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A marketer's guide to the CGM galaxy

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In part one of this two-part series*, **Bronwyn Higgs** looked at the media opportunities of blogs. In part two, she examines the promotional potential of podcasting, wikis, public message boards, social networks and product review sites.

A marketer's guide to the CGM galaxy (continued...)

The term 'consumer generated media' was barely used a year ago. Driven by a number of environmental changes – the Y generation entering young adulthood, the advent of broadband and innovative software such as RSS feeds – a new more personally relevant media platform, now known as CGM was spawned.

Today, CGM represents an entire new class of media including blogs, wikis, podcasts, public message boards, product review sites, consumer rating sites and social networking. Of these, blogs and podcasts are emerging as the most important for advertisers. One key characteristic unifying all CGM is that it is media created by consumers for consumers. As a result, CGM has developed an ethos and culture that is profoundly different to that of traditional media. In order to leverage the full potential of CGM, marketers need to think about promotion in very different ways.

PODCASTING

A podcast is a digital recording of audio or visual content, made available on the internet for downloading to a personal audio player. Podcasting is different to traditional broadcasting in that consumers control the content. Personal audio players use aggregating software that allows users to arrange files into a uniquely personal collection, which they consume at their leisure.

A number of Australian broadcasters currently offer podcasts as an extension of their media product. ABC Radio, Austereo Network

and News Limited have enjoyed spectacular success with their podcast trials. ABC Radio, offering around different 90 podcasts, enjoys a reported 100,000 weekly downloads. Austereo, with approximately 60 offerings records around 350,000 downloads per month.

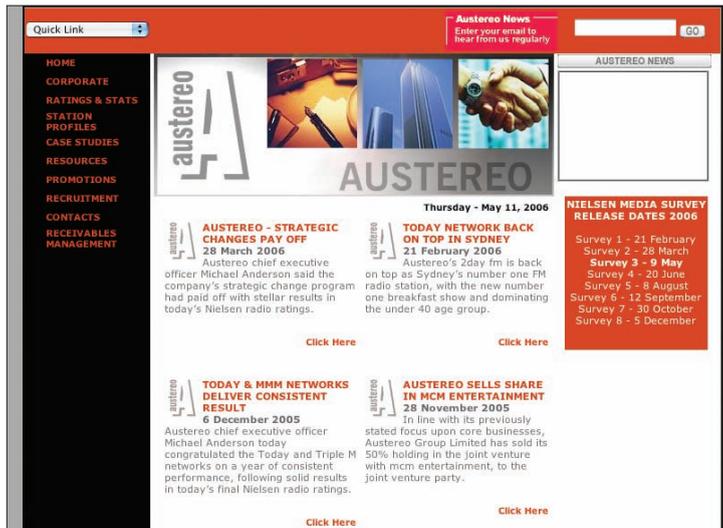
According to Austereo's New Media strategist, Mark Neely, the most popular genres are comedy, music, entertainment, sports, news and politics. Austereo's research also suggests that 90 percent of the population have heard of podcasts, but only 10 percent have downloaded one.

A major issue for podcasters is whether to embed advertising messages. Research con-

ducted by Austereo Network suggests that most consumers are willing to accept limited advertising in return for free downloads.

"Two to five minutes of advertising per 30-minute podcast is optimal," says Neely, adding that consumers prefer a "sponsorship format with billboards topping and tailing the podcast and only minimal advertising interruptions in between".

Less is known about the podcast audience than the blog audience. Clearly there is some overlap between the two cohorts. Podcasts potentially reach a broader market, however, than just the youthful blogosphere. It appears that while young audiences are wired to their



iPods, older segments of the market are using their personal computers to view content. ABC Radio's success suggests that the podcast audience is drawn from a diverse range of demographic groups.

Promotional opportunities for podcasting include:

- Embedded advertising. Currently few Australian podcasts include embedded advertising, but media companies are experimenting with this delivery mode. Expect it to be relatively widely available in the second half of 2006.
- Infomercial podcasts. On-air broadcast or newspaper pages can be used to push interested audiences to a podcast where qualified listeners can learn more about a product, brand, destination or venue.
- Sponsorship. Why not sponsor product reviews on a third party site? For example, movie reviews on the Austereo Network are sponsored by Blockbuster Video.
- Brand integration. Sponsor links on the download page. Integrate by embedding billboard sponsor messages into the podcast itself.
- Logo displays. Audio files played on an iPod leave a blank screen, an ideal space to display sponsor logos.
- Branded entertainment. Branded entertainment is a video where the brand is the hero of the narrative. A great deal of branded entertainment is now distributed via the internet in the form of podcasts. Conceived by Audi3, an excellent example of branded entertainment utilised a game of intrigue, available in both internet and podcast formats.

WIKIS

Wikis are online encyclopaedias. Unlike printed encyclopaedias, wikis are freely available. Wikis are developed using 'open editing' mode, which means that consumers contribute and edit content in real time. In other words, encyclopaedia entries are edited and updated by consumers, rather than by 'experts'.

The largest wiki project, Wikipedia, was devised in 1995 with the ambitious objective of cataloguing and indexing the sum of all knowledge. To achieve this end quickly, the editors conceived the open editing concept. The term comes from the Hawaiian 'wikiwiki', meaning 'quick'. Open editing has since become a pillar of wiki ethos.

Wikis have begun to proliferate. Wikipedia has recently launched Wiki Quotes, Wiktionary and Wiki Grammar. Dedicated wikis, like Travel Wiki, Corporate Wiki and several consumer wikis can also be found.

Wiki entries have a clear format. They are factual, properly referenced and wherever possible contain hyperlinks to additional research on the topic. Wiki editors provide prospective contributors with guidelines on house style and philosophy.

No known wikis accept straight advertising. Indeed advertising is contrary to the wiki philosophy, leaving most projects to rely on donations for revenue. Consequently, there are fewer promotional opportunities on wikis than on most CGM platforms.

Promotional opportunities for wikis include:

- Straight listings. Submit your company profile or brand details to all relevant business or consumer oriented wikis.

- Editorial contributions. Wiki editors are actively seeking contributions on selected topics. Perhaps your company or your staff could contribute articles on relevant issues?
- Corporate/employee wikis. Consider creating employee-developed sites to assist with internal marketing, FAQs, training and induction.
- It is not uncommon for wiki entries to make reference to company names or brand names. Some wiki editors, however, have developed techniques to spot content that is transparently corporate or self-serving.

If you are planning to contribute editorial content to wikis, it is important to use the language of the medium. There are several guidelines that should be observed:

- Ensure that contributions are factually correct.
- Avoid corporate puffery, gross exaggerations and negative commentary about competitors.
- Above all, respect the conventions of the media environment and make an effort to conform to any style guidelines.

PUBLIC MESSAGE BOARDS

Public message boards are also known as internet forums, discussion boards or bulletin boards. They are online noticeboards where interested parties can post and read content. Although message boards rarely allow users to interact with each other, they are often imbued with a sense of community. Message boards tend to dedicate themselves to specific themes or topics. They cover a broad range of topics, ranging from cars to cooking.

Promotional opportunities include:

- Site seeding. Post a question or comment designed to provoke debate.
- Straight advertising. Many message boards accept advertising.
- Threading. Threading refers to the process of starting a new topic on an existing board.

Message boards appear to be more receptive to commercial content than many other forms of CGM. Be aware, however, that board administrators have the ability to edit or remove content that is in poor taste or inappropriate to the forum's theme.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are loosely organised groups connected via the internet. The earliest and most well-known were online gaming communities where enthusiasts exchanged tips and strategies for their favourite games. Social networks are available for professionals such as accountants, singles searching for partners, carers, families and businesses.

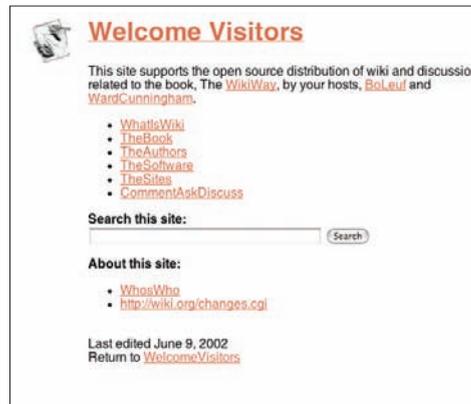
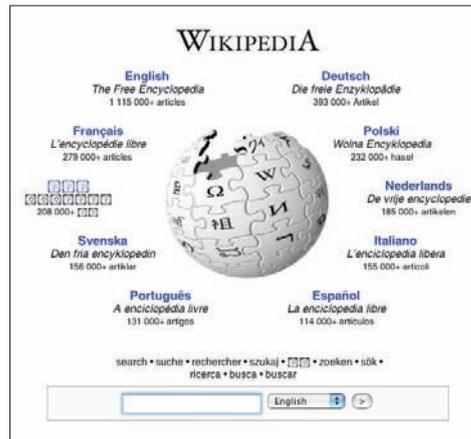
Given the variation in social networks, it is difficult to generalise about promotional opportunities. While some sites refuse all advertising, others will accept discreet advertising.

PRODUCT REVIEW SITES AND CONSUMER COMPLAINT SITES

Product review sites and consumer complaint sites are currently experiencing rapid growth. As the labels suggest, product review sites and consumer complaint sites allow consumers space to sing praises or air grievances with the corporate world. Consumers commonly consult product review sites as a convenient source of information when making purchasing decisions, especially for high-ticket items. Dedicated sites have been established for financial institutions, telecommunications service providers, real estate agents and a host of other categories.

Few consumer complaint sites are willing to accept corporate advertising. Curiously, however, most product review sites are more than happy to accept advertising.

CGM has many advantages. It is a relatively cost-efficient medium where advertisers can pay per view, thereby minimising wastage. It can contribute a 'human face' to brand campaigns, and it also has the potential to talk to audiences in language that has street credibility. CGM originally emerged, however, as a



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spontaneous reaction to public concerns about the relevance of traditional media and perceptions of corporate domination. Few media content providers gave much thought to the business models required to sustain

them and so, in spite of their lofty ideals for independence, many have been forced to accept advertising simply in order to survive. With this in mind, the key for marketers is to find ways to utilise CGM platforms creatively and with sensitivity to their origins and guiding philosophies. **M**

USEFUL LINKS

AUSTRALIAN MEDIA PODCASTERS

Austereo
www.austereo.com.au
Today FM
www.todayfm.com.au/podcasting/get_em_here/
Triple M
www.mrock.com.au/music/podcast/index.php
ABC Radio
www.abc.net.au/services/podcasting/
Ministry of Sound magazine
www.ministryofsound.com.au
Ralph magazine
www.ralph.com.au
News Limited
http://video.news.com.au
Boost Digital
www.boostdigital.com

WIKIS

Wikipedia
www.wikipedia.org
Wiki
www.wiki.org
Wiki Wiki Web
http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiWikiWeb
Voice of All Things
www.voip-info.org/wiki
Wiki Travel
http://wikitravel.org/en/Main_Page

MESSAGE BOARDS

Open Directory Project
(directory of message boards)
http://dmoz.org

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Ecultures (directory of social networks)
http://ecultures.homestead.com/about.html

PRODUCT REVIEW SITES

Consumer Review
www.consumerreview.com

* Part one of this series, titled 'Consumers are the new kings of content', appeared in the March issue of Media Zone. To view this article, go to www.marketingmag.com.au and click Archives under News in the pop-down menu at the top. We welcome your feedback at mediazone@niche.com.au