

Q&A

Stewart Kirkpatrick talks to Mark Gorman of Think Hard

Stewart: *Mark, tell me about marketing in Scotland...where is it?, Where is it going wrong?*

Mark: well, marketing in Scotland is probably best described as a collection of SME's...hundreds of small companies making a great contribution to the Scottish economy...over £330m at the last count, of gross value add. So it's an important aspect of the economy and it creates a great deal of added value to operators, businesses within the Scottish economy who use our services. So, it's a very creative collection of small business doing exciting things.

Stewart: *So, we have this sector which makes an enormous contribution to the Scottish economy for its size....How do you see it developing within the next five years?*

Mark: I guess the whole issue that faces marketing in general is the fragmentation of the media. The opportunities, for small companies are fantastic as it allows us to pick up niche opportunities...but on the other hand we are seeing the disappearance of the broadcast media.

ITV is struggling desperately, the newspapers...its well documented that circulation is going down dramatically and that makes reaching wider, broadcast audiences very difficult. However, the counter to that is, that there's millions of opportunities arising on a daily basis from the media.

My concern is that, as an industry being small and disjointed we don't really have a common voice....and I think our government fails to recognise the added value that we bring to the economy in Scotland.

I would like to see us engaging more closely with Government, finding ways for us to be helped as an industry to take forward that talent and to really exploit it to the full.

Stewart: *You mentioned the fragmentation of the media and obviously that has been driven by the growth of online....How do you see the Scottish online landscape?*

Mark: It feels very young...it feels quite inexperienced and it feels driven by creative energy, technical expertise and technical innovation.

The concern I have about the digital industry in Scotland is that it doesn't feel particularly embedded by marketing people, it feels more embedded by creative and technical people....and that's great because a lot of the online opportunities are technical but when you've got to go out there and spread marketing messages to people, I think if you lack that skill base in marketing that could be something which hampers our industry.

That is perhaps just because we are in the early stages and there is a lot of people growing up and into those roles but I would like to see more of a focus on the quality of the strategic thinking about the message, rather than the medium.

Stewart: *So what are the pitfalls of just focussing on the medium rather than the message?*

Mark: That the content is irrelevant, or the content is naive, or the content doesn't engage with the sales message and the rest of the marketing mix...as in a more mature sense.

Stewart: *Looking beyond Scotland to where perhaps the online market is more mature.....What are the innovations that you are excited about online at the moment?*

Mark: Well, there is a new innovation every day, isn't there! Some of which are completely meaningless, completely useless and are just a fashion items.

We saw big excitement amongst my circle of friends last year about the rise of Facebook as it moved out of the student generation into a wider group but already the talk is Facebook.....well that was so 2007.

So, I think that the danger is that there is a lot of bandwagon jumping going on, and that the bandwagons people are jumping on don't necessarily have any strong marketing role in the mix...they're just a bit of fun. Really, the industry...the digital communications marketplace needs to settle down a little bit I think and find real strong communications tools, vehicles and sites coming through.

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Stewart: *If you had to pick an online property or innovation you felt was going to last, that was of use...What would it be?*

Mark: Well having just dissed Facebook, I think that there is potentially, the applications that work with Facebook, once you get rid of the killing Zombies type applications and look at the social networking opportunities that lie there...may well give it a great deal of resonance.

But there is some fairly fundamental biggies out there. I have been reading recently about a thing called "The Grid"...that says...this is a thing coming out of Cern in Switzerland where the worldwide web was invented...and says that this will give instant access to the internet and is a new form of internet. I don't know enough about it but it does sound very interesting and it does for me touch on a pretty major issue which I am starting to see...and I think that part of it is down to the impact that BBC iPlayer has had. iPlayer, great idea but it sucks up bandwidth.

From personal experience it looks to me like there is major contention issues coming through even on 8MB width that you are getting from your local BT server...whatever. If that is true and that starts to grow, it's going to really frustrate people about the opportunities that the web brings and it's going to drive people away because we all remember what it was like using a 56k modem...which just didn't work. So that I think is an issue.

Stewart: *...and finally...if you could 'kill' any website, which website would you 'kill'?*

Mark: Msn!

Stewart: Good man.....Mark Gorman, thank you very much.

ENDS
