

# PERFECT FOOLS

The recession is digitising the media landscape and changing how brands engage consumers

**W**e've stood at the media barricades for more than a decade now, proclaiming the coming digital revolution as often as possible to whoever would listen (sorry, Mum).

Like many others, we've known that digital's host of advantages over traditional/analogue media meant it was only a matter of time before all media went digital and all agencies would follow suit.

What we never guessed is that, when the big tipping point came in the ongoing transition from traditional/analogue to digital, it would take the form not of a boom or a big new killer app, but a recession.

Amazing as it seems, that is exactly what's happening. Digital's share of overall media investment has grown rapidly for years. But in the past 12 months, the trend has accelerated. While most traditional categories swing towards flat or moderate decline, digital continues to post solid growth.

Brands have recognised that they earn a greater return on investment from digital activities, that their audiences are online and paying less attention to the old analogue media. They are voting with their marketing pounds, dollars, euro and renminbi.

When we emerge from this recession, the media landscape will most likely be completely remade with a distinctly digital face. Gil Scott-Heron once sang "the revolution will not be televised" – to paraphrase, it will be digitised and we won't really notice.

## THE VALUE RETHINK

Digital media offers more than the traditional analogue channels ever could. There are more stories and more ways to gather the information we need. More ways to create interesting, multi-way conversations to build relationships. But it's also an environment that presents some tough challenges for brands.

How can brands guide their relationship with consumers when those consumers have an abundance of choice, work longer, are often out and about and have less time to pay attention?

The old model of "find an attractive message and blast it out" is failing. The solution is to give the audience more in return for their time, to provide personalised experiences that entertain and have utility value. This applies to consumers around the world, from Birmingham to Barcelona and Stockholm to Shanghai.

Take the retail sector, for example. Amazon and eBay are well established, but the clothing sector is still stuck – mostly – in the analogue high street. Business models, however, are evolving and more brands are both digital and on the high street.

As the high street becomes more competitive, it might be that only the



Gardner (l) and Chalmers... brands need to exploit digital technology and create relevant experiences

strongest players can make a profit. Thus, the business model for many brands might be to create an intense, brilliant and valuable brand experience on the high street that acts as a loss leader and builds loyalty for the profitable digital business.

On the high street, the sheer act of you trying something on in the smart changing room creates your avatar. Styles, sizes and materials are recorded, purchases are noted and the new seasons' selections are presented to you, on "you", at home, online. Finally, a full-circle high street – home fit-out is completed. Value is back in fashion.

## THE ART OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING

It's easy when talking about change and innovation to want to start with a blank sheet of paper. While the digital revolution changes some things, it doesn't change everything.

The means of distribution and engagement and the consumer environment may have evolved, but the art of storytelling remains as vital as it was 50 or even 2,000 years ago.

Digital agencies must act as the curators of an art that answers a fundamental question, entertains and provides value through today's tools.

For example, we took advantage of

Converse's musical heritage to build something useful and inspiring as part of the brand's centenary celebrations.

We created a multi-language interactive music tool at [www.ConverseFestivals.com](http://www.ConverseFestivals.com) that lets consumers organise their festival-going online, decide which bands they want to see and which friends they want to see them with. It gives the brand an ongoing relationship with consumers and cements its relationship with music, as well as gathering information about the events, bands and genres that Converse-wearers are passionate about.

In the 70s, music was the platform for communicating with rebellious youths; in the 80s, fanzines had their moment, graduating to magazines in the 90s. Today's consumers express themselves via their own movies, pictures and blogs, broadcast on their own channels.

The challenge for brands is to explain why they should be on a social networking site or create their own such network. The answer is that today's stories require brands to become enablers and, using the digital technology, to create relevant experiences.

For the Swedish pension brand AMF, we created an application that

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## At a glance

**Founded** 2002

**Principals** Patrick Gardner, president; Tony Höggqvist, creative partner; Mark Chalmers, creative partner; Tony Sajdak, partner; Fredrik Heghammar, head of production

**Staff** 45

**Locations** Stockholm, New York, Amsterdam

**What's the best thing that will happen in 2009?** The big tipping point in the ongoing transition from traditional/analogue to digital. Mobile with rich media and positioning, internet-delivered TV, even interactive outdoor. They're here and they're here to stay

**Describe the shape of your agency in 2015** Just as foolish as we are today. This new advertising era will really be picking up speed by 2015 – and we want to be right in the middle of it

would literally age its target audience of twentysomethings and get them thinking about their retirement. Uploading a photo allows the application to show them what they might look like aged 70 in a matter of seconds.

For the BBC, we created an online adventure game and experience around its flagship drama *Survivors*. It allowed viewers to project themselves into the series and test how they would survive in the aftermath of a devastating virus that wipes out most of the world's population.

## MARKETING IN THE FUTURE

Where will this new way of telling stories take the marketing community? In the digital space, geographic and demographic boundaries become meaningless.

Definitions of reality become blurred: our approach is that "if you can think it, then it's real". Digital experiences are as real as those in off-line and can be more powerful.

Consumers will continue to be content-rich and time-poor, making it harder and harder for brand stories to create an impact.

Technology is the great enabler and as technology develops, so do the possibilities. Impactful brand stories will thrive through these new tools and provide the entertainment and utility that consumers increasingly demand.

Since PerfectFools launched in 2002, we've looked for ways to create stories that resonate in the digital age. We believe that interactive and integrated online campaigns can not only captivate target audiences, but also challenge expectations and get results.

The digital revolution continues and our challenge is to be constantly aware of the new possibilities, to be as close to the curve as possible, and, at times, to be creating the curve.

*Patrick Gardner is the president and Mark Chalmers is the creative partner of Perfect Fools*