The future isn't what it used to be

Richard Stacy September 2006

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Introduction

Most of the current on-line conversation about social media and web2.0 is very of-the-minute, focusing on the latest thing, widget, gizmo, company or controversy. There doesn't seem to be much attention given to the bigger picture or the practicalities of what this is going to mean and what brands and businesses are going to have to do about it – other than vague exhortations about doing things differently, becoming more social, engaging with consumers, recognising that power is shifting to brand users rather than brand owners etc. etc. I am not sure why this is. Perhaps it is because the pace of change is so great that no-one is able to see the wood for the trees yet. Alternatively it could be because most of the people driving the debate are more naturally drawn to the technical detail rather than the bigger picture implications.

Either way, what follows is a non-techy's attempt to start to galvanise thinking about the practical implications of what people in the business and marketing world are going to have to do adjust to the new world of social media.

The technique I have used is to set up some predictions about what the future could look like, based on current trends. I think this works because it forces you to either disagree with the predictions or accept the conclusion and then to work out whether you like it or not and therefore what you ought to do about it. It also, conveniently, means that this article should still work as a generator of thinking, even if its content is off-the-mark.

In this rather lengthy piece, at least lengthy by the standards of social media discourse which tends to be conversational soundbites and posts of 200 words or less, I have crunched my thoughts down into 10 predictions – all of which fall under the five-to-ten year horizon. These predictions are:

1. The price of traditional media will be cut in half within five years
2. The world's leading media organisations won't actually produce content
3. The 30 second TV ad will live
4. The rise of specialists and aggregators
5. The death of the brand proposition and the rise of the brand story
6. Marketing departments to split into the story department and the conversation department
7. The emergence of the category consumer franchise
8. The rise of the global micro-brand
9. The rise of brand watch communities
10. The emergence of Digital Identity Stress and Digital Scizophrenia as recognised medical conditions

But before looking at these in more detail it is worth airing the views of a well known radical and anti-establishment figure when commenting on this social media thing. *"To find something comparable, you have to go back 500 years to the printing press, the birth of mass media – which, incidentally, is what really destroyed the old world of kings and aristocracies. Technology is shifting power away from the editors, the publishers, the establishment, the media elite. Now it's the people who are taking control."* This radical was, of course, Rupert Murdoch talking to Wired On-Line in July 2006.

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Prediction One: The price of traditional mass media will be cut in half within five years

Let's start of with a rather ambitious and controversial claim and one that if came to pass within the timeframe would really shake the tree – pull it up by the roots in fact. This prediction is founded on the belief that the real challenge to mass media is not a content one, it is a time challenge. Many traditionalists will look at something like YouTube and ridicule it for its content. "How can mere ordinary people produce content as engaging, informative and balanced as us experts?" they say. The answer is that they can't, not individually at any rate. The real issue with YouTube is that every hour spent with YouTube is an hour not spent with TheirTube – even if, paradoxically, it is Their content people are watching. And as of when this was written YouTube was delivering 100 million downloads per day having only been around a matter of months.

History has shown us that as new media technologies come along, we don't simply layer then on top of our existing media choices – we run them alongside each other, but just re-shuffle how we use media and the priorities we attach to each one, while the amount of time we actually spend consuming media stays relatively constant. Admittedly, one of the features of the new media technologies, especially the mobile ones, is that they make it easier to exploit down-time and therefore cudgel a few extra media minutes out of a day, but how much down-time do most of us really have in a day?

Now we get to the crunch. You may have heard of a company called Podshow – arguably the most innovative company in developing the podcast sector. The two guys who run Podshow are called Adam Curry and Ron Bloom (check out Adam Curry on wikipedia to get an idea of his credentials). They are operating their business to something they call the 5:50 Prediction. This is that within 5 years, 50 per cent of the media that consumers consume will be produced by other consumers. This is this much talked about consumer or user generated content, the stuff of YouTube, blogs, podcasts and MySpace. Now if these guys are anywhere close to being right in this and we accept that the amount of hours that people will devote to media consumption are not going to increase dramatically – the only conclusion we can reach is that the reach or bandwidth available to the traditional media is going to collapse. And if they only reach half the numbers, they can only charge half the price – hence the prediction. The only factor mitigating against this is the possibility that people will see their engagement with social media as being something sufficiently different from consumption of traditional media, that they will create additional time for it, by cutting into leisure time or other activities. This might be possible with teenagers, but for people with more time demands and more structured lives this is unlikely to generate many more hours in the week.

Are the Podshow guys right? Well think about you average teenager today and recognise that teenagers are the early adopters here. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that social media is, and will always be, a youth thing and that as people get older they will suddenly re-discover TV and newspapers. Most teenagers today are probably already there. Even an oldy like me is already there – because even where I consume the product of the traditional media, I tend to access it through new channels (RSS, newsreaders etc) – i.e. the channels that don't, and probably can't, carry the subscription or the ads and deliver the money to the media owners.

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean the end of the traditional media, or rather the type of content the traditional media currently produces. But what is does mean is that the business model that supports it is in its death throes and to survive the traditional media and advertisers are going to have to find themselves a whole new model. There is going to be a big shake-out as a lot of the content of the traditional media falls into new channels and the challenge in constructing a new model is to work out how to hold onto the content in a profitable way. The answer will probably lie (as per Prediction Two below) in the traditional media cutting themselves loose from expensive and outmoded distribution technologies and focusing instead on being syndicated braned content producers.

As a side issue – advertisers are going to have to work out what to do with their "un-used" advertising dollars. Is the answer simply to shift the budget into on-line? Probably not, since much of the new on-line spaces are inherently advertising unfriendly. Also, despite the fact that there is much current talk about how sites like YouTube are going to produce revenue streams, these new forms of media don't need the same amount of advertising dollars to make them run – precisely because they don't have expensive distribution or content production infrastructures. Craigslist is the classic example – Craig Newmark has worked out a way of fulfilling the classified advertising role of a local newspaper at a fraction of the cost. He has been criticised for not being sufficiently commercial and exploiting Craigslist's advertising potential, but, in his words, he doesn't need the money. Sir Martin Sorrel, the chief executive of WPP has labelled what he is doing as value destructive and social media as a whole as "socialistic", but this is misses the point. Craig Newmark is far from socialistic. He is obeying the tenets of capitalism (or free market economics as it is now called) by better fulfilling an existing need at a lower cost. All he is destroying is the old business models (in which Sir Martin has a significant vested interest) and he is actually liberating value that can now be invested somewhere other than in outdated distribution technologies.

To come back to where advertisers are going to put the "un-spent" media dollars – the likely answer is into producing a much more extensive portfolio of content and investing into the human resources necessary to sustain conversations and develop better products and services.

Prediction Two: within ten years the world's leading "media" organisations won't actually produce any content.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that there is going to be a separation between content production and content distribution – and given that we tend to see media as the thing that distributes the content to us, we can say that the things that will fulfil the role of content provider won't produce their own content.

It is worth remembering that the word "media" itself is not a content based word – it is a channel word implying a form of mediation between sources of information on the one hand, and people that want information on the other.

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

I think this prediction is actually done and dusted: no debate here. One only has to look at YouTube, Google, Yahoo, Newsgator, del.icio.us or a host other forms of content providers – or more specifically content aggregators – to see that this is already happening and it is happening quickly.

The future media market will probably end up looking a bit like the current software market, where you have a few major utility type providers that provide the basic infrastructure and ubiquitous product offerings or concepts (as does Microsoft in software) with a range of much smaller specialists catering to niche interests.

The big players will provide an overarching personalisation and aggregation role with the small players acting as a sort of specialist content curator and community manager but actually living within the framework provided by the big aggregators.

Incidentally, in putting this article together this idea of the very big and the very small: the aggregator and the specialist emerged as recurring theme. Perhaps it should even warrant a prediction of its own in that in the future there will only be the mass and the niche. Or perhaps it is more piece of advice – be big or small, but don't be caught either in the middle or trying to be both.

Prediction Three: The 30 second ad will live!

How long have we all predicted the downfall of the 30 second ad and the whole assumed mentality that lies behind the centrality of the 30 second TV spot? Well, its going to live and thrive – albeit in not such a glamorous and expensive iteration. What is going to die is the business model that lies behind the production of the 30 second ad.

Advertising agencies are going to have to produce advertising for a faction of the costs they do now. I would estimate that within seven years, TV advertising will be made for around 30 per cent of its current cost. Why a 70 per cent reduction? Probably 40 per cent will be due to the reduction in the reach and effectiveness of paid for channels (covered under Prediction One) and 30 per cent due to increased resistance to paid for messaging.

This kind of reduction is going to force the destruction and re-invention of the advertising business as we currently know it, in the same way that the traditional media business is going to have to re-invent its business model. But on the positive side, advertising itself will be liberated from the pressure of having to carry a whole brand narrative (which is what a lot of it is doing very badly at the moment). It can retreat back to doing what it does best – an information dense focus on price and functional product benefits: the sort of thing we still see in what is currently called "un-creative" advertising. And its future as a cheap and cheerful, specialist communications vehicle, will be assured.

This isn't to say that there won't be a role for visual creativity (or creatives) – it is just that this will find a new home and that home will not be in paid-for media. An early example of this is the Sony Bravia "Balls" ad. I don't know how much paid-for media Sony have put behind this – but looking at it from my own perspective (as someone very much in the target market), I have had a huge level of engagement with this ad: I have seen the long version,

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

the short version, the making of the ad version, the Tango spoof, I have even seen the making of the next in the series version, it has come up in conversation and in presentations; but I don't think I have ever seen it on a paid-for media channel. All my interaction with this ad (or piece of content) has been through on-line or off-line social networks.

Prediction Four: The rise of specialists and aggregators.

Staying in agency land for a moment and thinking about what sort of models will emerge out of the wreckage of traditional advertising, two new forms of agency will emerge. On the one hand there will be a growth in specialist agencies and on the other a new beast will emerge that aggregates production and creativity rather than owning them. This will, incidentally, mirror the split in the media world between content producers and content distributors or aggregators.

On the specialist side of things, we have already started too see the more innovative brands moving away from exclusive relationships with big agencies into working with small, specialist hot-shops. This will continue. The advertising agencies themselves will split into creative and production shops. The creative shops will be the people who make the Sony Balls type of content and the production shops will be the places who will knock out the cheap and cheerful 30 second ads at 30 per cent of the current costs. Neither of these will carry the huge planning and account management overhead which is responsible for much of the costs of a current advertising agency. This "cost" will move into this new agency beast – an aggregator.

Aggregators will fall into two camps. On the one hand there will be aggregators who come from the procurement and production world. Probably staffed by ex-brand people or management consultants, these will provide a service that extracts value from the most efficient management of the wide range of agency type resource that brands will now need. They will have a heavy process focus and be based on generating and leveraging economies of scale. It is quite possible that existing media buying agencies will morph into this type of organisation.

On the other hand, there will be ideas based aggregators. Their role will be the creator and steward of ideas and brand conversations. They will not have creative resource from a production perspective – this will come from contracting-in the relevant creative and implementational specialists – but they will have creative resource from an ideas development and stewardship perspective. These aggregators will be the closest thing to what we currently see as a creative (as distinct from media) advertising agency and will be the principal partners of brand owners, although they won't be anywhere near as large as the big advertising agency players as w currently know them.

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Prediction Five: the death of the brand proposition and the rise of the brand story

Currently, at the heart of all brand planning lies the single-minded brand proposition. This is, by necessity, a highly focused and concentrated concept expressed in very few words (sometimes only one word). Its primacy as a planning tool derives from the fact that you need this level of focus to make an ad and ads have been the principal communications tool for most brands. However, we all know the world is changing away from advertising and the type of one-way, didactic and dare I say it rather anti-social communication that advertising represents. Consumers want more engagement and conversation and the new media channels that are opening up also require this in order to operate successfully within them. The brand proposition is singularly unhelpful tool as the basis for conversation or richer forms of consumer engagement, as PR people already appreciate. If a brand were to enter a room of metaphorical consumers with only a brand proposition as a conversational gambit, you would very soon be classified as socially dysfunctional and avoided at all costs.

What a brand will need in order to be successful when invited to a consumers' party is a story. Stories will be richer and deeper than brand propositions and extend backwards into the brand category and brand history and also forwards into the functional reality of product delivery. They will essentially be the brand's claim to trust and authority.

Creating and nurturing the brand story will be the primary task for those people we currently call marketing directors. It will involve them in a much broader role than they currently occupy, because so much of the brand story will be enshrined in product development and delivery. They will also be responsible for then building and maintaining a portfolio of content assets and engagement mechanics which will bring the brand story to life.

In constructing their story, brands will find themselves coming up with something which is much less sexy that they thought their old brand proposition was, although it will actually be much more real and genuine. This is because their old brand proposition will be exposed as largely hot-air – a façade, increasingly distanced from the functional reality of their product, with foundations in the hothouse world of advertising, rather than the chillier real world of the consumer. In constructing their story they are also going to find themselves dwelling on concepts and benefits which had hitherto been seen as (or dismissed as) category benefits. Herein will lie a problem, because to credibly own their story they will need to stake out a territory within their category which will inevitably start to overlap with competitor brands and they will encounter a real problem of brand differentiation. The long-term consequences of this may be quite profound (see Prediction Seven) and may involve a significant culling or aggregation of brands within certain categories.

Once brands have established their stories, they will then be able to work out what credible conversations they can have with consumers. Again they will face initial disappointment here as many brands see the sorts of conversations they would like to have sink beneath the waves of reality. A hair care product, for example, may find that it can really only talk about things related to, well, hair care and that broader ownership of territories such as music or lifestyle are actually not relevant to their story or the terms of the relationship they have with consumers.

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Prediction Six: Marketing departments to split into story departments and conversation departments

This really follows on from the previous prediction about stories. One of the first hurdles that any organisation faces when it starts to become involved with the new forms of social media is time. It is actually very time consuming to become more conversational. Corporate blogs require real people as authors, all these new channels and micro segments that are opening up require individual attention and it is impossible to fit one static, crafted and agreed message down all of these channels. They also very quickly discover down what dusty corridor their customer service department has been relegated to, because customer service suddenly becomes the front-line of communication and vital in the process of listening and responding to consumers or customers.

It is likely that the customer service department will morph into conversation department which will be staffed by large cadre of senior and skilled individuals whose responsibility it will be to speak on behalf of the brand and manage the brand's presence and profile in on-line social spaces. The resources to run such a large department will be diverted from the now largely redundant task of placing highly crafted messages in paid-for channels. The end of the dusty corridor where the customer services department used to live will now be occupied by the research department, because you won't need research as an intermediary between the brand and the consumer, the conversation department will know exactly how consumers feel each and every day.

The story department will morph out of the more strategic and planning functions within a current day marketing department. It will be much smaller than the conversation department, but as highlighted earlier, it will have the critical task of creating and nuturing the brand story and therefore its tentacles and areas of influence will extend right across the organisation because everything – from product development and delivery through to corporate behaviour will become part of the brand story. It will have a policing and discipline role much like the role played by a finance department, in fact it will probably need to have very close ties with the finance department because it will become involved in making the key decisions about investment and planning the long-term future for the business.

Prediction Seven: the emergence of the category consumer franchise

This is a much less tangible concept than some of the other predictions, but while this may lie some years in the future, its implications could be quite profound. This prediction has its roots in two places. First, there is the issue referred to in Prediction Five about stories, namely that in many categories (principally the low engagement functional / utility type categories) the range of available stories is going to be less that the number of brands wishing to own them. Second, there is the issue that power is shifting from brand owners to brand users. If you follow these trends to their logical destination, you arrive at the conclusion that in some categories consumers will effectively have all the power and will operate the category under the form of a virtual user franchise. Brand owners will simply become contracted producers who have to respond to the terms of the franchise – i.e. there will be but one producer who operates the household cleaning products franchise, or the

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

washing detergents franchise, or any other sector where the brand or product choice is not a self-defining one (i.e. you are not going to use your choice of this product to say something about yourself).

I know this sounds a little like the Soviet Union or China where there was only one choice in every category and a very limited range of categories. The difference however is that the provider is not a remote and inflexible state enterprise but will have to be an organisation that can instantaneously respond to consumers' needs or else run the risk of losing its franchise. Such an organisation probably won't own the means of production – this will be contracted out – but in reality many branded product manufacturers already do this. Instead, the organisation will be focussed on quality of product and real product innovation, rather than spurious innovation designed to establish differentiation. Consumers will then know as they walk down the supermarket aisle that they won't be facing a range of duplicates – each and every one of the products they put their hands on will be the best in a class of one.

You could say that the current system of having many organisations offering many choices and all competing against each other already provides this or is the best possible way of doing this. Well no. We don't actually live in a world where the consumer is king – we live in a world where the consumer is important but where collective corporate profitability is king. We should also not forget that consumers don't necessarily like choice, consumers like options and they like to know they are getting the best in all of the options they select. Choice is very frequently used as a surrogate for quality with consumers actually facing an intimidating range of choices, none of which are genuinely high quality and which it is very difficult to distinquish between – despite (or perhaps because of) the best efforts of marketers to confuse us about whose is the best product. This whole process is actually very inefficient – both from the perspective of consumers and producers – unless one adopts the somewhat radical view that the whole business of brands and marketing is simply a process for recycling and redistributing money around the economies of developed nations (in effect a hidden form of consumption tax that flows direct into the economy rather than through government), but this is an issue for Stephen Levitt (he of Freakonomics) or some other suitably qualified person.

The implications of this spread beyond just marketing. The possibility of social media actually empowering real consumer (or citizen) choice could have quite profound consequences and might actually deliver the forms of more efficient or perfect markets that proponents of free market economics set up as a necessary condition, but supporters of free markets find conveniently impossible to deliver in the real world. However, if we actually started to have a truly free market economy we will probably find that most of its current supporters will jump ship – because it will be consumers and citizens who are in the driving seat, rather than established and elite interests. But again, this is a whole new subject.

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Prediction Eight: The rise of the global micro-brand

Conventional wisdom has it that establishing a brand is expensive – particularly establishing it in a number of countries or regions. This is largely because the high cost of the media expenditure believed to be necessary.

However, now you no longer need large amounts of money to launch a brand and sell it all over the world, you just need a good product, a good story and a blog. You can also access the much-talked-about economics of the Long Tail in so far as you don't need to have a large number of customers in any one place in order to constitute a large market – an effective market for a product can be aggregated from a large number of small niches or segments distributed across the globe (provided you have the ability to manufacture or distribute a product to the disparate places that constitute your market).

At the same time as this ability emerges for small brands to do and be the things that only large brands have previously been able to do and be, consumer demand for niche and highly personalised products is on the rise, partly as a result of a back-lash against the concept of mass, global brands and also because the factors mentioned above mean that this option now exists.

As a result we will see the emergence of the global micro-brand. This will first make its appearance (in fact is already making its appearance) in sectors of high value, highly transportable products that are very relevant to a consumers sense of identity (see www.englishcut.com for a current example) but will soon spread into other categories as consumers become accustomed to the ability reject compromise and source options that are highly tailored to their needs and also find that they can use their consumption choices to say much more subtle and sophisticated message about themselves.

It is likely that some of the new micro-brands will rapidly grow to become macro-brands and become serious challengers in categories where established brand owners hold sway – even if the lifespan of individual micro/macro brands is short-lived, responding to passing fads, trends or needs. These brands will be able to set up a major, if temporary presence, that will be highly disruptive to the categories they "squat" within and it is quite possible that the biggest competitive threat to many of the established brands of today comes from products and brands which don't yet exist and may themselves only exist for a very short time.

Prediction Nine: The rise of brand user / brand watch communities

Within ten years, every brand and business will have a highly connected network of "watchers" who scrutinise, analyse and comment on their every move. These watchers will either have an interest in the product as a user, be a fan or detractor, or simply be a "hobby watcher". In many instances the information posted about a brand or business won't be produced by a dedicated author but will simply be accumulated fragments of information generated by referral in on-line conversations or through rating and tagging processes. Sophisticated search and content aggregation technologies will make it possible for the collective intelligence of these communities and conversations to be highly visible and easily available to anyone interested. In some instances a formal community may coalesce that

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

performs a gardening function, collecting, planting, seeding and weeding content – but in other instances these communities may well not be formal communities in the sense that we understand them today – but rather virtual communities that can be constructed on demand by interested parties using these search and aggregation techniques.

While much of the information and opinion within the whole universe of comment on a particular brand or organisation will be subjective, inaccurate or misleading, the principle of the wisdom of crowds will come into play – allowing a collective, reasoned, balanced and accurate picture to easily be distilled.

Everything a company does and says, even when protected by confidentiality and security walls, can be expected to find its way into the public arena and enter the collective consciousness and the conventional tools of spin and legally enforced restriction of the circulation of information will have very little, if any, ability to alter or impact the collective view.

Public Relations as we understand it today, will cease to exist in-so-far as PR is defined as something which seeks to create and manage a space between reality and the understanding of that reality. Instead PR, as with all communications disciplines, will have to focus on influencing realities and managing an in-coming process of stakeholder engagement, rather than trying to control and restrict the outward flow of information.

To date, these types of communities are evolving mostly in the technology world, looking at technology products, largely because this world is the most conversant with the tools of social media, has always been more open and transparent and has a long tradition of user communities. However, if you want to get a flavour of how this type of content, from a negative perspective, is evolving in other areas try the Search Sucks Test i.e. in a search engine type in, within inverted commas, your brand name followed by "sucks" and see what comes up.

Prediction Ten: The emergence of Digital Identity Stress and Digital Schizophrenia as recognised medical conditions

Much of the interaction with on-line social networks involves constructing a form of identity. On the one hand, that identity can be very basic and related to a specific function, such as your identity as a reliable ebay partner, or it can be highly elaborate and revealing, such as the profiles teenagers build for themselves in MySpace or people put in blogs.

There are two defining characteristics of almost all forms of digital identity. The first is that they usually require significant amounts of time to maintain and there is a form of digital entropy that applies even more strongly than in the real world that dictates that digital information decays in its perceived or actual relevance at a tremendous rate (see, even entropy has its own digital identity). I recently came across a blogger who decided to re-blog some of his earlier posts because he thought they were actually quite good, but because they were more than a few months old, no-body would find or look at them under normal circumstances. Essentially, you have to manage your digital identities in much the same way as a newsroom – ensuring a constant stream of up-to-date output and there

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

probably comes a time, at around about three months, where if an identity has not been refreshed in some way it will be assumed to be dead (or at the very least, dormant).

The second characteristic is that digital identities all differ in some way (either as a result of deliberate intent or circumstance) from an off-line or real world identity and from each other. We all know about the issue of people misrepresenting themselves in chat rooms and forums, but at a much less sinister level almost all forms of digital identity have a specific purpose and therefore represent a much more manipulated or crafted persona than that which tends to emerge more naturally through off-line social interaction.

These two characteristics have the potential, either individually or in collaboration, to introduce enormous personal stresses. On the one hand the ability to create differences between digital and real world identity and between individual digital identities presents huge opportunities to fuel schizophrenic tendencies or to actually bring about a form of schizophrenia where it didn't exist before. And on the other hand the pressures of maintaining and reconciling a variety of digital identities will also generate problems – either because of the time and effort involved or because of the need or desire to create consistency.

We all experience a very mild form of this stress already when we are faced with the user name and password conundrum. Whenever we sign-up to a new digital Thing the inevitable first step is the creation of a user name and password. Now our experience with the emergence of email has taught us that selection of user name in particular is a highly significant event. User names can very rarely be changed and they are often a very visible component of an on-line identity. However, we are asked to select them at a time when we have no real idea what we are signing up to and what its future usage and implications might be. This is compounded by a recognition that getting in early and getting a "good" user name is highly desirable. Everyone wants to be John Smith@ rather than jr_smith9735@. The process of thinking of and registering an appropriate user name therefore becomes stressful.

Passwords are less of an issue because they can be changed. The issue with passwords is more a consistency one – remembering and managing all the various ones you have established.

It can therefore only be a matter time before these stresses manifest themselves in defined psychological conditions – indeed I would be willing to bet that there already forms of schizophrenia where different personalities have already been allocated their own exclusive digital territories.

At the very least we can expect a whole host of new forms of social behaviour to emerge – providing fertile territories for psychologists as well as market researchers who have found the market for conventional communications research drying-up as organisations no longer need an intermediary to tell them what their consumes think (reference Prediction Six).

stacynet@googlemail.com
http://richardstacy.wordpress.com

Conclusion

Who knows how much of this will actually come to pass. These predictions are just a semi-serious attempt to provoke thinking about where the forces implicit in social media will lead us – especially those of us in the communications, media and marketing world. Probably the only prediction we can really make with any confidence is that we are going to see a lot of "The End Of … As We Know It" predictions. Almost all of the ten predictions I have put up could be framed in this way – The End Of advertising / traditional media / PR / marketing / democracy / free market economics As We Know It. But that is probably because we are going to see, as Rupert Murdoch (and incidentally, the Economist – which is where he probably got it from) predicts, a period of change unprecedented in the last 500 years. All bets are off!

The author:
Richard Stacy is a public relations consultant working within the Publicis Groupe.