

## **In a New Age of Interactive Media ... the more things change, the more they stay the same.**

With Gen X and Y fairly well assimilated into the business world, Millennials are presenting boomer executives with the latest infusion of confusion ... and with them has come a world of media options and habits many 50-something business leaders simply don't understand.

I confess to being one of them, but I have found hope: *many of these kids are really patient and seem to get their professional pleasure from simplifying their world for the generationally challenged. And better yet, even though things are changing, they seem to stay the same.*

### **Figures Don't Lie**

If you don't regularly read blogs, can't fathom why someone uses "social networking" sites on the Internet, or see any reason to include outlets like MySpace.com as part of your media strategy, consider these factoids:

- The number of blogs has been doubling every five months since 2003
- The 50 millionth blog was tracked on July 31, 2006
- Today, the blogosphere is doubling in size every six and a half months
- There were more than 60 million profiles on MySpace.com as of August 2006 ... up from 24.2 million in November 2005
- According to YouTube (which was recently purchased by Google in a \$1.65 billion stock deal) people are watching in excess of 70 million videos daily.

Oh, and if you're among those who don't know what a blog is ... it is short for Weblog. A blog is a personal Web site with its content displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs are joined together via hyperlinks, and these links are part of the global network called the "blogosphere."

I have also found that having your own page on MySpace.com is commonplace. "I've used MySpace to keep in touch with fellow members of the PR profession from college, and monitor how companies are increasingly turning to MySpace to send messages that will reach their targeted audiences. In fact, this has played a major role in the development of an internal study at our firm on innovative uses of social networking sites for clients," says Dana Johnson, Communications Specialist.

For business owners, deciding what to pay attention to can be a tough call. But in business, numbers speak and these numbers make it clear that a huge element of society is using new communication tools. It is essential that we understand those tools and learn how to fit them into our business and communication strategy.

## **Parental Press Kit**

Take for example Justin Campfield, one of our Communications Strategists at Curley & Pynn who learned that he and wife, Hillary, were about to become the parents of twin girls: “besides worrying about the usual new parent anxieties – finances, work arrangements, remodeling the newly deemed nursery – we quickly found another stress ... how to communicate all the changes coming our way to family spread out from the Pacific Coast to New York City.”

Their answer: “our blog updated every doctor’s visit and new sonogram image and when the big day arrived, the Campfield girls made their world wide debut courtesy of a Casio digital camera and YouTube.com within their first 24 hours of life. Now, our blog and YouTube uploads chronicle their big achievements and sleeping habits, while videoconferencing gives grandmas thousands of miles away reassurance that their new grandkids won’t forget their faces and voices.”

And Justin was quick to explain to me that he can employ those same tools for our clients: “you could build consumer interest by blogging and video chronicling the development cycle of a product or service; much like a pregnancy is the development of babies. It could either be real time (i.e., allowing the consumer to sit in on the brainstorming, design and manufacturing processes) or it could be a ‘look back’ once the product or service enters the marketplace, sort of like a ‘making of’ documentary that you find on most movie DVDs.”

## **Practicing What You Preach**

In much the same way, our Manager of Interactive Creative, Chris Riedel, related that in order to ratchet up the creative elements of his family’s Christmas card (not to mention saving him from being late with the cards once again) he developed an online video greeting featuring his son and daughter. “Not only did I for once get our cards out on time, I saved on postage,” he explained.

Now, Chris is at work on just such a project for our firm’s holiday card ... “a gift that will keep on giving,” he calls it, with a holiday blog and interactive desktop widgets ... a tiny program that launches from your desktop. If you’re interested, check back at [www.TheStrategicFirm.com](http://www.TheStrategicFirm.com).

We are also using some of the new media tools that are available to our clients’ advantage. Our account teams have a practice of using Google alerts and RSS feeds to track our clients and their industries in both the media and the blogosphere, making it much easier, faster and cheaper to keep up with their media coverage. As Dana mentioned, we are also engaging in an internal study that will allow us to provide more knowledge and services to our clients on new media including an understanding of how to use blogs to communicate key messages.

## **Not Such Bad Space, After All**

Another of our Communications Strategists, Kelly King, told me “I’m old enough to be removed from the young tech-savvy students, but young enough to feel the pull of social media.

“As someone passionate about communication, I knew I needed to get a clue about what I was missing, so I relied heavily on one friend who started her own personal blog to introduce me to blogging. My friend also convinced me to check out MySpace. I had been convinced by increasing mainstream media reports that MySpace was harmful, but I quickly learned that it is THE relationship management tool for teenagers, 20-somethings and beyond.”

So what does all this mean to her as a communicator?

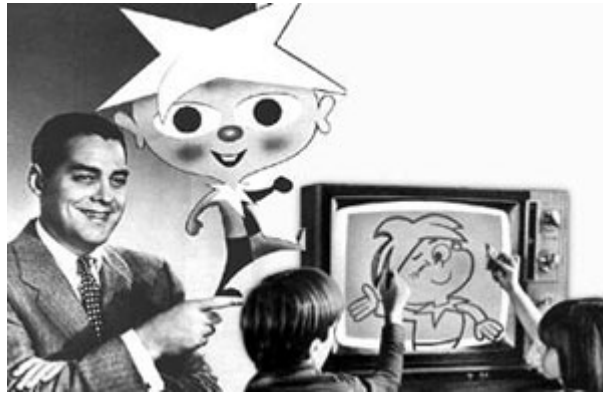
“It’s interesting to think about the way MySpace and other forms of social media are helping to form the relationships of our youth. Openness, communication and instant connection has not only made MySpace what it is today, but it has also helped many young people develop more meaningful relationships that place value on staying in close communication.”

You only get a glimpse of Kelly’s page at MySpace. Since she only uses the service for social interactions with those she knows, Kelly keeps her page set to “private.” This is a little known protection tool that MySpace offers and it means that you can’t read any information about Kelly: “until I’ve approved you as my friend.”

## **In Black and White**

My father of twins, Justin, gave me the best advice: “study, study and study some more, and then hire what you don’t get.”

There’s a lot I don’t get, but most of the young people I’ve surrounded myself with have to ask me about things, too ... like: “there really was such a thing as black and white television?”



I just smile and take the opportunity to tell them about my recollection of what Bill Gates has called “the world’s first interactive video game.” It was a Saturday morning cartoon show that ran between 1953 and 1957. It was called “Winky Dink and You.”

For fifty cents they would send you a “Winky Dink Kit” that included a clear plastic screen to place over your black and white television and a set of “magic crayons.”

“We sold millions of those kits,” said the show’s host Jack Barry. “It was well thought out.”



Kids would place the static cling plastic over the television screen and connect the dots to create a bridge or some other device so Winky Dink could cross to safety.

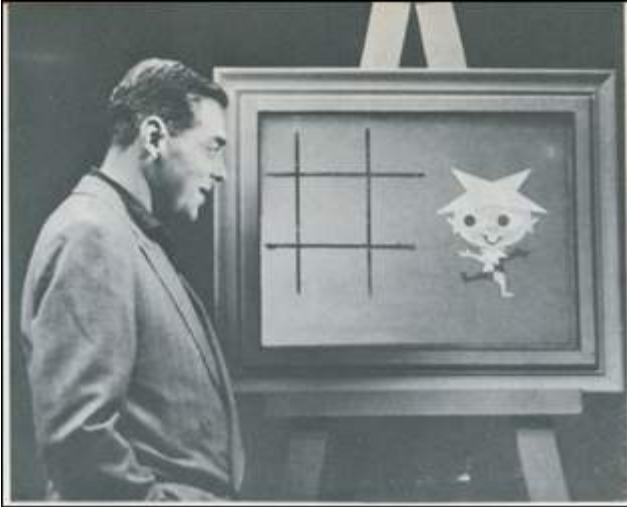
Then they'd trace portions of letters on screen to read "secret messages" broadcasted at the end of the show.

Even in 1953, business leaders were probably overwhelmed by this new "technology" and the idea that they too had to figure out how to become interactive to compete. But I think you would agree they succeeded. We've come a long way since then with Atari, then Nintendo, and now Xbox and Playstation, and I have confidence we'll figure this one out too. There is no doubt that 50 years from now, business leaders will chuckle about the first and very primitive blogs and social media sites in 2006 and the challenges they presented. Even if this is all new to you, it will just take a little bit of motivation to put your uncertainties aside and get involved and you will soon be on the path to successful understanding of this new age of interactive media.

## Keeping Pace

Here are four things you can do to keep pace with what may seem like an out-of-control explosion:

1. **Check out Technorati.com ...** to bring the blogosphere into a controllable environment. You can find 57 million blogs by topic and track blog mentions of your company, product or other keywords. Interested in wine country tours? So are millions of others. In order to get really targeted, I searched for "California wine + travel" only in tagged blogs. This one – Basic Juice ([http://basicjuice.blogs.com/basicjuice/2006/06/monterey\\_foray.html](http://basicjuice.blogs.com/basicjuice/2006/06/monterey_foray.html)) – is a fascinating compilation from "guest authors" and you can sign up to be one, too.
2. **Visit YouTube.com ...** and maybe even MySpace ... to get familiar with the sites and how you may be able to integrate them into your strategy. On YouTube, I searched for "wine country" and found 167 videos including this one titled "an awesome weekend in wine country" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNGqQuNCxNI>). Not all of my search results were relevant to my interest in the Napa/Sonoma area – many dealt with Italy – but you'll find a lot to pique your interest and develop your understanding.
3. **Don't forget good old Google ...** which can help you keep up in several ways. There's so much more to Google than a simple search. For instance, you can set up alerts or Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds to track "wine country" or *Wine Country Living* magazine's Web site, and you can search images, video or maps with a simple click of the mouse. Why not set up a Google Alert for "social media" to keep up with news about the ever-changing phenomenon? By the way, you can also read all about the adventures of Winky Dink on Google ... just type in "Winky Dink" and you can learn all about that marvelous invention from my childhood.



4. **Finally, as Justin said and I am learning, take some time to study, and then hire the rest ...** surrounding yourself with information, and better yet, those who “get it” naturally, can help defuse the new media confusion, and simplify the increasing complexity of developing a strategy for communication in an interactive media world.

As someone once said, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”