'll have lost them. Typically, there's less than a minute to retain their attention.

Now comes the final shot at your goal of scoring a positive response: providing the right links to enable and encourage their action in response. It's the first two links in the message that are most likely to get the click-through that completes the connection.

It's all part of ensuring that you don't miss opportunities within reach of your communication targets. After all, your marketing investment is always another sustainable goal.

It would be a pity to waste it.

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