

Home and away –

The blurring of work, home and leisure time



Marketing used to be easier. The world and its consumers used to be predictable. Neat categorisations were possible. Companies and brands concentrated on their core markets, consumers behaved like their demographic said they would, activities took place at certain predictable times (e.g. clothes washing on Monday). Markets could target products at particular consumer times, for particular occasions, at particular times, through particular channels.

Today it's different. People and companies don't do what they're meant to. Supermarkets are becoming banks, lower social grade consumers are buying designer goods, and we increasingly have the wealth and the freedom to buy and do what we want, when we want to.

This general blurring of behaviour is creating new challenges and none greater than for many consumers in the rapidly disappearing divide between home and work.

Working from home came first. Driven by technological developments, knowledge workers increasingly accept that evenings and weekends are part of the working week and that just because you're not at the office doesn't mean that calls can't be taken, e-mails sent, or presentations created.

Don't hang up

To compensate for the increasing intrusion of work into our home lives, we are now starting to take our home lives into work.

It wasn't too long ago that in many companies use of the telephone for private calls was a sackable offence. Today the environment and corporate attitudes are very different. Enlightened employ-

Taking the supermarket to your desk.



ers understand that time pressure is of major concern to their staff and actively help staff to deal with chores and other 'time robbers' to free up time and energy for concentrating on work.

Examples of homing at work include at the top end a major management consultancy's concierge service that will queue at the passport office or wait at an employee's home for a delivery. More mainstream developments include UK supermarket chain 'Waitrose@work' service that delivers groceries that have been ordered by employees over the Intranet from their desks to the companies' premises.

Walking to work

The implications of this blurring of work and home life for marketers are likely to be significant. Increasingly, purchase decisions are being made out of the context that they were traditionally made within, changing the consumer's mindset during the transaction. Consumers ordering groceries from their desk at lunchtime will not enjoy the ambience of a store, be confronted with colourful packaging, or be influenced by shelf wobblers. Booking a holiday from a desk will feel very different to lying on the sofa at home surrounded by brochures.

Consumers will need to be communicated with in new ways at new times. The journey to work may become the most important opportunity to influence purchase decisions. Ambient advertising is likely to reassert its importance. Brands must learn to represent themselves on screen in impactful ways using just a few pixels of space.

Further technological developments will take home and work chores into ever more complex and further out of context situations. Just as today's cellphone allows us to make calls whenever and wherever we choose, so the next generation of mobile telephones and organisers could allow us to work, shop and interact, whenever and wherever we choose.

Increasingly, it will become almost impossible to predict when a consumer will purchase, and where they will be when they do. Dead time will be a thing of the past as we become able to convert any spare moment into useful time for either work, chores or enjoyment. And while we are hoping that this dead-time conversion will free-up opportunities for quality time, our suspicion is that we shall continue to squeeze more activities into the available time.

