

Why marketers should pay attention to widgets

By [Jon Bishop](#)

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A what? This is the common response I receive when planting a seed with my marketing counterparts about the marketing benefits of widgets. I don't blame my non-technically inclined colleagues for feeling confused about such things, mind you, as the Internet is changing and growing at such a rapid rate that it makes it hard to understand what is worth knowing about and what will disappear in a few months.



Widgets are one of these new developments that will stick around for the foreseeable future and has definite marketing benefits, so they are worth getting to know.

What is a widget?

So you're an 'old school' marketer, still marveling at the mind reading abilities of predictive text but you deliver solid results via traditional print, media and even web campaigns (which also took a bit of convincing a few years ago) and you want to know what this widget thing is all about, so you ask your local techie to explain and his response is laced with sleep-inducing jargon and buzzwords (which I will underline) sounding something like this:

“ A widget is a string of code that you can embed on any blog or similar platform on the Internet. The content is appealing to the viewer if it is dynamic and this will encourage him to link-share or even to embed it in his blog or whichever web presence platform he chooses, creating viral spread opportunities. ”

They'll probably then rattle off about why Firefox is better than Explorer and why Macs are pretentious etc etc.

So you need to ask yourself: “Do I really need to know the technicalities behind widgets or do I just need to know their marketing benefits and how I can include it in my campaign?”

Put it this way: do you know the technical side of designing a brochure (hi-res images, paths, vectors, CMYK, DPI etc) or do you just ask your agency to design a killer brochure that really sells your product?

Explain

I'm sure you'll appreciate it if I explain a widget in a way a marketer will understand: You know when you walk into Edgars and there's a bright yellow, funky MTN-branded stall with the latest greatest cellphones (complete with colour screens and mind reading abilities) on display front and centre? That's a widget!

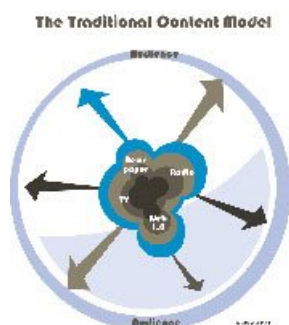
Now the bright yellow stall may attract your attention, but what makes you go over and interact is the beautiful phones on display. That's the dynamic content that the techies were referring to. Then you pull into CNA on the other side of the mall and there's the exact same bright yellow stall packed with funky phones. That's the viral spread bit!

So take this analogy online, and you realise that you can put your brand on other people's websites, blogs, Facebook and even users' desktops where your audience really is. Best of all, you can track the usage, and sales that it generates and can therefore determine a value for those three letters that strike fear into the heart of all marketers: ROI.

Paradigm shift

The truth that marketers need to accept is that the web has entered a paradigm shift which the techies are calling Web 2.0 and as a result, your target audience is shifting or already has shifted away from traditional media such as TV, newspapers and old school websites and spend most of their time with services that bring them the content they want, such as Facebook and Youtube. This shift has also resulted in a dramatic change to general content delivery models:

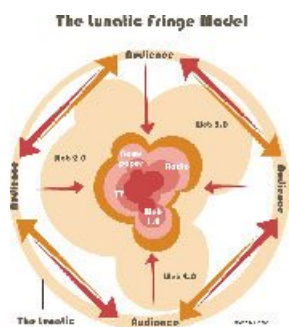
Figure 1 is a simple overview of how content was delivered to an audience before Web 2.0. Basically, if you want someone to know about your brand/product you advertise centrally on TV stations, websites, newspapers and magazines that have large readerships. So the content is owned centrally and is pushed outwards to the audience, giving all the control and influence to big media companies and the advertisers with big enough budgets to buy a piece of that prime space.



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Figure 2 is the content model after the advent of Web 2.0 that I have called the 'Lunatic Fringe Model', mainly to grab attention but also to draw to the fact that content movement now sits on the fringes of the model, within your audience, being passed from one friend to another and bypassing the traditional media that you are spending so much money on.

This also puts influence squarely on the shoulders of the consumers as they decide where, how and from whom they get their information. In fact [Shel Holtz](#), a respected new media practitioner, states that 62% of the content consumed by people born after 1980 is created by someone they know [and therefore not necessarily where you are currently advertising], for example reading friend's profiles on Facebook or reading a blog of someone they met online.



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It is this shift that has helped position widgets as a major new platform for branding and marketing. Widgets allow you to do one creative and, if executed well and according to the rules, will spread itself virally to your niche within the 'lunatic fringe'. No other media can claim to do this, not even email marketing.

I'm so excited, I want one now!

My strong recommendation is to not run down to the IT department and insist they whack up a widget for you, as the coding is the easy, least effective part. You need to take this platform seriously, just like you do with all your other platforms. Find an agency that understands 'the rules of good widgeting' and what makes people want to share the widget. Remember that you are playing in a space where the end user holds all the influence so you have to pander to their needs and rules. widgets can also be integrated into your current campaigns and be another affective platform to touch your audience..

Some non-online based companies that are using widgets

[VH1](#), [National Geographic](#), [Motorola](#), [BMW](#)

Additional reading:

Read Write Web has a very detailed article on widgets and gives some good examples, but is a bit techie:

www.readwriteweb.com/archives/world_wide_web_of_widgets.php

Why Widgets are worth Watching (Imedia Connection):

www.imediaconnection.com/content/18254.asp

Widget Platforms:

[Clearsprings](#)

[Gigya](#)

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