

Planning 3.0: The feeling is mutual

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Mutually inclusive

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The future is about Mutuality Planning, focusing on the value brands and consumers can give to each other through a strategy of co-operation, openness and reward

Over 30 years ago, Charles Channon defined planning as a combination of evaluating insights, developing communications objectives and making them inspiring and meaningful ('The problem of planning' *Admap*, December 1978). While the definition may still be relevant the context has fundamentally changed. Planning needs a new ethos: 'mutuality'.

In the natural world, 'mutuality' is defined as 'the condition or state of reciprocity or sharing'. Symbiotic mutualisms occur when two interdependent organisms benefit each other through collaboration. Relationships like this are balanced, equitable and sustainable. To overcome the challenges of the next decade, planners should tap into this principle, by forging more mutually beneficial and open relationships between people, brands and their agencies.

Mutuality can help convert challenges into opportunities. Five current challenges facing planning relate to what people need from brands and what brands need from people and their agencies. The more the 'mutuality planner' can align and satisfy these needs, the more sustainable and fertile the planning landscape will be in 2020.



1. People expect better value from brands

As recently as ten years ago, creative and strategic TV-led advertising was enough to earn people's attention and build strong brand relationships. However, with continued media fragmentation and evergrowing consumer empowerment, people now expect more value from brands than a 30-second TV ad could ever give them. In addition, people's ability to check and punish sub-optimal performance through social media means brand experiences are under more scrutiny and pressure. People are not going to be as loyal, supportive and open with brands if their products, services and communications fail to engage.

Mutuality planning is about maximising the value that brands give to people in order to earn their respect, loyalty and support.

2. Brands struggle to understand people well enough

In order to create more value for people, brands need to understand them better. They need to appreciate not only what people want and need, but also what permission they give brands to engage them. This requires rich and continuous streams of insight and dialogue. But traditional models of research are expensive and slow and the fastpaced world of business requires even faster decision-making and more inspiration.

The amount of data on people continues to grow (by 2020, the digital universe is predicted to be 44 times as large as in 2009). Although this means greater potential to understand people, there is rarely enough time, resource or expertise to do so. The mutualistic planner needs to help humanise data, by creating ideas that inspire dialogue and interpretation.

3. People do not necessarily share their personal data

There is undoubtedly huge potential in the data that people create, which not only allows brands to understand them better, but also creates opportunities for tailored, hyper-targeted and, therefore, more relevant communications. But recent studies suggest just 23% would share anonymous personal data (and 12% personally identifiable data) in order to get discounts. Just 5% would do so, to receive only personally relevant ads around content (Heller-Baird 2011). Recent EU regulations mean it's even less likely people will opt into the cookie-sharing necessary for behavioural targeting.

Mutuality planning is about motivating people to be more open with their data and get their permission to provide more personalised and relevant brand experiences.

4. Brands fail to understand social networks

Social media has allowed the sharing of views and content to grow exponentially, resulting in power shifting away from brands and media owners that once controlled the production and dissemination of content. People now have the tools and ability to capture and retain each other's attention and Facebook is predicted to be the biggest content distributor by 2020 – 52% of all media sharing is already on Facebook. So it is vital for companies to get their branded content into people's social networks.

But brands tend to over-estimate the extent people want to interact with them online (often by a factor of three). They often force an above-the-line strategy into social media and fail to create experiences people really value and want to be associated with. Online content has such a low latency period in social media that traditional methods of content production are insufficient to keep people engaged. Mutualistic Planning is about creating ideas that generate valuable content socially, in ways that are true to the brand.

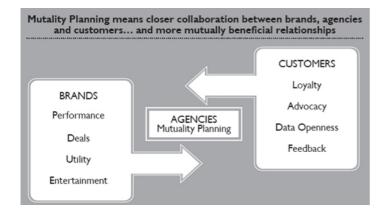
5. Clients and agencies remain segregated and competitive



With the specialism of agencies and divisions (mobile, social media, experiential), creating and executing truly integrated ideas can be challenging. Each discipline and corporate silo requires expertise, and agency and corporate cultures (even within the same group or company) too often default to a protective and competitive mindset.

Mutuality planners can bring together different parties and inspire a productive and collaborative way of working. They need to create strategic ideas that inspire coordinated creativity and employ co-creation techniques and tools for better co-operation.

Mutualistic planners can turn each of these challenges into opportunities. They will have to focus more explicitly on negotiating value exchanges between people, brands and their agencies, using an approach based on collaboration, openness and dialogue. There are several examples of this already happening.



MUTUALITY PLANNING

Creating more value for people

Mutuality planning requires ideas that create value while building the brand strategically. This means starting with people's brand expectations and its role in their lives. Converse's Rubber Tracks Studio campaign is a good example: it invested in upand-coming music talent by giving musicians studio time and distribution support. Demonstrating a genuine interest in grass-roots music and giving fans free access to exclusive content have contributed to more than 22 million likes on Facebook and a more mutualistic relationship between Converse, the music industry and its customers.

Brands can also create value through Corporate Social Responsibility activity. People increasingly expect brands to have fair and responsible business models and a positive effect on society. The 'O2 Learn' initiative takes teachers' best lessons to the masses and 'Wickes Trade Builder' provides advice to tradespeople and small businesses. The mutualistic planner can encourage ideas that are credible for the brand and genuinely beneficial for people.

Brands that understand how to tap into the cultural context in which they sit, will be more appreciated. A recent example is the BMW Guggenheim City Lab project which is part think-tank, part public forum and community centre. It is about creating innovative ideas for the future of city life and shows how aligning the brand with social issues and respected institutions can generate positive conversation and brand equity. By providing a technical and creative platform, the campaign positions BMW as genuinely innovative. The Mutuality Planner will be adept at negotiating these sorts of value exchanges between people and brands.

· Inspiring a better understanding of people



Account planning has always put insight at its heart and the notion of a 'Consumer Alliance' put forward by BMP's Stanley Pollitt has been a driving force. Traditional research is expensive to design, recruit, incentivise and interpret. A more cost – and time-efficient path to consumer feedback is necessary and should deepen understanding, while strengthening relationships.

Several brands have shown how activity can generate insights and engender more two-way relationships. Crowd-sourcing initiatives like My Starbucks Idea have helped create more open brand images, while generating new ideas. Campaigns like Walkers' 'Do us a flavour' show how feedback loops can be written into creative ideas to good effect. Best new brand at the 2011 Marketing Society Awards, Giffgaff, even used customers as support staff, rewarding them with discounts in return for running their own support service. Other examples include Vocal Point, P&G's network of 500,000 mums who generate insight and advocacy on its brands. Mutuality Planning is more easily achieved when ideas lend themselves to conversation and feedback.

Dialogue with people can help humanise data and make it easier to understand why they do things and how it makes them feel. The opportunity for dialogue will grow as access to connected devices increases (predicted to hit 22 billion by 2020).

Encouraging more data openness

People aren't necessarily keen to share their personal data, be it demographic information, preferences or interests. This is a major stumbling block for brands wanting to target people through behavioural advertising (across connected devices). To maximise the number of people opting into CRM campaigns, being cookied and sharing their personal data, the value exchange needs to become a more palatable prospect.

Privacy concerns and spam are the biggest inhibitors, but the more clear and transparent the benefits of data openness, the more people will opt into behavioural targeting. Reward programmes like Nectar have long understood that people will be open with their data and loyalty if they are rewarded. The 'American Express Saturday' campaign for SMEs encouraged data sharing by tapping into people's concern for their local community and their desire for discounts. Facebook supporters declared 'lim in' and for each 'like', AmEx donated a dollar to charity, raising \$1million, and gave away \$25 credit to members. Similarly, Burberry's perfume launch rewarded 25,000 of the ten million people that 'liked' it on Facebook by giving them free samples of it. By rewarding people's openness, a reciprocal and mutualistic relationship can be forged.

· Enriching social networks

Social networks devour content, so to maintain interest, people need to create and share content. Mutualistic planners must understand what has social currency by listening to what is being shared online and by planning how to seed a campaign with the most influential and relevant online authorities.

San Miguel tapped into celebrity DJs' social networks by getting them to curate music content in association with the brand. Honda used crowd content to populate its InterNavi GPS system by aggregating drivers' ratings, reviews and travel tips. Social media transcends traditionally segregated disciplines and business silos, so online brand conversations can meet diverse objectives. Brand ideas need to act like 'behavioural templates' – multiple brand representatives are empowered to engage with people online in ways that are true to a central strategic idea and tone of voice. The mutualistic planner will need to inspire close collaboration between these previously segregated parties and help currently separate silos to converge.



Leading more collaborative work practices

Collaboration requires co-ordination and inspiration of more complex networks of competing teams and agencies. Mutuality planning is about inspiring collaboration while sharing the credit and workload. Client organisation collaboration is also necessary. So many great ideas and insights remain dormant in employees' heads. To ignore their creative potential would be to dampen their motivation. Mutuality planning is about inviting diverse stakeholders into the strategic and creative process, making them feel valued and more likely to participate.

There is also a growing trend among agencies and brands to share the risk, intellectual property and revenue when developing branded technologies that engage people. The idea of opening APIs that share assets with non-competing third parties reflects a belief in the power of mutuality (Tesco, Google, Facebook and Spotify open APIs bear testimony to this). To create engaging brand experiences, the mutuality planner will help foster more brand-oriented collaborations between clients, agencies, publishers and third parties.

In conclusion, Mutuality Planning is about focusing more explicitly on the value that brands, people and agencies can give to one another. It means getting a better understanding of what people want and need, building feedback loops into brand experiences and finding ways to reward people for socially promoting the brand and being open with their data. Through the spirit of mutuality, the role of planning can enhance its relevance.

About the Author

Tom Woodnutt is a freelance brand strategist specialising in digital and social strategy. He was formerly director of innovation at Hall & Partners and began his career in account management at Lowe Lintas.

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