

Using technology to beat the crunch

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At a time when the credit crunch begins to bite across marketing departments throughout the professions, one firm believes it has the key to beating the recession whilst transforming the way we market forever.

Have you ever heard the saying, you are what you eat? Do you agree with it? If you do, just take a moment to think about what we have all been consuming mentally over the past few months. Fear? Worry? Panic? Well who can blame us? The newspapers, television channels and politicians offer little respite as they drag us from downturn to depression to disaster with each day offering some new financial terror to consume with our breakfast.

We'll don't panic. This article is not about regurgitating the same suffocating subtext. Instead my interest lies in what this "crisis" means and, more importantly, how we can benefit from it.

I may be a long suffering optimist but I have always held the belief that a crisis can be an important opportunity because, by its very nature, it creates an environment of change. We need change in order to refocus, rebalance and redirect. To this end and for many of us, how we handle the next two years may well be indicative of how successful we will be over the next decade.

After all, crisis is the great melting pot that allows us to create something brand new. The world we lived in a year ago is gone, the future is now more unpredictable than ever with some of the certainties we all took for granted - like our belief in the inherent strength of the banking system - have changed forever. This is not necessarily a bad thing and neither is the prospect of the much dreaded recession. The key is how we manage the downturn and prepare for the upside when it comes, (which it always does) and that work for sound businesses should never stop.

So it is that I turn my attention to technology and specifically to Vx by Vuture, a London based marketing and technology agency specialising in the professional services sector.

"Nothing new there" I hear you say. The difference is Vuture have spent the past few years developing a technology platform with the aim of helping businesses cut marketing costs. This is achieved by providing clients with the ability to create, manage and launch multiple websites,

email campaigns, print materials, pdfs and pitch documents without the need to use external agencies and therefore without the associated costs.

Tufan Unal Managing Director explains: "We developed the Vx platform to help clients use their existing human resources better. Our design team develops creative concepts or a client supplies us with designs from their existing agency and these are then converted into our platform allowing the client to create multiple design variations from a set of bespoke templates for web, print, email and many other communications options. Basically without needing any technical skills or experience of complicated software packages, marketers can now do all the things an agency would have done but still get agency standard results quicker, with more control and much cheaper than ever before.

"We wanted to provide speed, flexibility and cost transparency. Our clients are amazed at how quickly they can now launch a website or create an advertising program and that gives them more certainty, provides more efficiency, reduces unnecessary reliance on external agencies and helps the budget go much further."

Adam Silver, the Technology Director at Silver Levene, the London based accounting practice and past winners of the medium sized firm of the year award, is a convert to Vuture's take on the future of marketing technology.

"We operate in markets across the world, often focusing on niche industry sectors, so it is important to communicate to different audiences in different ways. The problem is this takes time and it can cost a lot. By using Vuture's marketing platform, Vx, we estimate that our costs have been cut by about 70% but our marketing activity is about to increase dramatically with the creation of integrated email and website marketing campaigns," says Silver. "Using Vx, we can now create a website that is highly designed, focusing on a specific market segment and optimised in minutes with the marginal cost of a few pounds where before it would have taken weeks and thousands of pounds. This gives us a great advantage which we intend to use over the coming months as other firms suffer."

Deborah Cauldwell, Marketing Director at UK Law firm Laytons is another advocate.

"We cannot ignore the cost savings the platform provides," says Cauldwell. "Vuture design what we want and then allow us to manipulate that design through clever technology across multiple channels. It is without a doubt the way forward."

Unsurprisingly, Vuture have won an array of clients in recent months from the international insurance group Aon through to the renowned property brand Savills. For once technology is being embraced specifically to provide tangible efficiencies. This is an approach welcomed by many organisations especially in the current climate and is perhaps the reason why Vuture won the award for innovation at this year's legal technology awards.

Nick Gilks of Aon adds: "Vx has given us a clear advantage, providing us with the ability to create client website applications quickly, easily, and with significant cost benefits. We can now co-ordinate our pitches in an innovative and differentiated way."

In a downturn, businesses are traditionally gripped with fear, cutting marketing budgets and activity only to regret the decision with hindsight when the upturn begins. Perhaps Vuture's technology platform and others like it will help the professional services marketplace avoid the mistakes of past recessions, ensuring marketing is not a casualty of panic driven cost cutting. But technology can only do so much. Without a radical re-think of strategy as a whole it is going to be difficult for many firms to make the most of the opportunities a recession provides.

Traditional marketing agencies in general will certainly need to rethink how they add value and compete effectively as industry budgets inevitably get cut and buying decisions become more price sensitive.

Necessity, it seems, will become the mother of innovation as well as invention if the supply side industry is to win out and this can only be good for all, providing a more focused, efficient and cost effective head start to a recovery when it comes.

The logo for Vuture, featuring the word "vuture" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font. The letter "o" at the end of the word is stylized as a blue circle with a white dot in the center, resembling a bubble or a sphere.

After starting his career in the financial sector, David has spent the last 17 years specialising in the field of professional services strategic management and marketing and has worked with hundreds of firms on both the client and agency side. He continues to consult directly for a wide range of businesses in the SME sector on business planning, strategic and operational business development, marketing, selling and client development and he is a Director of innovation at Vuture.