

Experiences – Spring 2013

As a first semester UWW student, I decided to engage in a completely customized curriculum. My learning objectives included reading three books on branding, diving into the topic of emerging media with the goal putting together a sharable presentation that outlined my findings, and spending time at a media planning and buying agency to learn about their process. In addition, I continued to feed my voracious appetite for learning about marketing and advertising communications, subscribing to a number of blogs, podcasts, and seeking out trends in the field by way of social media. I also built upon my practical experience in the field of advertising through continued work at the advertising firm, 88 Brand Partners.

Books on Branding

With the help of my community advisor, three books were selected for me to read, two of which were written by branding expert Marty Neumeier, titled “The Brand Gap” and “ZAG,” and a third book which is considered by many to be the definitive book for it’s topic, “The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding,” by Al Ries and Laura Ries. All three books were exceptional, and have given me a stronger foundation for the discipline of branding. With so many terrific anecdotes and examples in Neumeier’s books, I decided to write a multi-page summary for each book, hoping to better retain the finer points of the books.

What I take away from achieving this objective is a clearer definition for what branding truly is: branding is everything that can speak to who you are as a company, product, and even as an individual human being. As Neumeier says in “The Brand Gap,” branding not only says who you are and what you do, but also, and perhaps most importantly, it defines *why that matters*. All three books will attest to the fact that there are plenty of ways to screw a brand up, and many of those screw-ups involve attempts to spread the brand out, and make more money. What neither author really does, however, is acknowledge when success has occurred despite the risk of diluting the brand being taken. Despite the proselyting, I can understand that marketing decisions often have to be driven by the bottom line.

Emerging Media

One of the most exciting things about the UWW program is the ability to learn in real-time, at the speed of knowledge. In other words, as a student I can set my focus to the leading edge of my field of study. At the onset of the semester, my community advisor suggested that I consider learning what I could about emerging media, an area whose most accurate definition is “the evolution of utilizing technology to share information in new and innovative ways.” Emerging media has the entire field of advertising and marketing in a state of flux right now, and it is here, at the intersection of communication and technology, where there is the greatest opportunity to learn and lead.

Growing up around digital media and spending much of my professional life working in the field, I certainly arrived to this semester with an idea of how the various facets of emerging media work. I know YouTube. I understand why online communities are so popular. But it wasn't until I started to do the research for my presentation that I actually realized that all of these elements share one of two common threads with each other. Through my work I have formed the following definition: Emerging media has either given us a better way to do something we had already been doing in our lives before the new way "emerged," or else it is introducing us to something entirely new that makes some part our lives better.

If a new app, gadget, website, electronic tool, or device isn't doing one of those two things—even though it may be considered to be "emerging" for a time—it probably won't be around very long.

Media 101 with Kelly Scott Madison Media Agency

In order to learn about the process of buying and selling advertising time and space, my community advisor arranged for me to spend some time in a professional media agency environment. Kelly Scott Madison (KSM) has been in business for 40 years, doing the planning and buying for a very diverse range of clients. Positioning themselves as a partner to their clients, as well as strategic alignment with advertising agencies who seek out their services, KSM places hundreds of products and brands on the media map, positioning their clients everywhere imaginable: from TV to search engines to aerial banners.

In "ZAG," Marty Neumeier talks about touchpoints, and in a word, that is what a media agency is charged with managing: finding out where a customer could potentially find a brand, and then making sure that the message is there to be seen. Media planning, when done the way KSM does it, is tucked between defining the marketing objective and crafting the message. Not only must a firm like KSM find the perfect places for messaging to live, they also must cultivate relationships with the owners of those places. And despite the sheer volume of graphs and data that a Media Agency can pump out to justify a suggestion, the media planning and buying processes still rely heavily on common sense and intuition. After all, every client is different, and some would actually prefer to hear an assuring word over seeing a spreadsheet dotted with stats.

Other Reading and Experiences

When I discovered the common threads that I believe all Emerging Media shares, I came to realize that perhaps the greatest thing driving this innovation is not money. Instead, perhaps, it is our insatiable appetite to learn. Being informed and being entertained both can teach us about our world, as well about ourselves. As humans, it is my belief that we strive for more information and more entertainment, perhaps subconsciously in an effort to make ourselves better.

That being said, for someone who wants to learn as much as possible as they can about any topic, there is so much out there on the Internet. For me, despite already being an avid reader, particularly of what relates to my field of study, I spent the last semester plugged into the Marketing Technology Blog, listening to the New Media Trends podcast, followed a bunch of marketing people on Twitter, and found some terrific insights on communication from Ragan Communications. I've also started to make my way through the TED talks.

In March I had the opportunity to judge a business plan competition presented by an area University. It was an excellent opportunity to share what I continue to learn about marketing and advertising. Although the event didn't seem to be that important to many of the participants (who were high school kids), I walked away from it with plenty to think about. The most thought-out aspect of all of the plans that I judged was the actual name of the company. As a matter of fact, some of the competitors didn't even think about anything else. The authors that I read, Neumeier and the Ries', would all likely smile if they heard that, especially because their books preached about the importance of a name.

My employment at 88 Brand Partners brought many new learning experiences this semester as well. I was able to sit in on a presentation about writing creative briefs with the company's client partners which taught me about the process that takes place to make sure that a creative team has what it needs to do it's job. I also had the opportunity to sit in on a social media brainstorm that we had with a client of ours—an exciting experience that gave me the opportunity to interact and listen with clients and colleagues at the onset of a partnership together. In addition, I developed an iPhone app, built out a number of display advertisements, and worked on several website projects.