



# Digital Buying Trends

Brands deal with new and evolving consumer strategies along the path to purchase

BY MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT



**THE PATH TO PURCHASE** used to be a very simple journey. A customer saw or heard an ad in a print or broadcast channel, went to a store, and made a purchase. Variations on this straightforward scenario were few and limited in scope — a recommendation from a friend triggering the initial interest, perhaps, or some laborious comparison-shopping before completing the transaction.

Those days have all but vanished. According to a soon-to-be-released global survey from consulting firm Huthwaite Inc., the way buyers engage in the purchasing cycle has evolved, and different media channels command different levels of importance dictated by the individual stage of the cycle in which buyers find themselves.

Quite simply, the purchase path has been radically altered by technology.

“The reality of convergence is here — almost,” says John Coleman, CEO of the VIA Agency, in Portland, Maine, the *Advertising Age* 2011 Small Agency of the Year. “Cloud





computing and DLNA-connected (Digital Living Network Alliance) devices will link everything, which means brands need to think about how they create campaigns that tell connected stories across entertainment, gaming, information, social, and educational content.”

Naturally, the kind of product being offered, target-market demographics, and a host of other variables influence the specific approaches taken by individual marketers, but digital media and connected devices are playing increasingly important roles in all types of campaigns.

For example, Moët Hennessy U.S.A. is focusing on digital technologies and techniques that allow the Hennessy brand to continue a relationship with its target consumer. The brand plans to expand those efforts this year.

“There is no longer one definition or path for how the Hennessy consumer becomes aware of a brand,” says Montana Triplett, director of digital at Moët Hennessy U.S.A. “Our goal is to

ensure that we are providing a value exchange to our target consumers no matter where they decide to consume digital content.”

Hennessy has had success using Facebook and QR codes. Currently, it is assessing how to further integrate those techniques into all its marketing efforts and considering which new technologies to integrate into the brand’s digital strategy for 2012.

“Whether Hennessy drinkers see our ad on their favorite music site, go directly to our brand website, or see a Twitter post about Hennessy, we believe it is important that the brand is successfully connecting with our consumers across all platforms,” Triplett says. “This will drive our fans to want to engage more deeply with the Hennessy brand.”

Hennessy’s marketing team uses both traditional web and mobile devices to reach consumers, and it sets specific objectives for digital that parallel the overall Hennessy brand strategy. The company tracks KPIs (key performance indicators) throughout the year and continually makes adjustments to optimize the success of its digital efforts.

“The Hennessy QR integration to promote our limited-edition bottle with the artist KAWS was one of the most successful QR campaigns ever,” says Triplett. “We are proud of the success of that program and look forward to expanding the use of QR codes in 2012.”

The campaign is also integrated into the brand’s Facebook page, featuring a locator app that lets consumers find the closest Hennessy KAWS bottle via their zip code.

“Marketing is no longer about campaigns; it’s about relationships,” says Sharon Napier, CEO of Partners + Napier, a Project: Worldwide agency based in Rochester, N.Y. “The ideal customer journey is one that creates a relation-



**Above:** the newly released, limited-edition bottle for the Hennessy VSOP Privilege Collection NYX, which features a QR code on the back that leads to an interactive marketing campaign. **Inset, left:** the QR code integration for promoting Hennessy’s limited-edition bottle with the artist KAWS, one of the most successful QR campaigns ever.

ship between the brand and the consumer, not just an interaction that results in a purchase.”

But it's equally true that the relationship building and brand loyalty that digital media are so good at engendering become moot if they don't ultimately drive the top or bottom line, or both. That being the case, marketers frequently cherry-pick digital strategies and connected devices to influence specific stages along the path to purchase.

For example, Gilt Groupe Inc.'s seamless integration of Facebook apps with its Gilt.com e-commerce engine drives volume while simultaneously making the shopping experience more social. Late last year, it began rewarding shoppers who “like” Gilt on Facebook with special sales offers on the social network that don't appear on the flash-sale, members-only website. It also began offering its Facebook fans a chance to take advantage of other sales before they appear on Gilt.com. Transactions initiated through Facebook take place entirely on the social networking site, with Gilt's e-commerce engine automatically receiving the orders and managing order fulfillment. Gilt has added a “Support” tab for customer service to its Facebook page.

Jason John, senior director of online, mobile, and social marketing at Gilt Groupe, says that the retailer's goal is to allow consumers to experience seamless interaction with the Gilt brand across on-site, social, and mobile experiences.

Some marketers are becoming adept at leveraging third-party technology initiatives to bring greater depth and relevancy to their own digital and connected devices efforts. A good example is the multimedia campaign Chicago-based agency Blue Chip Marketing Worldwide created for the new Vicks Behind Ear Thermometer manufactured by Kaz, under a licensing agreement with Procter & Gamble, which owns the Vicks brand.

The campaign includes print ads, targeted email blasts, digital online ads, QR codes, and place-based TV ads, but its most creative aspect is a highly localized approach to geotargeting that will place ads on the smartphones of a carefully screened population of mothers, the primary purchasers of thermometers.

Working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2003 to 2008, Google created Google Flu Trends, a new predictive model to identify flu-outbreak hotspots, accessible in an interactive format online. The mobile



campaign places ads for the thermometer in popular apps that collect information about users and can target specific demographics to receive ads. It leverages Google Flu Trends to send the ads to smartphones in areas experiencing a high level of flu, and it further narrows placement to smartphones of mothers who are within two miles of a retail outlet that carries the product, with the ad alerting them to the location of the nearest store.

Bryon Morrison, president of mobile marketing at the Marketing Arm, a Dallas-based promotion agency, says that as exciting as some of the recent developments in digital and connected device marketing have been, the best is yet to come. “Having done thousands of programs that are based on SoLoMo (social, location-based, mobile) for clients ranging from Frito-Lay to jcpenny to AT&T, I feel confident saying we have not even scratched the surface as it relates to what's possible,” he suggests. “The next five to 10 years of marketing will be looked at the same way we look back on the dot-com era. Unbridled innovation, intelligent clients, and breakthrough ideas are all that's needed.” ■



**The Gilt Groupe Inc. offers exclusive deals to consumers using mobile devices. The company has made mobile and social media two seamless avenues for shoppers accessing the company's sales items.**