



THE DIRECT MARKETING COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA CAME TOGETHER TO TAKE BREAKFAST WITH DM GURU, DRAYTON BIRD. DIRECT AND CONFRONTATIONAL, BIRD IS NOT ONE TO PULL PUNCHES, EVEN IF SOME OF HIS TOUGHEST HITS AGAINST MARKETING COMPLACENCY LEAVE THE AUDIENCE ERUPTING WITH LAUGHTER.

**MALCOLM AULD, A LONG-TIME FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE TELLS HOW IT WAS TO BE THERE.**



Photos by Michael Thompson.

“...take an interest in as many things as possible outside marketing, which is a very dull subject.” Drayton Bird in full flight in Sydney.

# Bird ruffles feathers ... lays

**T**he Chartered Institute of Marketing named Drayton Bird one of 50 living individuals who have shaped today's marketing—other names included Kotler, Peters and Levitt.

Advertising legend, the late David Ogilvy, said Bird “knows more about direct marketing than anyone in the world.”

*Campaign* named him one of the 50 most important individuals in UK advertising during the previous 25 years—“the only universally acknowledged point of creativity in the direct marketing world.”

UK magazine *Direct Response* said his impact on UK direct marketing was “unlikely to be matched by any other individual”.

So given his reputation it was no wonder over 500 marketers turned up to hear Drayton Bird deliver the *Masters of Marketing Breakfasts* in Perth and Sydney last month, to hear his views on direct marketing and more particularly, the digital channel.

In his straightforward and none-too-subtle way, Drayton demonstrated that digital marketing is simply “*accelerated*

*direct marketing*”. Digital being a *channel* and direct being the *way* of marketing.

## Marketers haven't a clue what works

One of the highlights of both sessions was the testing exercise run by Bird with the audience—and there were numerous creative directors and marketing directors in the rooms. He showed two or three ads, e-mails, inserts or mailings that were used in different split-run tests. He asked the audience to vote for the ad they thought generated the best results.

In both cities, almost the whole audience of marketers and advertising agencies failed to guess which advertisements performed better. More than half the audience was eliminated after the first test. Perth ran out of steam faster than Sydney. And in Sydney only three from over 370 people guessed all test results correctly.

Linda Greene, the lady who did guess the final result in Sydney most accurately, is Principal of The Yellow Envelope Company and she shared with me afterwards that

they split-run test every campaign they do. She was surprised to learn that the majority of the audience didn't do any testing. Not surprisingly she runs a hugely successful business.

The point of the exercise was to demonstrate that nobody knows before an advertisement runs—be it print, mail, e-mail, banner ad, outdoor, etc—whether it will work or not. Which is why testing is so important. Nobody can predict the future, but those who test have a better chance of doing so and making more money.

## Taking it offline

I spent time with Drayton after the events and asked him a few questions about the industry.

**MA: We've been hearing a lot about the death of traditional media from digital zealots, what is your response to this prediction?**

DB: Rather like Mark Twain's on reading his obituary in a newspaper: 'Reports of my death are exaggerated.' I've been hearing



about the imminent death of direct mail and other traditional media for well over a decade. The first person to tell me, at three am in a bar, was the English creative director of an agency in Kuala Lumpur.

Like most things said by drunks in bars it was utter rubbish. Now they say 'Web 2.0 will change everything'. These claims are based on a totally flawed premise: that new media replace old. Instead they generally complement each other, which is why integrating media pays.

How come people are reading more books than ever? Still watching TV, going to movies, listening to live music? Why are direct mail volumes, with a few hiccups, still climbing? And why have e-mail response levels fallen from those early, dizzy heights?"

Marketers should learn more from history. As the American philosopher George Santayana said: 'Those who ignore the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them.' And we're already seeing people make the same old mistakes with the internet.

**MA: What are the most common mistakes made by marketers?**

DB: There are too many amateurs in a business that calls for professionalism and they fail to study the past—or to read. The amateurs "seek applause instead of sales"—Claude Hopkins said that over 80 years ago. Most forget it is just salesmanship and imagine it's a branch of the entertainment business. Entertain, by all means, but make sure it's relevant.



"Test, test and test again," is the mantra of Malcolm Auld, MAD.

**MA: What are changes have affected the marketing industry most during your career?**

DB: Most business executives forget that marketing reflects society—and is affected by the same things. Marketers need to look beyond marketing to understand what's going on in society and how they should react.

Some of the things that have had significant affect on the marketing industry over the last three decades include the computer and particularly the speed with which data is available. This has led to the development of databases. Now all organisations want databases because they realise the value they hold. They have also seen how easy it is to capture data via a website.

well for 150 years. The marketing director got another job, of course.

My own mistakes are so many it's hard to single one out. But I once bought a perfectly good newsletter and made it look like a magazine—stupid, as newsletters imply inside information and are seen as more valuable than magazines. Then I did a mailing to promote it far too near Christmas on December 12th—my only excuse is ignorance—and included the publication in the mailing, a definite no-no.

More recently trusting someone I didn't really know to revamp my website cost me three years of misery.

**MA: Why do you think the "digital" industry doesn't understand they are doing direct marketing?**

DB: The intelligent ones do; the stupid ones don't study. And there appear to be more stupid ones than intelligent ones. However, I chaired a conference in London last year where every single speaker—all from digital firms—took it as read that what they do is just direct marketing.

**MA: Do you predict a merging of direct and digital divisions or departments?**

DB: This is inevitable and is happening. Customers and their motivations do not change even if the media do. Actually as I point out in the new edition of *Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing*, the word "digital" is a misnomer. We have digital TV and radio, but marketers don't think of them as digital.

**MA: What advice would you give young marketers or agency people interested in the industry?**

D.B. Read. It's a very agreeable feeling when you walk into a meeting knowing more than anyone else. Study people. They are the only profit centre in your business. If you really understand your customers you multiply your chances of success. Constantly ask yourself: "What if?"—that is how ideas are born. You need an inquiring mind to succeed in this business.

And take an interest in as many things as possible outside marketing, which is a very dull subject. If you think about nothing else you will end up a tremendous bore—to others and yourself. ☺

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## 'em in the aisles

One of the most common mistakes it to invest before testing—why guess when you can know? And they don't measure. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. What sane person invests in anything without measuring return on investment? Marketers do every day. Why? Because firms see it as an expense, not an investment. That's why they cut marketing expenditure in recessions.

Many believe research will supply the answer—when it is only indicative [of where the answer may lie]. They don't study business as a whole—all they think about is marketing. There is a pervasive over-optimism and a naive belief that marketing, especially advertising will solve *business* problems. It won't.

There is too little due diligence in our industry. Marketing directors and senior agency people are often hired without [any] checking of their credentials. This leads to uncritical acceptance of *gurus* who are often just recycling old truths—me, for instance.

Direct marketing is attracting more investment than general advertising, which says a lot about how effective it is. Personalisation and customisation has allowed more relevant communications. That plays to a greater desire for individual expression, frustrated by the move towards ever more centralisation, a decline in educational standards, especially literacy and numeracy, even as the internet becomes more central.

Changes in attitudes to sex. There is greater openness, particularly in advertising imagery—along with an increasing obfuscation of language in the pursuit of covering the corporate rump. The increasing use of marketing techniques—usually badly and often dishonestly applied—by government.

**MA: Can you share a disaster or two with us?**

DB: The rebranding of Abbey in the UK, which confused their existing customers, led to a catastrophic drop in sales and eventually the sale of a firm that had done