

Marketing lessons from Digital Lifestyle Day

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Creativity Has Never Been More Important

The World Economic Forum was not the only event to attract VIPs to Europe's snow country in recent weeks. Hubert Burda Media, one of Germany's largest and most influential media companies, convened its second annual Digital Lifestyle Day in Munich late in January. And while Davos' attendees (prime ministers, presidents and CEOs) gingerly grappled with the state of the world, DLD's participants (game designers, VCs, historians, techies and professors) were more outspoken about where the media and marketing worlds are heading. I walked away with six conclusions:

1. Because the native costs of crafting and distributing creative product are trending toward zero, anyone can be a creative. Those who've been obsessing over the blogging phenomenon have missed the point; blogs are merely the most visible manifestation of an explosion in creativity. "Tools are now so inexpensive, anyone can be a publisher," said Dan Gillmor, founder of the Center for Citizen Media. Examples touted included podcasts produced by the U.S. military and myriad examples of "nanopublishing," Jeff Jarvis' term for the finely targeted, ad-supported blogs cropping up on the Web.
2. Individuals control their media. Forget about the mantra "consumers are in control," because consumers, producers, experimenters, receivers, perceivers and the merely-want-to-be-amused are all in this big stew together, creating micro-markets on the fly. "Hi, my name is Anina, and I'm a model and a blogger," said one fashionable speaker early in DLD. "I started a models blog because I was tired of the way the media was portraying my profession."
3. Whatever creativity is, its essence is more important in marketing and media now than ever. Do the math: A billion channels equal a billion creators and an awful lot of crap. Market mechanisms -- basically, the engagement of peoples' attention and their encouragement to subsequent action -- will determine winners and losers. BBDO Worldwide President-CEO Andrew Robertson noted that the Meow Mix Co. now makes \$1.2 million per year selling cellphone ring tones. He told the crowd, "My dream is that that's how we'll get paid."
4. Mobile social networking is the next big thing. The most excitement at DLD surrounded communities-on-the-hoof. Ignore Myspace and Friendster. Keep your eye out for Area/code, Kevin Slavin's New York startup that's using mobile networking to facilitate large-scale, real-world multiplayer games, and for Plazes.com, which uses GPS and Wi-Fi triangulation to enable the pasting of virtual "sticky notes" on physical places.
5. The "long tail" is making vast new forms of business possible. EBay allows a lone Nebraska quilt-maker to find a national market; Netflix can make indie straight-to-DVD films a profit; and Google enables them to advertise successfully. "People can quit their day jobs to become publishers, thanks to AdSense," Marissa Mayer, Google's president for search products and user experience, noted -- accurately -- about her company's ad-relevancy mechanism.
6. The physical world still matters -- especially as a validator. Mainstream media still count, even to the digi crowd. The number of major marketers at DLD engaging in cross-platform programs that start with incumbent media and leap to the Web to prompt customization, data collection and actions was striking, including BMW's Mini division, which showcased a youth promotion involving Burda's own print and digital properties. "Over the next three years, I foresee new business models for advertising," Hubert Burda himself exulted. At 65 years of age, he is leading the way from Germany.

By Randall Rothenberg

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