

Marketing

Associate Publisher, Editorial Director

Stan Sutter (416) 764-1603
stan.sutter@marketingmag.rogers.com

Managing Editor

Paul Ferriss (416) 764-1572

Editor at Large

Angela Kryhul (416) 764-1588

Media Editor

Chris Powell (416) 764-1598

Associate Editor

Rob Gersbeck (416) 764-1666

News Editor

David Brown (416) 764-1595
davidj.brown@marketingmag.rogers.com

Senior Writers

Paul-Mark Rendon (416) 764-1578
paulmark.rendon@marketingmag.rogers.com
Rebecca Harris (416) 764-1485

Staff Writer

Matt Semansky (416) 764-1567

Art Director

Peter Zaver (416) 764-1563

Associate Art Director

Karen Evans (416) 764-1583
karen.evans@marketingmag.rogers.com

Editorial Assistant

Averil Joseph (416) 764-1584

Supervisor, Web Design & Content

Jason Rudniski (416) 764-1478

All e-mail addresses, unless otherwise noted, are:
firstname.lastname@marketingmag.rogers.com

CORRESPONDENTS

Montreal

Danny Kucharsky (514) 482-1999
Fax: (514) 482-0337 dannyk@videotron.ca

Vancouver

Eve Lazarus (604) 990-9397
eve_lazarus@shaw.ca

Winnipeg

Judy Waytiuk (204) 256-9586
Fax: (204) 257-3142 waytiuk@wordsink.ca

Calgary

Norma Ramage (403) 938-0215
Fax: (403) 938-0216 nramage@platinum.ca

Halifax

Kathleen Martin (902) 420-1471
Fax: (902) 420-1468 masthead@ns.sympatico.ca

Reporter at Large

Paul Brent (416) 690-3970 paulb@dbtc.ca

Publication mail agreement #40070230

Registration number 08985

Periodicals postage paid at Lewiston, NY. Canadian and U.S. Postmasters: send address changes to Marketing Magazine, PO Box 18003 Toronto, ON M7Y 3J3.

Undeliverable copies notices to: Marketing Magazine, One Mount Pleasant Rd., 7th Floor, Toronto, ON M4Y 2Y5, rose.pedro@marketingmag.rogers.com. U.S. periodical registration no. 010-574 Marketing is indexed in the Canadian Business Index by Micromedia Limited. Back copies are available in microform from Micromedia Limited, 20 Victoria St., Toronto, ON M5C 2N8, tel: (416) 362-5211; and from the University of Michigan Micro Films International, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI, 48106. Marketing, USPS 010-574 is published weekly by Rogers Media. U.S. office of publication: 2221 Niagara Falls Blvd., Niagara Falls, NY 14304-5709. Periodicals Postage Paid at Niagara Falls, NY. U.S. postmaster: Send address changes to Marketing, PO Box 4541, Buffalo, NY 14240. ISSN #1196-4650

98th Year—Vol. III—No. 34

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Single copy sales only (416) 764-1596

Current issue (in Canada) \$3.95 plus GST and postage and handling (P&H). Back issues \$5 plus GST and P&H. Outside Canada \$10 plus P&H.

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Subscription rates: In Canada \$89 (one year), \$149 (two years). Group/Bulk rates (2 or more subs): \$50 per subscription per year. Student rate (one year): \$44.50. U.S.: \$120. Other foreign: \$180.

Please add 6% GST. 8% HST applicable in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. (Reg.# 137813424RT001). In Quebec, add 7.5% QST (Reg.# 101662-4728TQ1)

Printed in Canada. Member Canadian Business Press and Audit Bureau of Circulations.

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[FROM THE EDITOR AT LARGE] ANGELA KRYHUL



It's my info, not yours

I'm not playing ball with marketers anymore. I'm tired of hesitating before picking up the phone for fear it's a telemarketer who won't take no for an answer; or expecting to be paralyzed at the front door by a fast-talking canvasser demanding I donate, buy or sign-up. And I will no longer explain to surly cashiers why they can't "get" my postal code or phone number before I hand over my money.

Research pioneer Angus Reid makes the incisive point that consumer civility is on the wane and marketers have only themselves to blame. In a recent article, Reid explained that the market research industry flourished "because answering the questions of strangers on the other end of the phone line was considered a polite and socially acceptable thing to do." ("Market Research Liberated," Sept. 25, p. 19)

No more. People are refusing to participate in research—non-cooperation rates often exceed 80%, according to Reid—because of a breakdown of trust. Telemarketers are calling at inconvenient times or expect people to participate in lengthy surveys. Opinion fatigue—i.e., consumers who reject almost all attempts at polling—is a trend seen in the U.S., too, according to *Advertising Age*. Its report on the Research Industry Summit for Improving Respondent Cooperation, held recently in Chicago, found that fewer consumers want to take part in surveys and that participation rates of under 10% are common. The same people tend to be polled over and over again, which raises questions about the reliability or bias of results.

But it's not just about inconvenience or opinion fatigue, and it's not only telemarketers who are pushing their luck. I'm not the first to rant about people who ask intrusive questions; it's that marketers have an aggressive attitude of entitlement to that personal information.

Refuse the "Postal code!", "Phone number!" interrogation and you're treated to either the cold shoulder or an argument. "But we need it" is often the answer to a firm, but polite no. Yet few front-line retail staff will explain that their employer is building a database for its own benefit, let alone articulate how your postal code could ever improve store selection and service, or build a direct-mail or loyalty program that's actually beneficial to you, the customer. The joke around here is: What exactly has Radio Shack been doing with all those phone numbers it collected over the years?

You can ask the same question of loyalty programs. At a September Canadian Marketing Association conference, federal privacy commissioner Jennifer Stoddart said "at best, loyalty programs are not particularly clear and open about why they're collecting consumer information," and that while the marketing industry describes loyalty programs as a means to better understand their customers, "not all customers want to be better understood, particularly if it means surrendering their privacy for commercial purposes."

It's not just retailers who are more aggressive. I was recently kicked out of a realtor's open house when I refused to sign a document asking for my name, address, phone number, e-mail address and other personal information. I understand that realtors and homeowners want to keep track of who's traipsing through properties, but what raised a red flag was that my signature would give the realtor permission to distribute and trade my personal information as she saw fit. When I expressed discomfort, the realtor didn't explain that this was a database-building exercise, but insisted, twice, that she "needed" the information for "security purposes." I refused and was shown the door.

The attitude of entitlement colours the very language used by some telemarketers. I stopped donating to Mothers Against Drunk Driving at least two years ago, but the phone calls and direct mail never end. As far as I'm concerned, charitable giving is a voluntary exercise, but the last time I was on the receiving end of a MADD call, they said they wanted to "clear up the account," as if it was a lapsed credit card bill. What's more, MADD callers have implied, more than once, that I am dishonourable for not pulling out my chequebook on demand. Deadbeat, dishonourable...they'll never get another dime.

It's slowly dawning on people that personal data, while freely given, is actually worth quite a bit to the receivers and manipulators of that information. The notion that marketers and researchers should actually pay for the information from which they derive so much benefit is getting some consideration. VNU-owned Nielsen Media Research has reportedly seen respondent rates rise to 45% from 36% over the past five years, largely because respondents are paid for a two-year commitment.

There is concern in some quarters that if Canada tightens its existing privacy laws by requiring mar-

eters to obtain express positive consent prior to the collection, use or disclosure of a customer's personal information, it could cripple standard marketing practices.

So could people saying no, en masse, to the marketing bullies.

Our fall events and publication schedule changes

As you've noticed from the triple-page ad spread that opens this edition, the entire *Marketing* team is well along in plans for our first Marquee Awards, a new event set for Nov. 30 that will celebrate the achievements of Canada's top marketers and agencies.

As a result of this project, and the preparations for our other established projects such as the Digital Marketing Awards on Nov. 2 and the Media Innovation Awards on Nov. 9, we've decided to produce a series of special double issues in the lead-up to the Nov. 30 Marquee event.

The 18 Agencies that Mattered and the 17 Marketers that Mattered in 2006, as chosen by the *Marketing* editorial team, are listed in the announcement ad on pages two and three.

The Nov. 6/13 edition of *Marketing* will feature articles on the 18 Agencies that Mattered, the winners of the 2006 Digital Marketing Awards, and our fall report on television.

The Nov. 20/27 edition will profile the 17 Marketers that Mattered, and also include the 2006 Media Innovation Awards showcase and a special report on digital marketing.

The Dec. 4 edition will feature our Marketer of the Year and Agency of the Year profiles as well as our last Media+ report of the year. *Marketing's* final issue of the year will be published Dec. 11/18.

Those issues, of course, will also include much more material, including our regular columnists and departments.

As always, *Marketing Daily*—which is free to all subscribers—will continue to come out each morning with breaking news relevant to Canada's marketing, agency and media industries.

—STAN SUTTER, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

[LETTERS]

What, exactly, is Menzies' point?

Re: David Menzies' column "If it's gay, it's gotta be good," Sept. 25, p. 15.

I'm sorry, but what, exactly, is David Menzies' point? So Canadian marketers have jumped on the gay targeting bandwagon. So what? It's certainly a refreshing change from being ignored, denied and excluded. Ever tried to fill out a loan application in a same-sex relationship? Or been told by

a car dealer, "Oh, sorry, I was waiting for your husband to get here?" And don't delude yourself that extreme prejudice and hate against homosexuality doesn't still exist in Canada.

What's not clear to me is the reason for the nasty tone. Is David Menzies jealous that marketers aren't focused 100% on white, straight guys? Or is he, in fact, like many people

who hide their lingering discomfort or disapproval of homosexuality behind a politically correct whitewash of "Oh, I'm OK with gay people. I just wish they wouldn't flaunt it." In other words, stay on the sidelines, behind closed doors, and in the closet where I can pretend you don't exist.

A corporate logo on a Gay Pride float may be a sign of progress but atti-

tudes like Mr. Menzies' are signs of just how far we still have to go.

Nancy Evans
Toronto

The full versions of these and other recent letters are posted at marketingmag.ca.

Marketing welcomes your letters.

Mail: One Mount Pleasant Rd., 7th Floor
Toronto, ON M4Y 2Y5

E-mail: stan.sutter@marketingmag.rogers.com