

# Getting Active

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Watching our favourite shows is no longer a passive experience, and brands need to create content that engages if they want consumers to talk about their ads.

Once upon a time, TV was a passive experience. You sat on the sofa and watched. No longer.

Check your Twitter feed at a concert on a Saturday night or during a big sports match and you can see what your friends are thinking about the real-time action. Now the biggest events occur as much in the Twittersphere as they do on the big screens in our living rooms.

It's the use of second screens, particularly mobile – not connected TV, as some forecasted

– that has made the traditional distinction between lean-back TV entertainment and lean-forward interaction online irrelevant.

Location, too, has become unimportant. While the “social” aspect of TV watching was predicated on the other people in the room with us (or at the water cooler the next day), now many of us instantly activate our viewing via status updates on our mobiles. Apps, video calling and texting have also become increasingly important: YouGov research in the UK found that 43% of consumers had commented or discussed a TV show with people based elsewhere. Among women, it was one in two.

The shift from active to passive changes two things: the way broadcasters market their programmes and the way brands leverage event TV.

#### Actions for Broadcasters

At its simplest level, this means broadcasters should make sure that all viewers use the same hashtag or @accountname when they tweet. Hence, the profusion of Twitter calls to action at the start of each programme.

France Télévision leveraged social TV during the Eurovision Song Contest, the annual primetime showcase for Europe’s best singers, by not only tweeting live but also showing consumer tweets on an online Twitter wall during the broadcast.

Broadcasters also believe that social chatter before a programme airs will enhance viewing figures. This summer, USA Network launched six sponsored campaigns designed to provide fall viewers with additional content, including new episodes, behind-the-scenes films and a crowd-sourced cross-country treasure hunt.

Others have created whole social platforms designed to take the experience even further. Pepsi leveraged its sponsorship of the X Factor in the US by creating Pepsi Sound Off, to allow fans of the show to interact with each other online. Users log on to Sound Off using their existing Facebook or Twitter accounts, and have the option to communicate there or share their thoughts across other social media platforms.

The aim of such social TV campaign is to build up the chatter ahead of the broadcast.

### Actions for Advertisers

Such techniques are also being applied by advertisers with their own content to promote. Great creative is no longer unveiled in the middle break of the Champions League Final or during the Super Bowl: instead, a complex pre-game release programme helps spread the excitement.

For the launch of the Passat in the US in 2011, VW's Super Bowl ad was released on YouTube a few days before the game. By seeding the spot and harnessing the buzz about Super Bowl ads, it became the highest rated video of all time in the global Autos & Vehicles Category. Online viewing has become a massive driver of campaign reach, much like an airing on TV.

Other brands are taking such a process further by trying to be the place where consumers talk about all TV, not just a single show.

A good example is Orange, which has brought the gaming mechanics of Foursquare to the field via a new social TV app called TVcheck. The app, which has been launched in France and the UK, enables users to check in to their favourite TV programmes and connect with friends, unlock games, earn badges and chat about favourite programmes on social networks.

TVcheck uses the iPhone camera to recognise what show the user is watching and automatically checks in the user. Other examples of social TV apps include Zeebox and IntoNow.

### Fundamental changes to marketing

Such examples showcase two fundamental changes in marketing and the way brands use TV, in particular. First, the goals have changed – it's not so much about the ad anymore, it's about the social engagement. Get the latter right and people will find your ad.

Second, creating great content ideas is just the start of the engagement journey. The way you seed that content and create incentives for consumers to engage with it is as important as the content itself.

Brands need to become more focused on content (and not just 30-second slices of content), and invest in the specialist resources needed to exploit the opportunities that stem from the online activation of TV. Social media enables brands to extend the brand experience, but they need to recognise that they can only push content that is relevant to their audiences.

Content will ultimately dominate the future communications landscape, but brands and broadcasters must simultaneously focus on the need to add value to any social experience.

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