

Points of

**Is marketing still fun?
What keeps you up at night?
Which opportunities look best?**

In March of 2007, we ran a survey which consisted of a single question: As a marketer, what is your greatest point of pain? Given current economic conditions, we thought this would be an opportune moment to ask a few follow-up questions.

Not surprisingly, a plurality of our survey respondents said the marketing biz is “less fun” today than it was a year ago. “In this economy, is anything more fun?” asked one respondent.

But more than a few intrepid (masochistic?) souls said they relished the challenges of a less tolerant economic climate. As one put it: “For those with a passion for it, marketing is now more of an adventure into discovery, rather than a trip down the mediocre road of sameness.”

Beyond the obvious aches of reduced budgets and increased pressures, the greatest challenge appears to be improved understanding of, and communication with, consumers.

One solution, many seem to believe, could be the effective use of social networks. Indeed, 60 percent of survey participants picked “social networks” as the emerging media most likely to see experimentation in the year ahead.

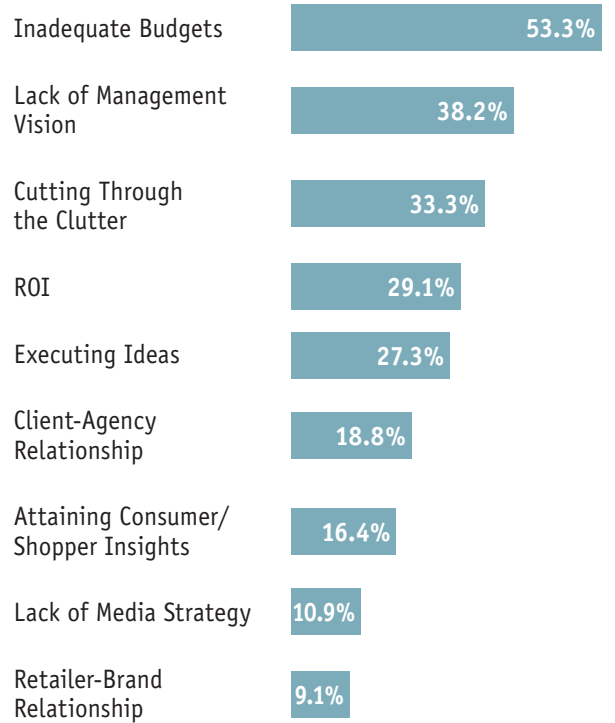
Mobile phones came in second at 52 percent, with online video (27 percent); microsites (21 percent); digital out-of-home (20 percent); and retail media (18 percent) trailing.

However, a few respondents voiced skepticism over the true potential of social networks and other relatively new forms of online media. “When ‘social media’ is touted as the Next Big Thing, we are in big trouble. If it doesn’t drive revenue, it shouldn’t be allowed to the table,” one respondent said.

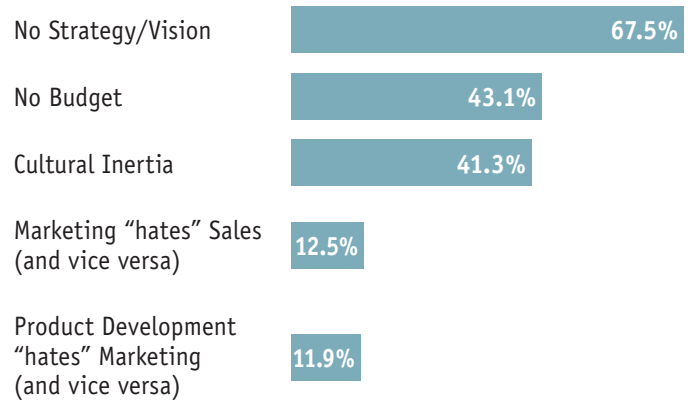
Fifty-three percent cited “inadequate budgets” as the issue most likely to cause restless nights, followed by “lack of management vision” at 38 percent. Interestingly, when the question concerned “obstacles to innovation,” the issues flipped — with 68 percent blaming “no strategy/vision” and just 43 percent citing “no budget.”

Meanwhile, “cutting through the clutter” was identified as a pain-point by 33 percent.

Which of these marketing issues is most likely to keep you awake at night? (pick as many as apply)

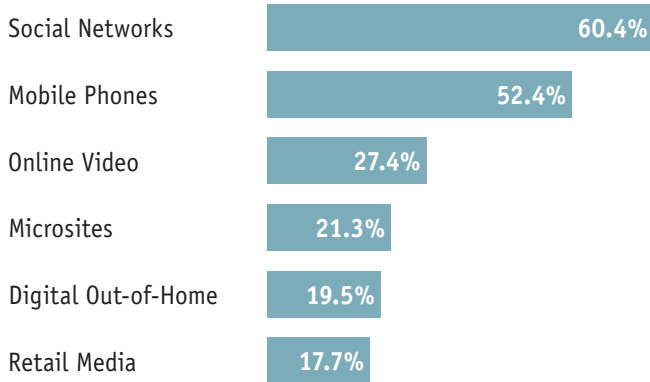


What are the greatest obstacles to innovation today? (pick as many as apply)

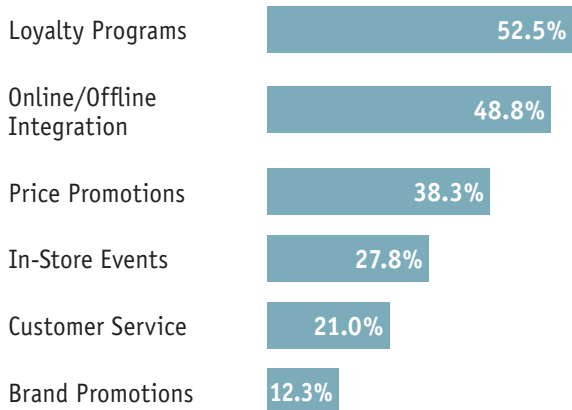


Pain

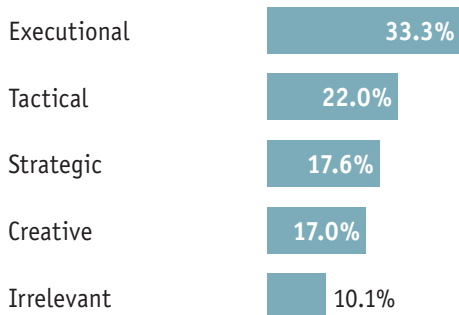
Which emerging media will see the most experimentation in the year ahead? (pick all that apply)



Which retail programs will see the most experimentation in the year ahead? (pick all that apply)



Which of the following best describes the role of most agencies today?



When we asked about the greatest opportunities for clutter-cutting, one respondent said, “Nudity,” but quickly added, “Just kidding.” Most answers settled in traditional areas of innovation, better products, services and customer experiences.

In what might be considered a surprise, relatively few respondents identified historically rocky relationships between sales and marketing or product development and marketing as problematic. In a similar vein, few cited the traditionally difficult relationships between brands and retailers and increasingly shaky bonds between clients and agencies as major issues.

As to the growing threat of “store brands” to the fortunes of national brands, a plurality of 43 percent characterized it as “medium,” with 39 percent calling it “large” and just 14 percent saying the threat is “small.” However, as one respondent noted, “Especially in this economic environment, ‘price value’ will trump ‘brand value’ if brands are not properly managed.”

“Loyalty programs,” at 53 percent, led the list of retail programs believed most likely to see the most experimentation in the year ahead, followed by “online/offline integration” (49 percent); price promotions (38 percent); and “in-store events” (28 percent).

With respect to the role of agencies, 33 percent said most agencies today are “executional,” with 22 percent terming them mostly “tactical,” 18 percent saying most agencies are “strategic” and 17 percent calling them mostly “creative.”

When it comes to “must haves” for the year ahead, most respondents homed in on the basics—talented people, great creative, adequate budgets, focus, vision, insights and a solid return-on-investment. Others took “must-haves” down to a more personal level. “Coffee, music,” said one. “Alcohol,” said another. “A job,” said a third.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

A total of 166 survey respondents included brand marketers (26%), consulting firms (22%) and agencies (21%). Twenty percent worked in packaged goods firms, 7% in media/entertainment and 4% in retail. A majority were senior-level executives with 78% reporting more than ten years of experience in marketing. ■