# CMS NewsLine

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# Relevance Drives Marketing Success

## Enhancing TV Advertising — Part II

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Can you mute the sound, or better still change the channel Barbara? So it goes when relevance is lost and interest and attention are quick to follow. What we need is a wind–chill factor like measure to gauge advertising context and relevance. "Please don't change the channel John, can't you see that I'm watching that commercial on the new low fat cheese for making pizza from Kraft Foods? You've got to lose some weight my dear, so if you want pizza for the Super Bowl when your friends come over, don't change the channel or mute the sound!" What a blessing when relevance meets need and interest is peaked by good placement and context in a TV ad! Without relevance the message is simply lost in the ether of a multitasking world full of distractions and quick–click getaways. How about a quick and easy way to put a number on the quality of the demographics, the degree of relevance, the level of context and whether or not an ad has been personalized as it appears within a TV show? How valuable would that be? Meanwhile a good deal of progress is underway at Comcast, Adlink and elsewhere, where new methods from the likes of Visible World are in use.

*"Without relevance the message is simply lost in the ether of a multitasking world full of distractions and quick–click getaways."*

The American people have never been good at abiding tyranny or suffering fools. Yet some miscreants have from time to time invaded political life like the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy whose venomous diatribe so distressed Dwight David Eisenhower. In the commercial sector one can recall the at times heavy handed approach of a Standard Oil, IBM and a utility or two — while Enron, Oracle and

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CMS NewsLine

*"Validating the Middle Ground"*

C M S N


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Microsoft now get the headlines. In home affairs little is more distasteful than to suffer those who force their way into the home as family and friends employ the electronic media to look for information, communicate and entertain themselves in private. Back in the late nineteen forties when TV first came into vogue newly minted push advertising got to play the role of the uninvited guest. Indeed you watched the advertising presented or you turned off the TV. Few folks liked the arrangement even back then except of course the advertisers and their for–hire media friends. Now this source of annoyance is in decline as push advertising is far less effective when a TV can pause and fast–forward — as with a TiVo. So what is the media and its advertisers to do to regain sufficient attention? Higher relevancy and better context along with far better data on viewer behavior seems the way to go. Herein we consider how and why.

> *"Advertising budgets will have to go up as companies seek to maintain and enhance their brands in the face of a public better able to turn its eyes away."*

Think about it, as advertising becomes less efficient at delivering its message because of ad skipping and fast–forwarding on digitally empowered TVs, there will need to be far more not less advertising. Advertising budgets will have to go up as companies seek to maintain and enhance their brands in the face of a public better able to turn its eyes away. In numerical terms, if something like 20% of the TV ads were actually being watched before the DVR, DVD and OD and their TiVo like 'trick–play' and that will go down to (say) 15%, then the present ~$60 billion budget for US TV advertising needs to go up to something like (20/15) x 60 = $80 billion to maintain an equal level of penetration. Argue with the numbers if you like, but this construct while simplistic to the extreme does make a point. That is the way it will be if and only if the world were to stand still, which of course it will not. So what is the way forward? Based on recent history it seems reasonable to expect that new technology will rebalance the economic scales to a new equilibrium. Push advertising may indeed be moribund, but other forms will soon take its place — so all will be fine again. At the heart of the matter is ad relevancy as well as ad placement that are in context with TV programming.

Finding the right audience and getting it to respond to your message is at the heart of the modern day marketing and advertising puzzle. In the consumer in charge model, mass marketing may indeed be dead, but how is the economic system to proceed without it or something equivalent? Not to worry, as new forms including search engine marketing are on the way along with varieties of behavioral marketing and contextual advertising. What is best and how it will get sorted out with a minimum of disruption and financial distress to advertisers and others is yet to be worked out. Thus there is a good deal of controversy and uncertainty within the advertising community and elsewhere as to how best to proceed. In the meantime some advertisers like

Proctor & Gamble and McDonald's look forward to the changes taking place and are hopeful. Others, including some ad agencies and media buyers, appear uncertain and at times quite reluctant. Such folks, as in a quixotic quest to bolster the status quo, gravitate from one alternative to another while denying that change is needed or on its way. As to real progress in TV advertising methodology, it is certain to move ahead with or without any who elect to hang back.

At the heart of the matter is the 'paradise lost' of the old tried and true TV Push Advertising Model. In its place and on the way are a good deal more sponsorship, imbedding, interactivity and all varieties of pull advertising. In these forms relevance and context are metaphors for effectiveness and also the keys to progress. As to the use of ever more sophisticated demographic and other data based targeting, such methods are most useful but remain insufficient unless relevancy is also present and ad context with programming is in place. INCA or In–context Advertising can no longer be ignored because of systems difficulties, cost, legacy systems and the like. In like manner a lack of relevance of advertising to its audience will no longer work — the ad will be skipped, fast–forwarded, etc. Smart advertisers know this to be true, as many ANA members are on board with the new consumer in charge paradigm. They also look forward to an even more prosperous future. It follows that the ad agencies and service providers who may be reluctant better get with the program and join in as well — and do so soon.

*"INCA or In–context Advertising can no longer be ignored because of systems difficulties, cost, legacy systems and the like."*

How ironic that some of the very folks who are true masters of persuasion and leaders in the advertising community at times prefer to use pushy methods to force viewer attention. Instead they should listen to their greater gods and use the gifts of mystery, suspense, humor, persuasion and propaganda with which they are so well endowed! Yet it is hard for some to break the habit of using down–your–throat methods where gentle persuasion and more reasoned ways would be better suited. In this regard, along with better targeting and better data, it is the relevance of the ad and context in which it is placed that should lead the marketing community out of the darkness it finds itself in today. Push advertising while certainly not dead no longer leads the pack and is clearly on the way out as the dominant method. In changing times it is necessary for even the most stubborn of monkeys to let go of their old ways and grab hold of a new bunch of bananas! Effective modern pull advertising methods aided by a far greater capability to collect valid data about audience behavior and mix is the answer.

Much is being done these days to improve ad targeting via a better use of demographics and a more granular distribution of variations of ads within a market, especially by cable. In this regard Comcast with its Spotlight targeting methodology is well ahead of the pack. Using technology from Visible World, Sea Change International and others, Comcast is able to deliver far more regionally sensitive as well as demographically in tune messages. The same kind of effort is underway in the LA area where Adlink uses technology to target neighborhood by neighborhood or DMA by DMA. The net result is that if the ad is seen at all it is more likely to hit the mark. However, when the ads continue to be found in the midst of long ad pods of 4 to 7 commercials that enter in an out of context fashion within the show's stream we continue to have a big problem with viewers tuning out. Ask yourself; will the annoyed viewer now keep his or her hand off the remote — for an ad whose start is not even seen? We think not. Without the rest of the package to keep the viewer in focus, the brilliance of any new ad targeting technology such as the one from Visible World will still miss the mark much of the time. Yet we should applaud the great progress being made.

*"Out of context interruptions by less than relevant electronic media advertising is but a click on the remote away from end of subject."*

Out of context interruptions by less than relevant electronic media advertising is but a click on the remote away from end of subject. For the advertiser or other purveyor of goods or services, that spells trouble getting the message across. In a busy world most people seldom take the time to pay much attention to matters that are not front and center to their work or play — i.e. lack relevance. From a consumer's prospective only items that fit, are apropos, germane or relevant gain the attention that can lead to acceptance. In contrast pressure from a salesman, a spouse or an outside agent can simply annoy and frustrate — as with much of today's push forms of TV advertising. Yet once a consumer accepts a brand as his or her own it matters very little how it came to be.

In that sense how important is relevance in the brand message? Does it relate to why some prospects ultimately fall in love with a brand? In today's new media scene push advertising is indeed becoming increasingly unpopular while the fit or relevance of the message is playing a growing role. Of interest to those with something to sell is how the perception of relevance helps energize interest in a brand? Herein we explore this and what causes an event, situation or product to resonate with an individual or a population. We also ponder the role of context in the effective messaging of a product or service. While every company wants its brands to be seen as relevant to its customers, how can this occur in today's consumer in charge model?

The CMS NewsLine lead article in October 2004 ***A Relevancy in Advertising Tool*** offered a future vision of the relevancy sensitive advertising model. It also formulated a methodology upon which to base a simple metric to measure value and effectiveness. As always in the social sciences a few brave hearts (and profiteers) seek to quantify and measure cause and effect — a formidable task — as in the Nielsen Rating of TV. In the remainder of this article we probe this subject to a few of its more natural conclusions. The little metric is called the IRS, which stands for INCA (In–context Advertising) Relevance System. Of central interest is how to avoid the fatal turn away — click away — walk away conundrum wherein viewer attention is lost. Better targeting alone cannot do the job, as personalization and staying in context are also critical to gaining and holding viewer attention.

Indeed why do viewers turn away from a show or an ad? The following are a few of the more obvious causes, as when:

*"While every company wants its brands to be seen as relevant to its customers, how can this occur in today's consumer in charge model?"*

- Something urgent captures the viewer's attention, even though what is on remains interesting or compelling — say the front doorbell rings or the spouse calls.
- Other programming of interest, which fills a current need, is being shown on another 'channel'.
- A viewer becoming aware of some interesting on–demand content chooses to switch to it and leave the current 'show'.
- A break in the action by an ad pod causes a loss of context and the now alerted viewer elects to reach for the remote control.
- A viewer who is waiting to go to the refrigerator, make a telephone call, or take care of a chore chooses the first convenient moment.
- A shortage of relevance and interest in the current content on the TV stirs the viewer to seek out a better experience.
- A lack of visceral action causes a viewer to look for something more lively to watch.
- Too many commercials or too many other interruptions from network promos, messages and the like upset the viewer.
- An emotional event or upsetting scene on the TV causes some to turn away, say from an excess of violence, sex or inappropriate language or material.
- The social scene in the viewing room or other location changes when someone else enters the room.
- The material being shown becomes boring, disturbing, or redundant or is poorly presented.
- TV watching weariness overcomes a viewer who needs a change of 'venue'.

According to the dictionary relevance relates from one thing to another the role of: applicable, appropriate, apropos, apt, associated, connected, correlated, fitting, germane, pertinent, related, significant, to the point and to the purpose. Thus for something to be relevant to a person means that under the right circumstance it is more likely than not to draw some interest and attention. In that way it serves as an initiator or precursor to the acceptance of Information, Communication, or Entertainment, as in (say) an advertisement. In counterpoint, when any such ICE is irrelevant it is unlikely to gain much interest or attention. This is a statistical factor as the relevance of any ICE is in most cases neither necessary nor sufficient to its acceptance. Yet it is still to be prized as relevance greatly increases the likelihood of capturing the interest and involvement of a person. The more relevance the more likely it is that a media viewer or observer will turn his or her attention to a subject. At the deepest and most inappropriate level we had the Viacom produced Janet Jackson 'wardrobe malfunction' at last year's Superbowl which was clearly intended to get everyone's attention via the always relevant visceral response to powerful sexual imagery. Thus relevance is not always a good, but it does draw an audience.

*"As obvious as this may be, in a TiVo enabled world a prospective viewer may not see enough of an ad to determine its relevance!"*

The relevance of a subject is also commonly linked to demographic factors. Little girls like to play with dolls while duck hunters like to watch videos of swamps and marshes. Thus relevance to varying degrees correlates to one or another group by age, gender, interest and the like. As it does so, the perception of relevance may also be time and context sensitive as determined by the local situation at hand — as in Christmas music by the fireplace at Christmas time. In a sense the degree of fit must also be taken in relation to other items of interest at the moment in the 'Theater of the Mind' — as in Xmas music interfering with the holiday bowl game. For there is always competition for the attention of the viewer even in the relative tranquility of the home and this complicates what gets focus and attention at any moment. This multitasking environment underscores the importance of effectively targeting the audience with compelling content. Indeed it is relevance itself that helps stir the attention that leads to interest or even involvement. Leaving aside subconscious perception, the conscious mind acts like a token ring network insofar as whatever item or subject has the 'token' controls attention. Such attention in turn energizes a train of 'events' wherein the mind moves from first noticing, to seeing some relevance and by choice on to such things as careful consideration and even action. Thus relevance along with the concomitant context in the moment are of great importance to making a deep or lasting impression on a person.

While relevance is critical, the relevance of an advertisement to an audience only comes into play if the potential viewer is aware of it. As obvious as this may be, in a TiVo enabled world a prospective viewer may not see enough of an ad to determine its relevance! This brings in the somewhat controversial issue of the importance of context in advertising. Many still say that context between an ad and a show just does not matter as long as the demographics are good and the audience is large. Indeed classical advertising litany proclaims that awakening an audience to an ad by shock, noise, change of scene and other disturbances is sometimes a good thing. Even today many a practitioner still adheres to this strange 'shock therapy' catechism — so do not waste your time trying to talk them out of shocking the audience into paying attention. However, with a remote control and 'trick–play' time–shifting capability such as TiVo, this old and now false idea is ludicrous. When shock and noise startle a viewer into noticing the beginning of an ad pod, he or she is as likely as not (80% are likely) to grab the remote and 'fast–forward', 'pause' or change the channel. Bingo, the old way is not the best way and 'shock' has to be replaced with context and greater relevance. That is to say that an ad that is contextual to a show — as in a Victoria's Secret ad to a daytime fashion program — is far more likely to hold its audience. Without the preservation of context as an ad begins much of the value gained from greatly improved targeting via Spotlight and other systems is wasted, as the viewer has already tuned out.

## IRS AS A CASE STUDY

Let us now consider a simple little IRS metric as a way to better gauge the value and utility of a TV ad. At the most basic level an in–context advertising and relevance based system or IRS should consist of an easy to deploy scale or metric which can be written in the form:

**IRS (of an ad) = Demo Fit/Relevance + INCA Level + Degree of Personalization**

**Which can be abbreviated as: IRS = DF + IL + DP, where their values are:**

**Demographic Fit/Relevance = {DF | DF = 0,1,2; representing poor, average, good}**
**Inca Context Level = {IL | IL = 0,1,2; representing none, modest, good fit}**
**Degree of Personalization = {DP | DP = 0,1,2; representing none, some, high degree}**

Or use a similar IRS configuration with more than three choices for each variable. In this version the relevance factor is combined with the demographic fit for simplicity. Separating the demographic factor from relevance — as overall relevance goes far beyond demographic factors — is the next thing to do which leads to four instead of three variables. Obviously many more complex models can be considered and only careful testing can determine the utility and ease of use of any system. The real question is whether this basic approach can yield real value to an advertiser. If it can, then the CPM of an ad may need to be adjusted via the IRS. That is to say that the CPM would no longer be determined only by the attractiveness of a show and its demographics, but also by the CMS Derfler In–context Advertising Relevance™ System or IRS. After all, why should an advertiser have to pay a high premium for an ad that is misplaced, as in a lipstick commercial that appears on a show intended for big game hunters?

Herein IRS = 0 represents placing an ad place with a poor demographic fit and lack of relevance, while making no attempt to match the ad context with that of the show and with no degree of personalization in use. Why should anyone pay for such an ad? This advertisement is a straight shot in the dark, with little hope of creating value. If you watch TV most any time you will see that the great majority of TV advertising falls into this category, it is mostly a zero. On the other hand an IRS = 6 would signify that all three factors come into play at their high level. This would mean that an advertiser should prize it highly and be willing to pay a premium for its placement. Here we have good demographics leading to relevance, with the ad inserted at the right point in the programming and sufficiently personalization to make an impact on its audience. Such a situation is rare indeed even on the Internet. Today it is mostly a case of targeting the audience in terms of demographics, and that is what gets most of the attention.

For example, for the new TV hit show *Medium* the demographic and relevance factor may be high for a makeup ad targeted at mature women so that DF = 2 the highest score. Yet, if such ads are not placed with context in mind and with a degree of personalization included then the IRS is still only a lowly IRS = 2+0+0=2. Note that for this basic IRS model the proper value to use for each of the three primary variables are likely to be self–evident. Overall, good demographics and proper relevance of an ad to an audience can only yield a modest score unless context and personalization are also in play. And that in large part is the limitation of today's TV advertising to DVR, DVD or On–demand system enabled homes! Without context and personalization a good number of the ads will continue to be skipped.

While much has already been explored, a great deal more development work and field–testing of ad personalization is needed to establish how to use it to enhance viewer interest. The same can be said of in–context advertising (INCA) and to understand and apply demographics and relevance to branding and advertising. What is certain is that viewers tune out when they lose interest due to a lack of relevance and context (bound together) with what is on the screen. But how much of this is required to minimize the viewer fast–forwarding the ad will still need to be determined. In permission–based advertising any push must be very light handed indeed while pull must be driven by relevance and context that ensures interest and attention. An attempt by the industry to work toward achieving a truly practical and useful IRS can go a long way to re–enabling the TV advertising model to work effectively for the advertiser. Without annoying or frustrating the viewer high IRS valued ads are able to successfully get the ad message across to the viewer. Difficulties aside, technological change has made such an adventure a necessity for all involved in the TV business. So why not address this challenge head–on by bringing relevance and in–context advertising formally into the electronic media advertising space with an IRS metric to begin to solve the problem?

Of course a truly useful IRS may (after much field–testing) need to be a bit more involved. For example we could have:

**IRS = Demo Fit + Relevance + Context + Personalization (1)**

**Or formally as IRS = a.D + b.R + c.C + d.P (2)**

**Where the values to be used can be as in:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Demographic Fit** | **=** | **{D \| D = 0,1,2, ...; degrees of fit}** |
| **Relevance** | **=** | **{R \| R = 0,1,2, ...; levels of relevance}** |
| **Context Level** | **=** | **{C \| C = 0,1,2; ...; degree of context}** |
| **Personalization** | **=** | **{P \| P = 0,1,2; ...; personalization of the ad}** |

Here a, b, c and d are parameters that can used as needed to weigh the importance of each factors. The actual values to be used for these parameters would come out of a statistical analysis based on the results of focus group and similar testing. As the primary variables D, R, C and P may not be independent — and frequently are not — additional factors can be added to the equation to show the cross–correlation of these factors. All in all it is important to note that the simpler the formula the better; that is without throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

## IRS IS VALUE ADDED

Hypothetically let us imagine we have a product to brand and sell that we wish to advertise on TV. Depending on the product, the demographic profile of the audience may be of greater or lesser importance — as for example toothpaste, which is used by one and all. Similarly, the relevance of a thing can vary greatly based on the ad and the target population. As to the context level, how and where you place an ad in the stream matters a good deal — and let all those who remain in denial eat cake. For example an ad for a sports car fits right in next to a scene where James Bond is chasing someone along a scenic highway on the Riviera — as compared to placing the ad next to a heated argument about world affairs.

For the purpose of seeing how this approach could result in a viable system, it might be useful to ponder how an IRS metric could be employed to improve TV advertising efficiency. Also how the IRS valuation of an ad might help to set its commercial price. One non–disruptive approach would be to leave the current pricing model to set the value of the underlying CPM for an ad in a show; then downstream adjust it via an IRS at the point of usage, i.e., set its final value based on context, relevancy and personalization. In that way the advertiser and media buyer get greater value as the CPM is altered based on the degree of adherence of the network to the context and relevancy level of the actual viewing situation. Initially, especially during a trial period, this adjustment of the CPM using an IRS value could be kept small. Later on, as experience begins to train thoughtful buyers to use the IRS with skill, this adjustment can be increased as needed.

This approach could also have an impact on the TV upfront market, wherein the upfront market ad buyers might be allowed to gain an advantage in ad placement within a show over later spot market ad buyers. The upfront guy gets to pick the best in–context situations for his or her ad within a show while the last minute buyer is made to choose lesser fare. This way of employing the IRS as a tool would leave the economic balance between the upfront price and the spot price based on relative advantage over relative risk — a most sensible economic model. CPM prices would flux over time based on the attractiveness of a show as well as the positioning of the ads. In this manner, the IRS values would only represent a valuation tool for the advertiser and the media buyer. It is then up to the network to determine how the ads are finally positioned within a show in a manner that maximizes overall return based on this adjusted dual set of prices. So many possibilities and so very interesting it is!

*"The upfront guy gets to pick the best in–context situations for his or her ad within a show while the last minute buyer is made to choose lesser fare."*

To set such a process in motion will take the weight of one major advertiser or industry group willing to test the approach. It will also require support from a technology house, an advertising agency, a service provider and one or two others. Working in community an IRS project could within a short period do much to

Send a question or comment by e-mail: info@cmsderfler.com revolutionize how TV advertising is managed and priced in various sectors including the Internet. The net upshot may well be to increase the value of advertising to such a degree that it counterbalances the loss of efficiency caused by the rapid rise of such new technologies as the DVD, the DVR and On–demand. If so, it will be the advertisers who gain the most, while a grateful public learns to appreciate the value of advertising as a good in its world. As to its impact on the economy, as advertising becomes more effective, the nation as a whole is sure to benefit. Where are you Adam Smith?

*"As to the effort required to put something like an IRS metric into practice, there is no better time than now to start the experimentation."*

As a practical matter it really gets down to a pay me now or pay me later situation — with pay me later coming at a far greater cost. As 'time–shifting' or 'trick–play' in TV viewing spreads to a high percentage of TV sets something must be done to increase the efficiency of TV advertising. There simply is no other real choice. Yes advertising on the Internet will prosper, so will interactive advertising on TV, embedding methods will get their play, greater sponsorship of shows can work as well and so on. Nonetheless, as a practical matter the pull forms of advertising hold the greatest promise in the lay–back atmosphere of the living room, and pull requires audience interest and participation. Here the best pull of all is when the viewer stays tuned as the ad begins even though the means are close at hand to just skip away. Now that's real pull!

In the middle of all of this uncertainty we have wise advertisers spreading their bets, laying off their action and disintermediating their arrangements while hoping that the sky does not fall — on them. With the Telcos entering the electronic entertainment world with VOD and IP TV and the DBS satellite folks developing advertising technology which downloads, targets and inserts ads via the DVR, the relative advantage that Spotlight and the like offer the cable MSOs may not last. Of course the efficacy of one such system versus another depends in part on whether it is used for local marketing, as with auto dealerships in northern New Jersey, or to power up a universal brand via a national footprint, as in a Budweiser Light campaign. Stay tuned for the advertising competition among broadcast, cable, satellite and the Telcos is just really getting underway. In all these cases a simple little ad valuation metric such as the IRS will be of help.

As with any major change in the business situation, it is only natural that some may want to hold back a little while hoping that the old ways will prevail — if they just pray enough. In this case it will not pay to delay too long as advertisers are paying more and more to get less and less. As to the effort required to put something like an IRS metric into practice, there is no better time than now to start the experimentation. The beauty of this approach is that something of value comes to the advertiser right away.

Indeed from the start a train of events is set into motion that begins to address the present difficulties in practical terms concerning relevance and context. In contrast, standing frozen while watching a 'tsunami' hit advertising is just bad business. Make no mistake about it; the TiVo-like capabilities of DVR, DVD, OD and similar systems are a devastating hit on TV advertising unless steps are taken to rebalance the system closer to the desire of the advertiser and the viewer. It is up to everyone to join in to bring greater relevance with better context to TV advertising. Perhaps a simple metric can be of help, so welcome on board with your ideas!

(Leo Willner and Greg Kalsow contributed to this issue. In order to discuss any of these points with the authors, please e-mail them at:
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