

IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT: TRADITIONAL AND INTERACTIVE PSAS

By: Ken Fischer

Editor's note: this is the first in a regular series of articles on new media and the impact it will have on mass communications. Ken's blog is at <http://web20blog.org>



In traditional media, impressions seem to be the most important measurement of success - the number of times a viewer saw or heard your message for a certain time. But what does that mean? How does that translate into a PSA serving its purpose of informing the public and resulting in positive changes in behavior?

Recently we started measuring the visits to a website which is featured in the PSA. In a pre- Internet era, calls to a dedicated phone line featured in the PSA were used to correlate the PSA to those specific actions. Both of these actions show definite audience interest, but this is mostly information gathering behavior

Was the PSA adopted by audience members in a deeper way which changed their behavior, and did it have a lasting effect? These questions raise still another one – how can we link PSAs more effectively with audience behavior to measure long term effects?

First, we would need a medium which allowed for a behavior to be captured, and for it to be clear that the behavior has a relationship to the PSA. Behaviors which we would want to measure include:

- Asking for additional information, (not just once but whether is done repeatedly and in depth)
- Telling a friend about the information and measuring whether the friend responded.
- Giving input about the message such as comments or relevant past experiences.
- Checking for updates or news concerning the message.
- Creating personal goals to adopt or spread the message.
- Providing visual or written examples of how the message has been adopted.
- Discussing, adopting or spreading the message.
- Continuing these behaviors over time.



All of these are behaviors which can be measured using new media or Web 2.0 techniques through an “iPSA” or interactive PSA. The set of behaviors above and others correspond to what is termed engagement, in new media parlance. Engagement constitutes a deeper connection between the audience, the message and the message provider. This graphic shows the engagement process continuum.



As an example of how this works in the real world, if we wanted to spread the message about the importance of exercise, we could create a widget¹ on a site such as Facebook which allows audience members to:

- Get more information about exercise, drill down in depth and return for additional information later.
- Send the information about exercise to others.
- Express preferences for types of exercise or examples of how it helped them in the past, or outcomes which they hope to change through exercise.
- Create an easy to find location where they can check on updates or sign up for updates to be sent to them.
- Create personal exercise goals.
- Announce whether they have met exercise goals and provide photos or video of their progress.
- Provide discussion boards to discuss exercise programs.
- Maintain a location for these activities and measure the return of the audience or the active audience members.

We can measure all of these behaviors and know for certain they are directly related to the original message because the behaviors were only possible by encountering and acting directly on the message content.

The interactive PSA or iPSA allows more measures of behavior change which the traditional PSA on its own, cannot offer. The iPSA, or new media component of a PSA campaign, will be a critical component of any successful PSA in the near future, because it allows for the audience to become engaged and more importantly provides better measurement.

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¹ A widget is a portable chunk of code that can be installed and executed within a web page and often takes the form of on-screen tools such as clocks, event countdowns, auction-tickers, stock market tickers, flight arrival information, daily weather etc.