



The State of Digital Marketing, 2009

By [Shane Atchison](#), ClickZ, Jun 8, 2009

For three days in May, the state of digital marketing was...Rhode Island. The site for this year's Digital CMO Summit, an exclusive gathering of industry thought leaders, was held in Newport, Rhode Island, and I was privileged to attend.

The theme of this year's summit was "measure up," an appropriate tag line given the highly statistical nature of digital marketing and Web analytics. Digital marketers everywhere are blessed -- and bombarded -- with metrics of every kind, from user behavior to conversions to social and more. How do we make time to analyze these mountains of data and execute on our findings, especially with fewer resources?

Summit participants debated this topic in a healthy, honest environment. We left the summit feeling certain that the state of digital marketing, even in the present economy, is full of promise and vision. There is a very bright future ahead for the Web and those who smartly conduct their business there. It's a feeling projected and shared by summit organizer Dean DeBiase, CEO of New York-based TNS Media, whom I interviewed a few days after the conference.

Shane Atchison: Why Newport, Rhode Island? (It's beautiful, by the way.)

Dean DeBiase: Newport was picked for multiple reasons. It is away from the hustle and bustle, so people could take a micro-sabbatical. It's easy to get to for East Coasters, and it is right in the middle of TNS Media's main centers: New York City (where we have our Media Intelligence and Media Research business units) and Boston (where Compete and Cymfony are located). Newport also was the first town in America to have a gas-lit street, and I thought that would be good for innovation and inspiration!

SA: What impressed you about this year's lineup of speakers?

DD: The common thread unifying all speakers was an ability and vision to use data to connect the dots from strategy to implementation. They also each showed great openness to sharing information and expertise in the hope of getting feedback from other participants.

In addition to being visionaries and tech-current -- they all have Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts -- they were also gutsy. None were afraid to go sailing in serious weather conditions.

SA: What specifically do you mean when you say that digital marketing is both a blessing and a curse?

DD: The ability to create data means that everything can be measured, but not everyone is using data correctly and therefore not getting the returns they could. It's also hard to make the Web work with other media. The Web has adopted direct marketing principles (science), while other media are still very brand-centric. This creates lots of optimism but also lots of confusion. The challenge is to truly integrate measurement across the spectrum from offline to online. This is a key area in which we are looking to help marketers.

SA: What three industry trends do you see coming out of this year's summit?

DD: Clearly, there is an increasingly steady media shift from offline to the online channel. This will require a more holistic approach to marketing measurement, not only mix modeling but [also] new, advanced techniques like portfolio management. Additionally, there is a great need to create online experiences (microsites and landing pages) that work in close concert with offline media. And given that we are in a downturn, the need to measure and improve ROI is becoming a hotter topic that will not be going away any time soon.

SA: What things were you most surprised to hear or learn at the summit?

DD: With all the momentum and discussion regarding addressable television advertising, it was interesting to hear the views of speakers that this will become widely adopted only when it begins to measure up to the standards of Internet advertising relative to interactions, targeting, and measurement. Additionally, it was surprising -- but refreshing -- to hear that people are optimistic about the future, despite the current challenges. Most felt that there was a real opportunity for the industry to emerge in a much stronger position.

SA: There was a discussion devoted to the future of television. How does television factor into digital marketing?

DD: Television and digital media are quickly merging, driven by technology prevalent at the recent CES show, to enable Internet access on television screens. This will have a significant

impact on the current interest in online video. That will certainly affect programming, as television Internet access becomes more prevalent. Additionally, with the advent of return-path data from cable set-top boxes, we are gaining access to the level of granular insight into audience behavior more associated with digital media. This will help spur integration of measurement across all media platforms, enabling marketers to better assess how their offline expenditures are impacting online initiatives.

SA: Lastly, how can the discussions and decisions of a handful of thought leaders at the Digital CMO Summit affect the rest of the industry?

DD: Well, by definition, the attendees are leaders, and they will carry the insights and perspectives gained at the summit back to their organizations. Our hope is that they will act as catalysts, inspiring others to innovate based on our discussions at the summit. That's how movements are started, by the advancements of a few inspiring a much wider audience. Did we just scramble to protect our organizations to survive in the downturn, or did we go further and [not only] seize this period but also position our brands to be stronger once the recovery gets underway? I think as marketers and leaders we will eventually be measured on how we took advantage of this unique [down] period in our history.