

# The Rundown

Reporting on Local Television News Since 1981

VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 42

OCTOBER 26, 2009

**Advice from Larry Rickel**

## **Maximize Evolving Media Opportunities: Upgrade Your Strategy Now**

*Online and wireless are a permanent part of life now.*

*When Larry Rickel, President and CEO of The Broadcast Image Group, does workshops, he no longer talks about "new media" because quite simply the platforms are no longer new. Instead he trains and coaches staffs to embrace the concept of "evolving media," because our business will continue to evolve with new challenges and opportunities around each corner.*

*In fact, the recent approval of the DTV to cell phone standard is a perfect example of how quickly things are moving. The NAB hailed it as a milestone that, "ushers in the new era of digital television broadcasting, giving local TV stations and networks new opportunities to reach viewers on the go."*

*Although the DTV technology is still months away from being installed in cell phones, there are many opportunities with mobile that exist right now and that should be part of your evolving media plan.*

### **Evolving media growing, changing**

**It's big, and it's growing quickly.**

"Using mobile Internet is now a part of people's everyday lives as a way to access information, video, social media and text based searches," says consultant Larry Rickel, President of The Broadcast Image Group.

According to comScore, Inc. the number of people who used their mobile device to access news and information on the Internet more than doubled during 2008. And, of the 63 million people who accessed news and information from their mobile device in January '09, more than one-third of them (35%) did so daily.

Research from Nielsen puts the increase in mobile web use last year at about 34 percent, increasing to 57 million people.

"According to Nielsen, while men still make up a larger part of the mobile audience, (53% men - 47% women), the number of female visitors is continuing to grow dramatically," Rickel adds.

## Set a course, keep adjusting it

**Clearly, one of the most important things to do in the days ahead will be to develop an effective Evolving Media Plan.**

"It's not just mobile. We think about it as Evolving Media, because it all crosses over. A person may sign up for mobile by going to the website. They'll find out about it by watching TV. All these platforms are intertwined," Rickel says.

Mobile is the untethered component of the evolving media plan.

"As we become more of a mobile society, mobile becomes more valuable for those people who are not bound to being at home," he says.

This is not replacing television news.

"I don't think television is broken. Television still has strong great value and will continue to be successful, because when you are home, you are going to continue to watch TV," he says.

"You are only going to watch TV on your mobile when your TV is not available to you," he says.

The anytime, anywhere customer doesn't have to wait to get home to watch the news to find out what happened.

"They want to know right then, and that is the service we are providing to people," he says.

## Consider the role of mobile in our lives today

**Texting is now the way more and more people communicate.**

"When your mobile device vibrates or alerts the user to a message, the person typically stops what they are doing and they look at their phone. The phone goes with them wherever they are. It is the perfect companion for the anytime, anywhere customer. It is always with you, and when it does something, you tend to respond immediately to it," he says.

It is the most convenient platform at any moment.

"It is your first connection to the world when you wake up, and now more and more people leave their cell phones, iphones or Blackberrys on all night," he says.

It is the way to stay connected all the time in real time.

"In an emergency, you are more likely to turn to your mobile device first to tell someone something if you hear some news. So it has become totally integrated into our everyday life," he stresses.

He adds that with the shift that is going on now away from print, more and more people want what they used to get in print in real time.

"Whether it is moving from newspaper or moving from radio or television, or even the Internet, real time is where is at. And, real time in its most dramatic form is on mobile," he says.

**"The real opportunity is that this is something that is always with you, it is something you tend to respond to when it does something, and when you want something, you can also use to it to get something."**

**"The benefit from a branding point of view is that there is brand continuity. Your brand is always there. If your logo is on an app, that app is always with them."**

**Larry Rickel  
President and CEO  
The Broadcast Image Group**

He believes that, ultimately, mobile will be a greater tool to build brand than even the web is, simply because you choose which things you put on your phone.

## **It may be the best hope for new revenue**

### **People are used to paying for mobile.**

"We are now seeing a big push for companies like News Corp. and CNN to charge for data. Whether that works or not remains to be seen. But we do know that people will pay for information on their cell phones because they are used to paying for SMS messages, text messages, data and a variety of services," says Rickel.

People are already conditioned to pay for things on their mobile devices, which gives everyone a head start.

"CNN just started charging for their mobile app on the iPhone. They are actually charging for the application, not the data. The *Wall Street Journal's* application has been free, but after January 1, the data will no longer be free," he says.

"What the iPhone did was to change that paradigm. Now lots of people have phones where they expect to do more transactional things on them, instead of just sending text messages or talking to someone on the phone. On a lot of these phones the actual voice isn't the primary thing they use it for anymore," he points out.

## **Far beyond just a cell phone**

### **It's not just iPhones with custom apps now.**

More and more app stores are opening for different platforms.

When the iPhones came out, it totally changed the landscape for mobile phones. It now has its own environment or ecosystem because it has the applications.

"When you start investing in the applications, you are then more vested in that platform. Whereas, up to that point, people were changing phones out so frequently that they were always staying with the newest technology. You wouldn't buy a computer or a television as frequently, but mobile phones are switched out with greater frequency. In fact, the mobile phone companies encourage their customers to do that. As a result, when the new DTV technology gets installed in phones within the next year, it'll happen much more quickly than other adaptations because people are switching their phones out more quickly," he says.

### **It's not just business people using the technology.**

"As smart phones become more mainstream, everyone is going to have the same level of accessibility," he says.

Rickel refers to a recent article, in which Verizon's CEO said that with the rise of web phones, like the iPhone, BlackBerry and Palm, 40 percent of Verizon's new phone sales are smart phones. In the same article, a market research group projected that mobile advertising will balloon from \$160 million in 2008 to \$3.1 billion in 2013.

### **Rickel cautions that mobile has an entirely different threshold for ads.**

"Because users pay for the data, any ad content must be opted in and have a specific benefit," he says.

**Some stations are sending coupons through cell phones.** They push a coupon with a bar code on it.

"You take your cell phone to the grocery store, and they run the bar code over their barcode reader at the grocery store to get the discount. When I travel now, I download my boarding pass to my cell phone and run my cell phone over the scanner at the airport," he says.

## Succeed with Short Message Service

**Some stations have had great success reaching people with SMS --- Short Message Service.**

During the California wildfires, KNBC-TV, Los Angeles and KNSD-TV, San Diego, encouraged viewers to text in the word "fire" to a five-digit code to opt in for fire updates, evacuation routes and other emergency information about affected counties. A whopping 20,000 people signed up in less than one day!

It was an effective way to reach an audience that wanted and desperately needed information.

[Here's a clip showing how they did it.](#)

"People weren't around their television sets or their computers. They had been evacuated and the one platform they still had with them was their mobile phone. It was a way they could get information from the station," says Linda Lee Ozuna, Senior V.P. of Branding and Client Resources at Broadcast Image Group.

**Election results is another area where stations can provide data to mobile users.**

KNBC has done well with this, too. People opted in to receive election results on Super Tuesday. The station pushed out 30,000 messages in a matter of a few hours, and not one person opted out.

How does it impact me?

Rickel says viewers want information right down the zipcode in situations where there is severe weather approaching, such as hurricanes or tornados.

"They can opt in for it and get it right on their cell phone, because they know they will always have their cell phone with them," he says. Some stations charge for this service, he adds.

## What do you charge for?

The whole issue of whether to charge for it, or continue to give it for free is going to be a very slippery slope.

Rickel points out, "One thing you have to remember is that the station can still get revenue from the cell phone company, if they are generating business where the cell phone company is charging for the text message."

Ozuna adds, "Television stations can also sell it as a sponsorship. If a person signs up for traffic alerts or entertainment news, that service can be sponsored by somebody," Ozuna adds.

## Search is the next big thing

**The real revenue may come with mobile search.**

"The one thing that mobile gives you that you can't get on any other platform is what's called 'location based search,'" says Rickel.

Because many mobile phones are location based, the system knows where the person is when they have their phone. When you search for a dry cleaner, restaurant or grocery store, mobile search will give you the things that are the closest to you, because the phone knows where you are.

"Most people agree that from a revenue point of view, mobile search is going to be a great opportunity in the future," he adds.

"The biggest opportunity is going to be whether or not you invest in a local directory business or you have local search engines that you are powering," says Ozuna.

She explains that with location-based mobile search, if a person does a search for 'pizza' from a mobile phone, the revenue opportunity is being able to deliver an ad to a mobile phone for a pizza parlor that is two blocks away.

"On the web, there was a battle for years about who would develop the search engine. There were different ones out there, and now it appears that Google is the one that came out of it. That's what the situation is with mobile right now," she adds.

## **Stations maximizing user-generated content**

When a tanker exploded on a Detroit interstate, a lot of WDIV-TV's breaking news content came from viewers sending in video and pictures.

And much of the video and information about the Colorado balloon hoax came from viewers who sent it in on their cell phones.

Rickel told us, "Hundreds of thousands of tweets came in on the balloon story alone. The way I stayed on top of that story when I was travelling was on my cell phone. I had the CNN application on my computer, so I watched live on my cell phone the coverage of the story. I was out of pocket. Anyone who had bought that application --- whether they were at a grocery store or at an airport --- could have watched the coverage live on CNN."

"The reason I paid the fee is because I wanted to get live breaking news coverage on my cell phone," he says.

### **Keep pressing to develop more promotion and branding opportunities.**

"TV stations have iPhone apps now that reflect their entire brand --- news, weather, sports, consumer, health or any other franchises they have. All of that is right there and accessible to them. You are constantly connected to your customer through your brand. With push notification, when something happens, the phone will alert you as well," he says.

### **When a person is constantly notified throughout the day that there is live video available of a breaking story or updated with e-mail alerts, Rickel says the customer is going to go home that night and watch the station's newscast.**

"If you create that emotional connection with the customer on a story they are interested in during the course of the day, of course they are going to go back to that station. They know you did such a good job of keeping current on the course of the story during the day that you are going to follow through that night," he says.

"If you can stay connected with them during the course of the whole day, you are going to keep that momentum rolling. They will send you things when they see something," he adds.

## **Coach your staff**

A lot of stations today see the value of mobile, and they are investing in mobile apps. Slowly, but surely, they are training their photographers and reporters about producing for mobile.

For example, the first thing journalists should do when they arrive on the scene of the story is take a picture of it with their cell phone and Twitter it back to the station, so the station can put out on all of its platforms what the fire looks like and what the latest information is.

"The idea is that everyone is getting into their mindset and culture to service the customer immediately and not to wait for the newscast," he says.

"It's an evolving process. Those stations that have always been more progressive are going to be more progressive in this area. Progressive television stations are always going to be a leader in things regardless of what it is," he says.

The stations that were the first to go digital or the first to go color or the first to adopt ENG or to buy the latest weather technology will likely be the first to embrace evolving media.

### **Training is a big part of successfully implementing an evolving media strategy.**

Many stations have trained or are in the process of training their people on search engine optimization.

"When someone searches Google or Bing, you want them to find your story. Your staff must be trained to write differently for the web so it gets found in search. Just like they are training for search engine optimization, they are going to have to be trained for mobile tools as well," he says.

**Rickel's training is a growing part of the consulting process.**

"Where we used to spend 5 or 10 percent of our time at a station doing training, now it may be a half a day or a whole day of a two-day visit training on an evolving media platform --- whether it is the web, mobile, or the 360 wheel and how they cover the story all day long on all the platforms," he says.

## **Innovate, Experiment, Mobilize and Reorganize**

**Rickel's mantra is "Innovate, Experiment, Mobilize and Reorganize."**

"The reason we talk about this as evolving media is because the hardest part of this is staying on top of what's going on," he says.

**Innovate.** This means that you can't be afraid to try new things.

**Experiment.** You have to experiment. Some will work and some won't. "The key is that you can't be so overwhelmed by all the opportunities that you don't do anything," he warns.

**Mobilize.** Pick one, two or three specific things you want to focus on and really become good at those, he urges.

**Reorganize.** Your staff must be ready to meet the new challenges of evolving media. An example of this approach is a project of the Fisher stations. They are doing hyper-local websites.

"They've done a great job with revenue in very short order in getting these going and digging deep into the communities to develop these hyper-local sites. That's an example where they've chosen that to *mobilize* on," he says.

To do this, they've had to *reorganize* their newsroom. It was important for crews in the field to all have the technology to be able to shoot video and be able to get it back to the station immediately, without having to depend on the microwave truck or going to an Internet cafe and sending it back via wifi.

"They needed the ability to have data on their phones so they can twitter or they can send something to the Facebook page back," he says.

"You must be willing to reorient the thinking of everyone who works in your newsroom, so when photographers and reporters go out to cover the story, they aren't thinking the job is only to produce something for the 5 or 6 o'clock news. They must realize they are producing the story for *right now*," he stresses.

## **It's about content, not technology**

As usual, content is king.

"All of this goes back to content," Rickel stresses.

"You may have all of this technology, but if you push things out to people, and it isn't valuable information for them, they are going to start ignoring it and will opt out of it," he warns.

You have to reorganize so you are providing quality content, regardless of the platform you put it on, he urges.

## **Content + Context + Convenience = Commerce**

**Part of the solution is viewer education.**

Rickel says "digital immigrants" are still figuring out how to use the evolving media platforms. However, "digital natives" have grown up using your evolving media platforms. These are people who are members of the "broadband generation."

"More and more of the 'immigrants' are seeing the value of this. That's why we're seeing more 50-65 year olds signing onto Facebook. The sweet spot for Facebook now is the 35- to 55-year-old TV news viewer, because they are now seeing value in it," he says.

The Digital Natives have always been involved. These are the younger people who see value in this.

### **Create your material for a small-screen medium.**

"When you generate content for cell phones or other mobile devices, it is not a matter of taking the exact same material and putting it on the web. Because screens are smaller, you must produce content differently. You must shoot closer shots. You have to focus on one person or one image. Wide shots simply don't work when you are looking at it on a small screen," he says.

**Your graphics must be larger.** You can't move quickly across images because that takes up more bandwidth.

You must use softer lighting. Avoid fluorescent or dimly lit areas, he says. If you use soundbites, attribute the soundbites like you would in a morning newscast.

"As we define this mobile user and as we define news on this third screen, we must realize that because the screen is smaller, we must use it in a way that most effectively maximizes its strengths," he says.

## **Devices will have even more capacity, functions**

**As the mobile units become more sophisticated, they will be of greater value.** They will receive broadcasts right to the mobile phone using the digital signal.

Manufacturers will put a chip in cell phones that will function like an antenna.

"It'll be another way to receive video on your phone other than the way you are currently getting," he says.

"When I watch breaking news on my cell phone now, it is coming over the 3G network or wifi. It's not being broadcast like a signal used to be broadcast to the old rabbit ears on the TV. When you think about where the opportunities are for television stations with this, it is everything current TV can do --- and more," he says.

Besides live audio and video, people may be able to subscribe to live datacasting, or get video on demand.

"If someone didn't get a chance to watch their child's high school football game, they might be able to purchase it and watch it on their cell phone. People could have time-shift viewing, just like they do on their DVR. Plus, there will be interactive components and people can be polled," he says.

### **On the commerce side, there will be much more than traditional ads.**

"There may be pop-up ads, e-commerce, banner ads, coupons --- geo-targeted ads that come up on your phone based on where you are geographically. Stations will also be able to send you emergency alerts in even more controlled ways," he says.

"You can set it up to have planned viewing or it may be impulse viewing if you are bored and just want to see what's on now," he says.

"It is like a more sophisticated version of the old Sony Walkman TV, but this will be a totally interactive device," he says. "It is truly going to be the next screen," he stresses.

Are people going to watch this screen as opposed to a huge 46-inch HDTV screen in their home? "Of course not. But it isn't designed for that. It is designed for the person who is out and about and who needs the information now, he stresses.

## **Balloon hoax coverage is the future**

Rickel says how the story of the balloon was covered is a perfect example of the future.

"That story was a twitter story. It was a mobile story," he stresses.

Many people learned about the story through breaking news alerts on their cell phones. Ozuna learned of it on her cell phone, and then went back home and turned on the TV to watch the coverage. She is based in Denver and she had the luxury of choosing whether she wanted to get the information on her mobile phone, from one of the station websites or on TV. Rickel was travelling and got the mobile updates on his cell phone, as well as the CNN coverage live. At lunch, he put the phone in the middle of the table and they watched the coverage. "Next, I got in the car to go to the airport. I fired up Twitter, and literally every message on my Twitter stream was from somebody talking about the boy or the balloon," he says. He received play-by-play from Twitter all on his mobile device. When he arrived at the airport, he watched the coverage on the airport's televisions. "All of those things connected. It was seamless coverage of a story. What the evolving media news organization can do is provide seamless coverage of a story ---from the moment it happens across all the platforms. That is the opportunity that exists today," he says.

## **Develop an Evolving Media Plan**

### **You must keep yourself current.**

"You must invest in understanding the technologies. You must realize that this is your future, and you must keep evolving, keep asking good questions, and stay current. It's like staying current on anything else --- you must read about it, go to sessions and be trained on it," he urges.

"The way you stay on top of it is to try not to do too much too fast. But do something that can distinguish you. Once you get really good at that, evolve to the next thing. You want to be known for something. You won't be known for mobile necessarily, because all these platforms are really conduits to extend your brand," says Rickel.

If you are the breaking news station, then you need to own breaking news on all these platforms --- on the web, on Twitter, on Facebook, on mobile. If you are the On Your Side station, it becomes a higher priority to alert people about the Toyota recall of their cars, he says.

"It's all about using these platforms as new tentacles to extend your brand. It is about using these new platforms to extend your reach, and being sure you are customizing the information to the platform and the customer at the moment they want the information," he says.

### **Realize that you can't do everything at once.**

"You must focus on a small number of things with and execute them with relentless consistency. You must be known for one or two things, and then build on that," he adds.

---

The Broadcast Image Group  
7744 Broadway, Suite 100  
San Antonio, Texas 78209

210-828-6664 (phone)  
210-828-6225 (fax)

---