



Web Experience Excellence:

Expectations for the web have changed. Are customers excited about what your site delivers?

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

Digital Pull Strategy at Its Finest: Making the Perfect Match

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Shrinking budgets and the slowdown in consumer demand have affected the way marketers are spending and speaking to their audiences. While many marketers have exercised caution in reducing the size and scope of their spend in traditional broadcast and print outlets, others have emphasized smarter mix planning, and have pushed the hot button for permission to grow digital efforts and speak one-on-one with hand-raisers.

With U.S. home appliance analysts predicting a demand decline of up to 12% for the category in 2009, industry marketers, including U.S. giant, Whirlpool Corporation's Whirlpool and Maytag brands, have rapidly expanded digital marketing investments, creating a model to achieve growth amid industry turbulence.

When a critical appliance, such as a refrigerator, breaks, consumers typically make a replacement purchase within 2-3 days. With this knowledge in mind, brand digital communications must strive more aggressively than ever before to find and communicate to these consumers with accuracy. Digital marketers have just a few seconds to win that first impression and guide consumers deeper within prescribed purchase funnels.

This represents an important shift in current digital planning: Instead of a delivering fully-developed brand-building messages across a range of media, the need is more apparent than ever for appliance manufacturers and like brands to catch duress consumers in the research phase, match their search queries and rapidly respond with the appropriate level of compelling content.

This is a digital pull strategy at its finest. A clever spend in paid search, content match and display advertising, utilizing behavioral targeting and re-targeting allows savvy marketers to influence conversation with duress consumers as they visit research sources to form a consideration set.

The first step towards success is securing and *sustaining* user click-through actions that lead a consumer closer to purchasing stage. To accomplish this feat, Whirlpool and Maytag brands have enhanced digital plans through the use of richly-animated display banners that expand *in situ* when touched by a shopper's mouse. The messaging on such banners is crafted with laser focus to the fact the consumer has been both behaviorally targeted and will likely reach a purchase decision within 48 hours.

The rich creative and user-triggered functionality on these banners prompts consumer involvement through roll over details of product features that provide pop-up benefit text boxes, zoom functionality, dealer locator and product dimensions — all a mouse-roll over away, no click required. Rotation of expandable rich media banners within plans has led to more than *double* the expected interaction rates for Maytag, permitting the brand to engage with shoppers in excess of a 20-second impression.

Attractive digital advertising content must not only lure consumers, but must also build upon the promise, maintaining engagement levels within specified destinations. U.S. home appliances fall nothing short of an ultra high-touch purchase process. A primary restriction of the Web in the consumer appliance shopping experience is the shortfall for consumers to extrapolate sensory perception online. Yet the opportunity here for marketers is to act on these often forgotten elements when building digital shopping programs.

Yes, shopping for home appliances might not be as exciting as selecting a new sports car, but it doesn't mean that we can't market them as such online. The dependable heft of a Maytag door closing, the sparkle within a new Whirlpool front load washer's high gloss paint or the exacting precision of a Direct Inject Wash System can all be brought to life through investment on digital media destinations.

To advance traditional display advertising and search terms in this stage, Whirlpool and Maytag have built both brand-only and co-branded digital media plans with respective retailers. Brand plans direct consumers to richer content within brand sites, while co-branded media drives consumers to a robust brand microsite, embedded within the website of respective retail partners and synched with product catalog content.

By creating rich digital partnerships with retailers, the brands interrupt the consumer research process at an early stage, offering to guide duressed consumers directly into a measured retail environment. Yet, what the consumer does not know is that the brands continue to dictate the bulk of the content displayed on these retail microsities.



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This focused approach leads consumers from display and search media to co-branded microsites and “buy now” retail environments, while allowing brands to measure and optimize each step along the way.

Having the digital advertising bait and a destination are not enough; today digital marketers must also question if they have the assets that can confidently secure a purchase decision. The addition of richly animated product modules with sound, video demonstration, three-dimensional, 360-degree product views and zoom functionality allow Maytag and Whirlpool brands to digitally simulate the physical product shopping experience and increase customer interaction online.

A static product catalog page is a dead-end with today’s consumer. Instead, brands must build the appropriate marketing layers and have the tools within their digital destinations to simplify the consumer’s shopping process, answer pertinent questions and allow traffic to touch and *feel* the product online.

Both Maytag and Whirlpool have resolved the product catalog browsing dilemma by building selection tools and layers of marketing content that clarify engineering jargon, illustrate key product benefits, showcase image galleries, and explain the reasons to step-up among models. It’s not often that marketers can eliminate complexity in product lines, but it is our duty to simplify these decisions for our consumers and arm them with the information they need to buy our brands.

The fact of the matter is that today’s consumers will also engage with your brand beyond brand and retailer sites. Consumers will ask their friends for advice. Does your brand encourage this conversation? More importantly, what are your references saying?

There are simple steps your brand can take to encourage its praise. Whirlpool and Maytag promote newly-designed brand and co-branded content to be bookmarked and shared through such Web 2.0 tools as Delicious, Stumble Upon, Facebook, Digg and other networks. This ensures that if a user takes interest in a product and wants to check for approval from friends, family and peers, it can be syndicated within seconds.

Likewise, Whirlpool offers a service through its Whirlpool Institute of Fabric Science (WIFS) program, which provides tips and timely advice on fabric care stain removal to followers on Twitter. While these are only two examples of the utility of such new digital tools, they demonstrate the importance of adding consumer value to digital plans by inclusion of a variety of online media formats — especially in those which your consumer most readily has a voice — and can increase your opportunity for growth.

With a surplus of brand communications trying to connect with a smaller pool of purchasers, it has become imperative for marketers to quickly provide their consumers winning answers. No doubt, this is where digital marketing is king. Through a cohesive and measurable Web strategy, marketers can take the driver’s seat and guide the experience for their consumers, providing rich commentary and smart simplification to the process. After all, the purchase decision is only one click away.