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## The Downturn will Separate the Marketing Wheat from the Chaff

Posted At : October 15, 2008 4:53 PM | Posted By : Paul Holmes

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Gini Dietrich, via a comment to an earlier post and an [item](#) at her firm's Fight Against Destructive Spin blog, draws my attention to a [Wall Street Journal article](#) reporting that "experimental" marketing activities--a host of digital services including web video, mobile marketing, and video game advertising--"are among the first to hit the cutting room floor" and says many companies are going back to traditional advertising.

This dovetails with a point I made at a presentation in Madrid yesterday. In tough times such as these, some companies--smart, sophisticated companies, confident in their understanding of digital and social media--are going to accelerate the shift of resources out of traditional advertising and into areas that can deliver greater return-on-investment.

But some less sophisticated companies--those that have been spending money on social and digital media to make themselves seem "cool" and "hip," who haven't actually measured ROI, who lack either confidence or courage--are going to retreat to what they know best, which is what Gini calls "tried and true advertising." (I'd agree that it's been tried.)

Unfortunately--please forgive the cynicism--there are a lot more unsophisticated marketers out there than sophisticated marketers, so I wouldn't be surprised to see some shift of resources back into the traditional 30-second commercial.

All that means is that smart, savvy marketers, who actually want to engage with their customers (and other stakeholders) will be in a position to get far greater bang for their buck, and therefore seize a competitive advantage over their less adventurous peers. Public relations agencies need to make the case that when times are tough and consumers are squeezing every nickel, bombarding them with one way "buy more stuff" messages is unlikely to prove effective. They need to show clients how they can use digital and social media (and traditional PR too) to forge real relationships with their customers, to provide them with resources they can use to navigate tough times (like the financial education programs described in [this New York Times article](#)).

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Gini is right: it is time for public relations to take a more central role in brand and communications strategy, and a larger share of clients' budgets.

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

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