

The year that digital marketing comes of age

 By [Walter Pike](#)

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Trends in marketing in 2009 will be driven by the worldwide economic crunch, technology and the election campaign of Barack Obama to become the president of the United States of America - and not only because of the political impact of that but because it provides a dramatic example of how a no-hoper, a junior senator, can make it to the White House using modern marketing methods.



As always in tough economic times, marketing budgets will be under pressure as business focuses on the most effective use of its resources. Although marketers often throw up their arms in frustration, this is no wonder as we find traditional marketing approaches to be less and less effective. Less effective because customers have greater access to information, the opinions of their peers and experts available on millions of blogs, social networking sites and Internet searches and don't have to rely on marketing collateral.



In spite of some conventional South African wisdom writing off the Internet as a peripheral medium, the importance of the Internet will grow. South Africa has already [more than 4.5 million Internet users](#) and is also standing on the brink of an Internet explosion as access to Internet bandwidth suddenly increases and broadband becomes the standard. This starts with the coming on-stream of the first of a number of new undersea cables and the expected reduction in the cost of bandwidth.

Extremely significant will be the realisation of the importance of mobile connections to the Internet, with services such as MXit, which has millions of users, being recognised as a main stream communications medium.

Marketers, faced with greater pressure for accountability and effectiveness and being shown the how, are likely to turn more and more to exploring and using digital methods which are measurable and there will be a growth in mobile for 2009.

New approach to branding

Smart marketers are starting to realise that top-down branding is a phase that is passing on; the importance of brands has not declined but the shift from brand management towards brand collaboration and stewardship has commenced. This is being driven by the shift of the power in the transaction to the customer, because customers have greater access to information, the opinions of their peers and experts.

Marketers around the world will be considering the amazing and radical campaign that resulted in the election of Democratic Party no-hoper, Barack Obama, to the White House. [The campaign](#) turned traditional branding and marketing on its head and is forcing a complete rethink of traditional approaches.

Brands as movements

The Barack Obama "Yes we can" rallying cry is a wonderful example of how a brand can be generated as a movement of the people. It's a word-of-mouth marketing approach that started with the people - bottom up, not top down - supported by the networking infrastructure provided by social networking, and cemented using traditional media to reinforce instead of to launch and introduce the brand.

Word-of-mouth marketing has always been regarded as the most powerful but also the least practical of all marketing approaches. However, the most important conversation in the market has always been and always will be that between your

current customer and your prospective customer. Social networks such as Facebook (with well over 30% in the over-30 bracket) and MXit lead the way. The emergence of a new style of hyper local networking sites, such as the Word Of Mouth Forum (WOMF) (www.womf.com) network being rolled out in South Africa, will facilitate the growth of this approach.

Mobile marketing

Mobile connectivity is already significant in South Africa, as is the number of WAP-enabled phones. I see marketers starting to tap into this medium very much more aggressively as the realisation hits home. This should mean more than mobile interactivity at the lower end of the market but potentially with location-sensitive communication becoming more mainstream and map interface applications such as The Grid (www.thegrid.co.za) starting to attract interest amongst early adopters.

Mobile marketers will be more likely to move from thinking in terms of normal interruption advertising to useful applications which will [create engagement](#).

Attitudes changing

Advertising agencies and marketers who have been viewing digital as a peripheral media type will start realising that it is not a passing phase, and really not just another medium, that it requires a brand new look at marketing. To quote Media Mogul Rupert Murdoch:

“ To find something comparable, you have to go back 500 years to the printing press, the birth of mass media - which, incidentally, is what really destroyed the old world of kings and aristocracies. Technology is shifting power away from the editors, the publishers, the establishment, the media elite. Now it's the people who are taking control. ”

With this realisation will come the need for people with the skills to be able to deal with digital. The next question is: where these people are coming from?

For more:

- LinkedIn Answers: [What marketing/advertising/online trends will become prominent in 2009?](#)

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