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How Dannon Cultured Multichannel Marketing

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If you're a yogurt eater—and even if you're not—it would have been hard to miss Dannon's recent campaign to support Breast Cancer Awareness. Dannon's marketing team did everything possible to make sure that consumers knew it supported the issue—on its packaging, in its stores, on TV ads, on its Web site, and on its Facebook page, across all of its brands.

"It was a real companywide effort that blurred the lines between traditional and digital marketing," says Alessandro, who late last year was promoted from senior director of marketing to the newly created position of vice president of connection, media and innovation at The Dannon Co.

Creating an environment and culture that can seamlessly integrate both offline and online types of marketing into campaigns in a way that is agnostic to the type of communications channel is Arosio's overall goal, he says. "We like to think of it as building a consumer-centric communication process. It's not about shifting everything from TV to digital, but considering everything in the spectrum of touch points."

What Dannon is doing is what all companies are aspiring to do these days: combining traditional marketing methods, like direct mail and TV, with digital marketing, like email, social media, and mobile technologies.

"The challenge of capitalizing on multichannel opportunities—delivering seamless messages and campaigns and maintaining dialogs with customers that span channels—is probably the most important priority I hear marketers talking about today," says Jonathan Margulies, a director at Winterberry Group, a New York-based strategy consulting group.

An integrated multichannel strategy allows companies to deploy their messages in more dynamic ways and gives marketers the flexibility to launch different types of campaigns, test messages, and find the approach and cadence that works for different customer groups.

It also improves the bottom line. "Marketers have fairly consistently determined that a multichannel buyer spends a minimum of four times than a single channel customer, said Ernan Roman, president of Ernan Roman Direct Marketing and author of the book "Voice of Customer Marketing.

Breaking Out Of Silos

So if multichannel marketing is such a win-win, why isn't everyone doing it?

Simply put, it's not easy. Most companies today still manage their marketing efforts in channel silos, not necessarily because they want to, but because that's what they know. Data flow is optimized for independent channels, the service providers they use to manage marketing programs usually still focus on independent channels, and internal marketing operations departments and technology platforms all have single channel roots that are hard to overcome.

"Long-term, nothing should be managed in a single channel way, but it's an evolution. It's a question of what transition/maturation plan makes sense," Margulies says. "You can't walk into a large, functioning marketing organization today, tear down the silos, and command that groups work together."

It's changing, but slowly. Dannon's push to create a multichannel environment, for example, is ongoing. After Arosio began his new position within Dannon, he set about restructuring the marketing department. Arosio's four direct reports are three consumer connectors (one manager for each brand group) who have responsibility for both online and offline marketing, and one digital marketing expert who works across the portfolio of brands to ensure the right infrastructure is in place to create relevant content to communicate with customers. That group is called the connection team and is separate from the rest of the marketing department, which currently handles offline marketing.

Even these changes are just an interim step. Within two years, Arosio says the connection team will be merged with the rest of the marketing organization, and brand managers will be able to handle all channels—online and offline—with ease. He expects to keep a separate innovation team whose job it will be to be on top of the latest trends and channels and to determine how to best incorporate them into Dannon marketing campaigns.

Next: Determining the optimal channel mix.

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