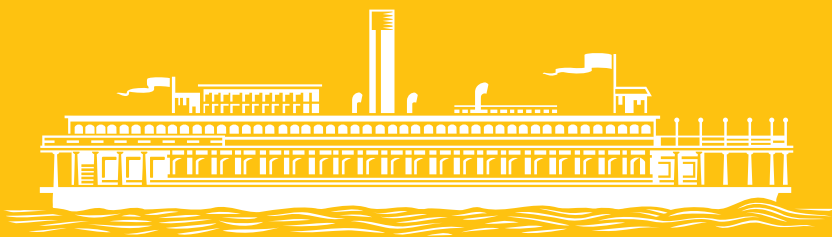


Does your brand have  
portability potential?  
by Allen Adamson  
*Advertising Age*  
23 July 2007



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# Does your brand have portability potential?

## Third-screen branding poses its own unique set of challenges

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**For all intents and purposes, the launch of Apple's revolutionary iPhone—complete with folks lining up and even sleeping on sidewalks in anticipation—heralded a new age of portability.**

The iPhone and all other soon-to-be-launched mobile phone-centric devices are not simply about the portable phoning capability (*so yesterday*). They're about the portable Internet; portable entertainment; portable news; weather and sports; portable retailing; and, yes, the opportunity for portable branding.

The iPhone and its competitors shouldn't be thought of as just another mobile calling trend in any way, shape, or form. This technology channel shouldn't even be thought of as just another line on the media budget; that would also be a vast underestimation. Rather, it should be considered part of a major cultural shift in consumer behavior and consumer empowerment.

### **Consumer demand**

That's because these third-screen devices enable portable, personalized, boundary-less access to everything and anything of interest to anyone and everyone. And while the technology itself has been the enabler, it's consumer demand for greater control, connectivity, and, yes, self-expression and fun that have been the real drivers in the seismic shift. Talk about I-communications (with a capital "I").

As consumers adopt and adapt to the latest third-screen devices, and as brand organizations in every category from automobiles to military recruitment begin to "port" their branding, they need to think strategically about their brands in terms of portability potential. They must look at their brands from the perspective of those looking at the third screen.

Looking at my own third screen, and knowing what I know about branding in general, I'd like to offer four things to keep in mind should you want to port a brand communication to this newest mobile space.



### 1. It's simpler if your brand is rooted in a simple idea

Brand-attention disorder has been with us for a long time. Portability just adds another dimension.

TV ads, Internet ads, banners, and pop-ups are all shown no mercy in equal measure. Consumers can click off, over, or out anytime they like, and they like to do it quite often.

But if you think it's hard to get your brand promise across in 60 seconds, think about what two seconds means—on a small screen, no less.

Mobile interfaces are much simpler, and a lot of what consumers do with them is much more immediate than what they do with a PC. Their criteria for the experience, therefore, will be how fast and how easy it is.

The brands that succeed in porting branding to the third screen will be those based on a simple, compelling and relevant idea to begin with—an idea that has long resonated with consumers and on which the ported communication is strategically aligned. Philips, for example, the electronics company with the simple idea that its products are designed for “sense and simplicity,” brings this idea to life in its mobile branding.

It offers a very sensible and simple mobile-based concierge service. When visiting any one of a number of major cities, the user types a special code into the Philips mobile device and a concierge ports back a list of not-to-be-missed restaurants, shops, and entertainment venues.

The premise of my book, *BrandSimple*, is that the most powerful brands in the world are based on ideas that are simple for consumers to understand. Given its size and the consumers' expectations, simple is even more important on the third screen.

### 2. Text rules

AAMOF MOS

(As a matter of fact, mother over shoulder.)

NVM BLNT

(Never mind. Better luck next time.)

The generation that was brought up on quick-cut video is now making quick work of words-only communication. These younger consumers are likely to text, email and instant message more than they talk on the phone. So much for calling features.

Word-driven messaging that might have not been cool in traditional branding channels is way cool in mobile media—for all ages. Brands that understand this will be best positioned to compete in the text-based communication venue.

The Air Force, for example, knowing it would reach a text-savvy audience at a NASCAR event in Texas, extended its “Do Something Amazing” campaign to the mobile arena. Bluetooth transmitters set up around the racetrack relayed text messages to Bluetooth-enabled phones inviting recipients to stop by the Air Force recruiting booth at the site. This initiative was successful enough to persuade the Air Force to make it part of its continuing recruitment efforts.

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### 3. Interactivity is key

If there's ever been a branding space meant for interactivity, it's the mobile space. As I said earlier, consumer demand for self-expression and involvement has never been greater, and it's only increasing. People have shown they like to be part of the experience—not apart from it—and they're empowered by immediate feedback.

The most successful third-screen branders will be those who can use interactivity in innovative ways and link it to their brand promises.

After Hurricane Katrina, Verizon and the Red Cross created a way to immediately donate money by texting “2help” and pressing the send button. Text voting has also been a huge factor in the successful branding of “American Idol.” Reinforcing the specific characteristics of a brand's personality through interactivity is one of the biggest opportunities for branding on the third screen.

### 4. It's (very) personal

Consumers have a different relationship with their mobile devices than they do with other technology; they consider them an extension of their personality (just listen to the variety of ringtones heard on city streets).

Unlike TVs and PCs, which may be shared with other family members, a cell phone is personal space. As such, tolerance of unwanted content is nil. And while consumers have shown some interest in accepting advertising in exchange for freebies, the payback has to be something they truly value.

Brands that are invited in will provide consumers with what they want, not interrupt them with content they don't want. Adidas was aware of this when it created a third-screen component of its campaign surrounding the NBA All-Star Week in Las Vegas. The brand designed a mobile experience alerting fans to where they could catch sight of players en route to hotels or games and letting them know about special events and promotions.

Bottom line: Mobile space is personal space, so if you have something to say, make it personally relevant.

While we're still in the early stages of this age of portability, smart brands are not sitting on the sidelines waiting for the perfect time to jump in. As quickly as things change, there will never be a perfect time.

Technological evolution is a redundant term. Brands that understand this, that begin to experiment with programs that leverage existing and new technology will be ahead of the curve.

Although I can't imagine myself sleeping on the sidewalk lying in wait for anything new and improved, the technology eventually will become mainstream, and we'll all adopt to the third screen the way we adapted to the first and second.

If you've got branding to port to this space, examine its portability potential now. Asleep at the interface, your brand will be left behind. ■

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