

# DDB<sup>o</sup>



## Swarm Marketing

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**Building Influential Brands with Conviction,  
Collaboration and Creativity**

The **Yellow** Papers Series

**Watch a school of fish swim. They have no leader. No one is telling them what to do. Instead they are paying close attention to the fish next to them, in order to move at exactly the same time in exactly the same direction.**

**This type of swarm behavior defies convention. Animal groups moving together as one without ever being told what to do.**

**The comparison of swarm behavior to human interaction has become increasingly relevant. Digital technology has made it possible for human communities to behave like swarms of our own. In social networking communities, the voice of one can quickly become the voice of one-hundred or one-million. There are no geographic borders, no boundaries and no limits.**

**The communities – and how they form, interact and disperse – are irrevocably changing the landscape for marketers and how we communicate. Increasingly we are being charged with delivering ideas that engage and influence swarms – a world of living, breathing, and highly responsive human communities.**



#### **Chuck Brymer, President and CEO, DDB Worldwide**

As the CEO of DDB Worldwide, Chuck oversees one of the world's great brands in the field of marketing and communications. DDB has over 200 offices in 96 countries and is renowned internationally for its extraordinary creativity across a broad array of media channels. Formerly head of Interbrand Group, the world's largest branding and design consultancy, Chuck is one of the foremost experts on branding, corporate identity, and advertising. With BusinessWeek, he created the annual ranking of 'The Best Global Brands'. He also created the highly regarded brandchannel.com, the leading online exchange about brands and branding. He is a frequent speaker on the future of advertising and has been featured in numerous articles on the subject.

**Look for Chuck Brymer's book on swarm marketing and how to build influential brands available in Autumn, 2008 from Palgrave-MacMillan.**

#### **Why we have become a digital swarm**

Ants are not the smartest creatures in the world. They basically search for food and follow the scents other ants leave behind. But put a million of them together in a colony and they form complex and efficient super highways, often using their bodies to build bridges over obstacles. They have a collective intelligence that lets them flock to resources or flee from danger.

Today we are becoming a human swarm linked by digital social networks. For example, picture a group of 1,200 or so volunteers. Most of them do not know or talk to each other. No one pays them or tells them what to do. But they too follow simple rules, without a leader, and in the process create much of the content of Wikipedia, one of the ten most visited sites on the Internet.

Now think about the relationship between consumers and your brand. What happens when they decide to buy something nowadays? Twenty years ago they listened to your ad. Today they check consumer ratings on Amazon, get feeds from their favorite blogs, and tap into their social networks on Facebook or MySpace. Just like swarms of animals in nature, human digital swarms follow simple rules that can quickly lead them to flock toward – or flee from – your brand. Here is why they will change the way we look at mass marketing:

#### **Swarms move fast**

Humans once sat in front of their televisions and socialized in small groups. Now they share information with 40 friends in their social network or 140 people on their blog feed, who then may each pass it on to 140 more. For example, when we release a viral video for a client that engages consumers, it can reach a million or more people rapidly, efficiently and effectively.

#### **Swarms are highly connected**

According to figures from our Tribal DDB subsidiary, over 80 percent of students and 80 percent of professionals use social networking sites, 40 percent post to them at least weekly, and one-third of all humankind now has wireless access. People now turn to these networks the same way that ants follow their scents.

#### **Swarms flock to the same place**

According to Princeton biologist Dr. Iain Couzin, "If you put two food sources near a group of ants, it just takes a few ants to tip the balance toward one of them, and then the whole swarm moves towards it." The same thing is happening as human swarms flock toward brands. Amazon doesn't just sell more books than its nearest competitor's website, they sell a lot more. The Apple iPod, which didn't exist at the beginning of this decade, now represents close to three quarters of the market for digital music players. And despite hundreds of search engines, two of every three internet searches is on Google.

**Marketing to the swarm**

For decades we marketed to people as a herd: sending advertising messages to individuals in front of their televisions and magazines hoping to reach a percentage of them. Later we added viral marketing, where messages spread from person to person like the outbreak of an epidemic. Today, we are dealing with a swarm where people gather and deposit information with the collective intelligence of an entire social network.

The human swarm phenomenon is fundamentally changing marketing, because instead of just relying on authority figures, ‘expert sources,’ mainstream media and mass advertising, people are relying on members of their own swarm – such as friends, family, peers, and fellow online community members – to guide their decisions.

This means that we control our brands, but we no longer completely control our brand message. Today what a mother in Minneapolis or a businessman in Bangladesh thinks of your brand now carries equal weight with the best-crafted marketing strategy. We are entering an age of reference, not deference.

This also means speed is the new ‘big’: instead of just blindly broadcasting our messages to mass markets, we are thinking about how to reach a small number of swarm influencers who spread these messages quickly. For example, our edgy viral video ad for the Philips Norelco Bodygroom helped them capture 70 percent of the market very quickly, while spending less than the typical cost of a US residence – and studies showed that nearly half of those who saw this ad forwarded it to others.

The good news is that brands that engage the swarm can far outperform those who still speak to the herd: look at Google and Facebook, whose market capitalization mushroomed to eclipse some of history’s most established brands. This trend will move marketing from our comfortable, traditional niche to a much bigger and brighter world: one built around sustainable brand communities that flock toward us in response to seemingly small, but incredibly meaningful efforts.

**Fig 1 Viral marketing versus the spread of information through a swarm, where social networks accelerate the rate of contact**



### **Engaging the swarm: The 3 C's**

Not that long ago, people would create products and services and then talk with people like us to create advertising for them. Today, your brand has to engage consumers and become a community so that the swarm flocks toward you.

Notably, the traits that create a strong brand for the herd are even more important for marketing to the swarm. For example, when Radiohead released its album *In Rainbows* directly to fans online and later topped the CD charts with it, they built on a strong brand identity that other 'viral video' artists could not capitalize on. Similarly, when you look at the top 100 websites today, they are mostly either strong traditional brands or swarm tools like search engines and social networking sites.

We see the critical competencies for the swarm marketing era in terms of what we call the '3 C's':

### **Conviction**

I believe that behind every brand is a great idea. All brands start in the same place, with the personal vision and conviction of the marketers behind them: like people, the best ones have always stood for something. They are authentic, consistent, and true to themselves, and people follow them. Whether it is Harley Davidson's creed of freedom and individuality, or Volkswagen's image of practicality and brains over brawn, swarms flock toward strong brands.

### **Collaboration**

Product marketing is increasingly being replaced by interactive brand communities. Customers now tell Dell Computer what the next system will be on their production line. Communities sit down with McDonalds to co-create what the architecture of their next restaurant will look like. Companies like Nike are bringing virtual communities of runners together in the real world. Today swarm members want you to link them with your brand and demand meaningful interaction with each other.

### **Creativity**

Creativity has always been a constant in advertising and marketing, but its nature must change in an era of distributed mass consumer communities. Today we must learn to think like the swarm, and the creative process must evolve to engage communities and not just consumers. Content, message and channel are all part of the same strategy and conversation that is then delivered as creatively as possible.

Ultimately the swarm decides whether your brand is a peer or a predator, and does so quickly and disruptively. In nature it only takes a small number of ants to send the colony swarming toward a food source, or few fish to send the whole school fleeing from a predator. Even the neurons in our own brains swarm around small amounts of input. Likewise, digital human swarms flock or flee based on the information left behind by a few early adopters in their social network. Since you only control part of this information, it will become more critical than ever to engage the people who influence swarm communities.

Above all, marketing can no longer be a separate function, nor can it remain a one-way form of communication. Today, the swarm must become part of the conversation that surrounds your products, your services, and your marketing – and marketing itself must become a collaborative process that draws from the intelligence of this swarm. Herds are a one-way relationship and conversation: swarms require dialogue and participation.

### **Flocking in formation: Putting swarm marketing in action**

We are just starting to scratch the surface of using marketing to influence the swarm. In fact, much of the research on what factors influence swarms is still emerging as we speak. But what we are learning is already having a powerful influence on how we leverage human digital swarms around strong brands. Here are some examples:

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- As one of the sponsors of the LiveEarth concert, Philips had an ecological challenge for visitors to the streaming concert website: they helped people to figure how much carbon dioxide they could save by switching to their compact fluorescent lightbulbs, and asked them to pledge to do so – and to tell their friends. By flying alongside the swarm and engaging it, they sold an estimated 3 million lightbulbs.
  - Volkswagen sought to reload its image in Germany as “the people’s car” with a video blog of coarse German everyman Horst Schlämmer’s attempts to get a driver’s license and buy a car. It soon became one of the top blogs in Germany, and his exploits were followed closely by the German print and broadcast media. It wasn’t until well after people got hooked on the story that they realized that Volkswagen was sponsoring it, and by the time Horst got his license VW had a massive following.
  - McDonald’s helped solidify its position as one of the largest restaurant chains in China by engaging its customers, including a promotion where over 6,000 people uploaded videos of themselves cheering on China in the 2008 Olympics, and a blog where people can interact with Professor Super Savings, a genius who is always “proving” how the best way to spend a small amount of money is on their Super Savings menu. More than 19 million unique visitors have now seen these online.
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These cases highlight what is different about swarm marketing. Instead of just advertising to people, there is something there to engage the swarm. Instead of targeting the masses, they are focused on niches. Some of these campaigns are substantially less expensive than traditional marketing campaigns. All of them get swarm members interacting with each other. They serve as examples where a strong brand identity is the scent that attracts the swarm.

### **Where swarm marketing is leading us**

So what will swarm marketing look like in the future? We are still learning lessons about how swarms think, based on everything from biological research to human purchasing behavior. Based on what we know so far, here are some of the changes I see coming:

#### **Creating communities**

How would you like to be able to step on a subway car and have your mobile phone show you what other riders share your interests? This is just one of many ideas being discussed as social networks continue to evolve. As technology blurs the difference between these networks and real life, your brand and your swarm of customers will be getting closer than ever.

#### **Targeting swarm influencers**

As little as 1 percent of a population – for example, 3 million people in the United States – can launch a movement or business market. As a result we are increasingly targeting the few who can influence the many, with efforts ranging from creating thought leadership to advocacy within the blogosphere and social networking community.

#### **Learning what attracts a swarm**

To have a swarm flock toward you, your mindset needs to shift from brand message to brand advocacy. Instead of just creating desire for your products and services, we need to create information – and often entertainment – that swarm members will post or send to each other.

### **Changing what we measure**

Standard measures of marketing effectiveness don't apply when you are influencing a swarm. At DDB, we are currently developing an influence index that more accurately measures the life cycle effects of how your efforts spread throughout the swarm and how your brand grows in influence.

The relationship between you and the swarm can exist at several levels. At one level, you may track and listen to what its collective intelligence tells you. At another level, the swarm may become a central part of your business model, where customers have a direct say in what you do. At still another level, you may become an agent for linking entire swarm communities together.

Finally, your internal stakeholders are a very important part of this dialogue. In particular, we see the role of the chief marketing officer evolving to become a 'chief collaboration officer' who manages the growing number of touch points among your brand, your organization, and the swarm of your brand collaboration.

### Summing up

We see a new era for the future of marketing: one that will take us from herds of consumers to swarms of engaged brand advocates. This era will leverage social networks and Web 2.0 to move us from brand messages to true brand communities.

Herd marketing still works and will always have its place. The return on investment for traditional marketing expenditures is still there. And the value of a strong brand is more important than ever.

At the same time, influencing a swarm creates powerful leverage for strong brands. The collective intelligence of the swarm has led in the past to many of society's great ideas, ranging from government to the Internet. In the future, it will continue to change the way people interact with the products and services they buy.

This revolution in marketing springs from the behavior of ant colonies, flocks of birds, and schools of fish, but has its roots in digital technology and human needs. Its impact goes far beyond marketing into the evolution of society as a whole. In my view, swarm marketing will become the new standard for a globally interconnected world.

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have its place.**

**DDB Worldwide Communications Group Inc ([www.ddb.com](http://www.ddb.com)) is one of the world's largest and most influential advertising and marketing services network. With more than 200 offices in over 90 countries, DDB provides creative business solutions by its proprietary philosophy and process built upon the goal of influence. DDB and its marketing partners create and deliver unique, enduring, and powerful brand experiences for competitive advantage.**

DDB is excited by ideas. We invite you to visit our website to share yours and keep abreast of ours. We believe that creativity is the most powerful force in business and that ideas get sharper with more minds rubbing against them.

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