

What a Toddler Can Tell You About the Future of Media

Just Put One in Front of an iPad, Take Notes, and Say Goodbye to Passive Media

By Mike Henry

Anyone pondering the future of television programming and related business models had better talk to my son Carson.

At the ripe old age of 18 months, he's already a veteran iPhone and, now, iPad user. Having watched Carson control his exploration of media for nearly six months, I'm now convinced that there is no future for passive video consumption on any device -- at least not once marketers become interested in him.

This isn't going to be a gradual shift. This isn't about migrating video to internet connected TVs or other devices. This definitely isn't about moving some media dollars to support a schedule of :30s on Hulu or a home page roadblock on YouTube.

This is about how a generation feeding on absolute control and connectivity will have a completely different perception of media overall, and video in particular. The ramifications for programming and advertising are far more significant than anyone inside the current ecosystem is prepared or equipped to address.

Carson's devices (more specifically, his mom's iPad and iPhone and his dad's iPod Touch) are stocked with kid-friendly fare, including several educational, video-based apps. We've also loaded a handful of traditional videos from producers like Sesame Street and Yo Gabba Gabba. He's capable of unlocking the device, flipping through pages of apps that aren't interesting to him and dropping down into whatever he feels like using -- I can't begin to imagine how or why his mood shifts from one thing to the next, but he's very directed in what he's doing.

Here's what we've found most interesting: While our son still has some tolerance for passive video watching on a television or mobile device, when given the choice, he almost always chooses the interactive experience. His own desire for engagement, combined with new technology that's so easy a 1-year-old can use it, has already built strong media consumption preferences that will dramatically affect his long-term relationship with what we call "television."

I suspect that my son and other children of his generation will demand a seismic shift in programming -- from static, passive video to immersive, interactive and intertwined content available on-demand and on any device. Seamlessly shifting between entertainment, information, competition and e-commerce mindsets, Carson will see limited value to anything meant to wash over him -- least of all, TV spots. But opportunities may lie elsewhere.

If you're not currently enjoying an 18-month-old, just invest a few bucks in your iTunes account to download Fisher Price's Chatter Telephone. Check out

Grover's Number Special or Elmo's Monster Maker, both from Sesame Street. These apps deliver no traditional advertising but they cost money to use -- quite a bit by app-store standards -- and they increase brand awareness. My son's Elmo awareness, at least, is off the charts.

See Carson in Action:

<http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid1543292789?bctid=9002280001>

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