

Systems Thinking: A World in which an Audit is Good

CONNECTIONS STRATEGY SYSTEMS THINKING

BY ROB STEVENS, STRATEGY DIRECTOR, MEDIACOM WORLDWIDE 15 DEC 2014

Systems are complex, but systems thinking doesn't have to be. MediaCom's Connected System Audit is an elegant tool that makes applying systems thinking to brands simple and accessible, says Rob Stevens, Strategy Director. By Rob Stevens, Strategy Director, MediaCom Worldwide

We've discussed the importance of the elements, interconnections, flows and feedback loops that make up your marketing communications system, but have we armed you with the tools you need to really understand them and take action?

Allow me to introduce you to the Connected System Audit (CSA).

When MediaCom developed the CSA our thinking was that marketing is already hard enough; how could we clarify the systems thinking process rather than add layers of complexity?

The answer, we believe, is the CSA, which breaks the system down into its basic components: not by individual media silos, but by the system's core principles and the elements that make up its DNA.

The CSA provides a holistic assessment of a brand's communications system and identifies any gaps across paid, owned and earned media across in four key areas:

Channel

How media is selected and utilized to reach audiences and deliver against objectives

Content

What and how messaging is produced and deployed across the system

Connection

How system components are linked together to guide consumers toward intended destinations

Consistency

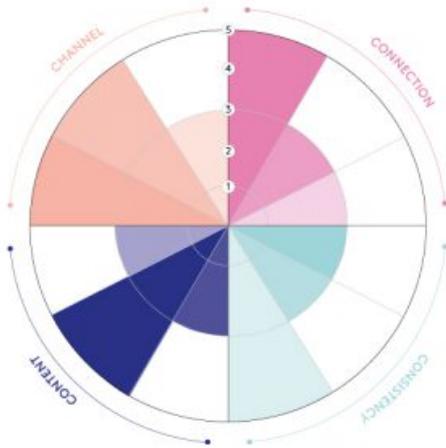
How consistently communications are delivered across the system and over time

The CSA was developed specifically to assess how well a brand's communications system is functioning and where the most significant opportunities for improvement lie.

It involves scoring system performance against a series of questions, each of which

correspond to a colored “wedge” on the CSA wheel.

The result is a highly visual summary of system performance that provides a framework able to quickly highlight areas of weakness and identify areas for improvement.



To give you an idea of how we build a CSA, here are 12 broad level areas of interest we explore when working with a client:

Channel Mix

1. Is the channel mix effectively reaching the target audience and delivering against the client’s business goals?

Channel Selection

2. Is the station/title/site selection within the channel mix appropriate?

Mobile Strategy

3. Is there an effective use of mobile touchpoints?

Consumer Engagement

4. Is the content engaging and relevant for the target audience?

Content Accessibility

5. Is the content seeded and promoted in a way that ensures it will reach its target?

Platform and Touchpoint Relevance

6. Is the content being effectively adapted across touchpoints, platforms and screens?

Calls to Action

7. Does every channel have an appropriate call to action?

Links and Destinations

8. Do all touchpoints link logically to facilitate the consumer journey?

Social Connections

9. Are the right social channels being used and do they connect effectively with consumers?

Single Minded

10. Are all on- and offline touchpoints working toward an overall strategic goal?

Always On

11. Do the touchpoints sustain a continuous brand presence across paid, owned and earned channels?

Campaign Commitment

12. Do the touchpoints maintain a long-term campaign message or do they frequently change direction?

When we conduct the full and complete CSA evaluation for a brand, we actually adopt a deeper forensic methodology that enables us to audit every single element of the system, asking many more detailed questions and drawing from a myriad of data points and sources that can help inform and support the scoring system.

But even on your own, the above questions provide an excellent start. Obviously, they can't provide the kind of comprehensive overview that we can achieve when using the tool properly, but your answers may point you toward insights that a full CSA could tease out in more detail.

Try answering them now.

To help, we've printed two blank CSA forms. [Download them here.](#)

On the first form, we suggest you score your own brand across the 12 CSA questions. Then, if you like, you can repeat this exercise for your major competitor in the second one. Then compare and contrast. This exercise is likely to provide you with plenty of food for thought, and it may cause one area or another to pop in a way you'd not previously considered.

If you find the process rewarding and would like to find out what a real CSA can tell you about your brand's communications system, please get in touch.

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