

Making new consumer connections

 By [Mike Abel](#)

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Hi there. My name is Mike and I am a rejuvenile. You can even call me an adultescent if you wish. I didn't know these terms until recently, when an old friend of mine sent me a brilliant article which she had written, on the demand for certain cupcakes in New York. In this piece she uses these terms to underpin the reason for the said demand. I stole them. The words, not the cupcakes.

I'm told that these two new descriptors, as one might imagine, refer to the kid-in-the-adult. I am therefore relieved at my steadfast refusal, in part, to give up "childish things" because, come to think of it, there's a lot of stuff that we, as marketers, astonishingly, don't know. And without a childlike-passion and curiosity for learning and discovering, the new Web 2.0 world would be a very scary place.

Anthony, my five-week old son, wanted to meet his uncle, aunt and cousins. We live in Cape Town, South Africa and they live in Auckland, New Zealand. And so they met up one Sunday morning, on video Skype. There was lots of oohing and aahing, a bit of spittle on my fancy new keyboard and we also met my brother's Labradoodle.

Happening very fast

Another new thing. A combo-deal of a Labrador and a Poodle. You see, it's all happening very fast. So, whilst chatting, I saved some shots of the curly black dog and the dribbling Anthony, down-sized the screen mid conversation, and shot the pics off to the rest of my connected inner-circle. A few minutes later, while still talking to the Kiwis, a mail came through, commenting on how cute my son was but expressing much greater interest in the puppy.

My wireless mouse was moving across the mouse pad. Not an ordinary mouse pad. You see, we were in London a few months ago, my wife and I, having a last bit of fun before our third son's arrival, which we knew would take us right back to the incarceration of Planet Nappy. One forgets - or not.

Anyway, back to the mouse pad. So here we were at Hamleys, looking for gifts for the older siblings and we see that you can personalise your mouse pad with a family photo. They have been doing this for quite a while. I needed a new pad for my study and so I asked if I could Bluetooth them a photo from my cellphone taken last year, in the Seychelles, of my boys playing on the beach. Forty five minutes later, we walked out with this high-quality picture pad.

Now let me categorically state that I am not a techie. I don't even know how to write up PowerPoint slides, only how to show them. I am of the acetate on the overhead projector generation and other than the odd bulb blowing, I maintain that this is a much more reliable method. But fortunately technology hasn't allowed me to remain stuck with these archaic tools and so

one is forced to adapt. I managed to install a wireless ADSL line in my home the other day, which was easier than working my lawnmower.

It's about being versatile

Marketing and communications can be much like this today. About the need to understand the various new channels and opportunities for reaching and connecting with consumers. It is about being versatile. It is also much less about the what and far more about the how. Information, today, flows effortlessly.

People gravitate, through choice, towards what they are interested in. The push method, particularly, when it comes to brand-building, is largely dead and one needs to master fly-fishing. A bit of shimmer, sparkle and movement in the water and then let the fish come to you.

In the digital and mobile worlds of today, we create our own reality. The emphasis is largely on joy and play. It is up-beat, quick, instant and results-orientated. The "want it-get it" generation. You enjoy the engagement, you stick with it. You don't like it, you dump it. Look at the focus on gaming, blogospheres, and folksonomies. The MySpaces and YouTubes, the Facebooks and Googles. It's only about inter-personal connection, the sharing of thoughts and ideas and fun. It the human condition at its best. The need to feel heard, to share, to think, to laugh, to connect. It is a world of choice and options. The barriers to entry are extremely low and the potential upsides, exponential. In this world you can try and fail and try something else, until it takes.

Not digitally-sussed

When I get home tonight, I will need to spend 15 minutes on Club Penguin (www.clubpenguin.com) with my seven-year old. He has a personalised avatar penguin that solves mysteries and connects with other penguins around the globe. He also wears a Club Penguin cap which he bought from their virtual store. My five-year old will show me his latest Mr Men characters that he has developed himself on the digital Mr Men World. He wants to create his own characters, not the ones just in the books. These are not digitally-sussed children.

They are, simply, today's "digital natives".

So, be they young adults or kids, these are our consumers of today and it is a wonderful and exciting challenge to reach them. But to do so, we need to meet them in a fun, light and engaging way and in their worlds. We need to provide an accessible and non-paternalistic canvas for creating, personalising and transacting. It is a world of possibilities and fresh conversations. It's a time to leave the lectern and to join the audience.

ABOUT MIKE ABEL

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