

eMarketing: exciting times, surprises predicted

 By [Rob Stokes](#)

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In such turbulent times, who would dare make a prediction on what the future holds? Interestingly, I find a great deal of similarities between the world today and the world we faced in 2001 with the dotcom bubble burst.



Thankfully, Quirk made it through that experience and it stands us in good stead for the tricky times we face in 2009. While I can't see a major tech bubble to burst today, we are certainly in for some exciting times and no doubt a few surprises.

Here are my predictions for the eMarketing industry in 2009. Let's hope they're not all wrong.



1. **Growth of online budget as a proportion of overall marketing budget:** this is already happening, but I think 2009 will see the biggest leap in this trend to date in SA as the online share is still tiny. Times are tough, and online marketing is cost effective and measurable. 2009 will be the year eMarketing really comes of age in SA.
2. **Industry consolidation:** as a result of the above, there will be more industry consolidation. This will not only be in the pure digital agency space. The traditional agencies will start buying web shops in the hope to remain competitive and keep a larger share of the budget. Hopefully with this we will see better, and more, on- and offline synergy in campaigns. I think this is the real marketing sweet spot at the moment.
3. **Growth of online video:** with the (hopeful) introduction of better, cheaper bandwidth [the Seacom cable coming later this year], online video will explode in SA. More people will start watching and those who are already watching will watch more of it. Marketers will want to be in that space and with that will come more viral videos, branded entertainment and video display advertising.

Video is interesting because it's the first place where the digital and traditional agencies will really collide. Everyone knows who makes the TV ads; everyone knows who does the search engine magic: where does online video sit? I say with the eMarketing agencies.

4. **Mapping::** As digital maps of SA improve, particularly on mobile devices, we will see consumers using them more. Mobile and local search marketing will become very important to many marketers.
5. **A focus on function over form (conversion/usability)::** traditionally SA web developers and online marketers have

been far more focused on look and feel over usability and conversion. As budgets tighten and marketers become savvier, they will realise that these elements are far more important for online success. We will see an increasing focus on web analytics driving website and campaign performance. Together with this, digital awards will move towards recognising campaign effectiveness rather than pure creativity.

6. **Online reputation management (ORM):** as the online consumer voice grows ever stronger, online reputation monitoring and management will move from a strategic nice-to-have, to a business critical must have. I think the [QVC saga](#) has underlined that even traditional businesses are not immune to reputation problems and if you don't have a plan in place before the problems start, they have the potential to seriously impact any business.
7. **Increasing usage of MMORPGs:** Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games are not a new trend. The likes of World of Warcraft and Second Life have been around for a while. However, in SA, the use of these platforms has been very limited due to our current bandwidth constraints.

While I'm not touting the growth of Second Life (personally I can't really see the point in it), I think the use of these platforms as a whole in SA will grow once our broadband access and cost improves.

The main impact this has on marketers is the rise of in game advertising - already an enormous industry globally and yet still infant in SA. Expect this to be firmly on the eMarketer's radar in 2009.

8. **The rise of distributed social networks:** The social network will increasingly become a commodity and with it will go Facebook's market value. If Google takes Open Social and Friend Connect where it wants to, then the web could become a truly social platform.

This has many implications for eMarketers, but whether they can do it or not is a different story. I figure if Google can add a social layer to Gmail (ie you can see your friends' friends) before Facebook adds a Gmail beating messaging application, it will win. A very interesting tussle awaits us!

I thought you might enjoy this cartoon:



[click to enlarge](#)

All that said, if Twitter launches a "connect" service, the game will become even more interesting. The ambient awareness of Twitter sets it apart from most social networks, and it's my belief that the trend is moving in this direction...

9. **2009 is the year of mobile (again!):** Haha, sorry I couldn't resist that one. I think it goes without saying that the use of mobile and more importantly the consumer's mobile sophistication will continue to grow.

ABOUT ROB STOKES

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