



GREG VERDINO

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, **CRAYON**

GREG VERDINO PROBABLY KNOWS MORE ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA THAN ANY OF US WILL EVER FORGET. HE'S MADE A CAREER OF UNDERSTANDING CONSUMERS AND HOW THEY CONNECT TO BRANDS AND EACH OTHER THROUGH MEDIA, AND HIS MARKETING BLOG IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST OUT THERE. BEFORE JOINING INTERACTIVE SHOP CRAYON, GREG WAS DIGITAS' DIRECTOR OF EMERGING CHANNELS, WHERE HE TAUGHT CLIENTS LIKE AMERICAN EXPRESS AND GENERAL MOTORS A FEW THINGS ABOUT HOW THE WEB *REALLY* WORKS. PRIOR TO THAT, HE WAS VICE PRESIDENT OF ARBITRON NEWMEDIA. THESE DAYS, WHILE HIS BODY MIGHT BE AT CRAYON'S OFFICES IN NEW YORK, HIS SECOND LIFE AVATAR, JIGGY STARDUST, IS ROCKIN' IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD.

Q: In your lifetime, what was the first marketing campaign you can recall being exposed to?

A: I'm sure there were plenty before this, but the first one that comes to mind is the "Mamma Mia! That's a Spicy Meatball" TV spot from the 70s. In an interesting twist, though, it wasn't until I Googled that quote ... that I remembered that the brand advertised was Alka-Seltzer. Leave it to me to turn a simple nostalgia question into a story about how even 30-some years ago, marketers may have been more invested in making gimmicky—albeit memorable—creative than they were in having any real, lasting impact. I remember the ad but not the brand.

Q: What made you decide to pursue marketing as a profession?

A: In college, I was a sociology major, which—at the most basic level—meant that I studied the science of how communities influence and impact the people that belong to them. It also meant that I was eminently unemployable upon graduation [in 1990], so in the midst of a recession I took a low-paying job as an agency media planner. At the time, few people, including the guy that hired me, saw any connection between my academic coursework and the real-world work that I would be doing on Madison Avenue. Today, of course, the world is a very different place. With the rise of social media [and] the gradual shift from one-way brand communications to two-way conversational marketing ... a degree in sociology doesn't seem irrelevant anymore, does it?

Q: What qualities make a marketer great?

A: A great marketer understands the consumer and the ways the balance of power has shifted, is agile and courageous enough to respond to rapid-fire change, and demonstrates a high tolerance for risk. It also doesn't

hurt to have a passion for new things, a solid understanding of emerging technologies and how people use them, and possibly even a kid or two who is willing to smack you around when you slip into old-school thinking or pining for the good ol' days of *Mad Men*.

Q: What qualities undermine an otherwise talented marketing executive?

A: Fear of the unknown. I've worked with too many marketers who define innovation as the idea for which there are only five competitive case studies instead of the usual nine.

Q: Pick your poison: Hard and fast ROI, or experiment and see what sticks?

A: Given the choice, I'd live and die by experimentation. Marketers can't keep up if they aren't willing to take risks and try new things, even if they're unsure of what they'll deliver. Having said that, at Crayon we talk about 'well-structured experimentation'—don't simply chase every shiny new object; instead enter into each experiment with clear business goals and a well-defined learning agenda. Just don't let all the goal-setting and talk of accountability paralyze you to the point of inaction.

Q: What inspires good marketing ideas?

A: Consumers do. It has never been easier to look, listen and learn what consumers want and expect—and it doesn't require a one-way mirror or all-you-can-eat M&M's anymore. Every marketer should think of the social Web as a massive learning lab that you can tune into to gain insights that will lead to the next, best marketing idea you've ever had.

Q: If—as the saying goes—you are your own brand, then what is the tagline for a brand campaign for you?

A: I'm going to answer your question by not answering your question. Instead, I'd like to offer up a favorite quote from Marty Neumeier. In his book *Brand Gap*, he wrote that "A brand isn't what you say it is. It's what they say it is." That's a fancy way of saying that if you want to know what my brand really stands for, ask the people who "consume" my brand.

Q: What do you point to as your greatest single marketing accomplishment?

A: Whatever marketing program I am working on next.

Q: What do you point to as your greatest single accomplishment outside of marketing?

A: Definitely my daughter. She is smart and funny and beautiful. At four-and-a-half years old, she is already teaching me new lessons about how her generation uses media and technology. If she disappoints me in any way, it would be the fact that she actually likes TV commercials; she thinks they're part of the show.

Q: Ten years from now I'd like to be _____.

A: Living and working in the epicenter of Web 3.0 or 4.0 or 5.0, or whichever generation of the Internet we're up to by that point. If I'm lucky though, I'll be doing so in avatar form, while sitting on a beach someplace warm.

Q: What profession, other than marketing, would you most like to pursue?

A: During the Web 1.0 bubble, I stepped outside the marketing profession to try my hand at a few other things. ... For the most part, I feel like I've gotten the wanderlust out of my system. If forced to pursue a new career, I'd probably like to own a restaurant, write novels or hit the professional speaking circuit, although probably not all at once. **m**