

Between a rock and a hard place: How should marketers deal with new channels?

 By [John Ginsberg](#)

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One of the most astute assessments of the relationship between humans and technology appears in the glossary of *The Handbook of Technology Management* under *Technology Readiness* which, according to the book, is the "propensity to use and adopt technologies for accomplishing goals in one's personal and professional life."

The four attitudes



People's technology readiness (or lack of it) manifests through four possible attitudes: some users feel optimistic about technology; they have a positive view of the control and efficiency that technology offers. Innovativeness - the second attitude - helps those with the tendency to be a technology pioneer. Some users, on the other hand, experience discomfort - at what they perceive as lack of control over technology and tend to feel quite overwhelmed by it. Lastly - some users experience plain insecurity, involving distrust and scepticism in relation to technology.

Clients, customers and marketers are bound to experience any one - or more - of these four attitudes: they may feel optimistic, innovative, experience discomfort - or feel insecure about technology. Marketers may therefore find themselves wedged between a rock (the clients or brand owners) and a hard place (the customers, as potential brand users). On the one hand, marketers are expected to identify, assess and recommend emerging technologies that may be useful to their brand - that 'next big thing' that could guarantee an explosive uptake by customers. On the other hand, the industry is awash in new applications, platforms and services that bell-and-whistle their way in, only to fizzle out and disappear.

Which new technology should marketers follow and where should they hedge their bets?

It seems that the prevailing reaction is to bet on an ever-growing number of new ideas as marketers scramble frantically to get their hands on anything new for fear of losing the competitive edge by being 'the last one there'.

Fight-or-flight response to Google+

The main question marketers ask themselves each time a new technology appears is - should one wait until the new platform settles and shows its worth, or does one commit resources to learning about it and start using it immediately?

In a recent article, eConsultancy's Matt Owen considers the huge media hype around Google+: "Unless you've been living under a rock for the past week" [he says](#), "you'll be aware of the huge buzz (no pun intended) surrounding Google+, the search giant's latest foray into the world of social networking." We all know that Google's previous forays onto social networking failed quite badly, yet - reading about Google+ across various social networks (even Facebook), "you'll be hearing the great and the good praising the new platform, telling us how great it looks, how useful it is [...] If you're on Google+ then hey, you must be an influencer right?" Owen is overly cautious about the question (consider the title to his article: "Google+ : Early access doesn't mean early success.") - he says "it's simply too early to tell what the platform is or how it will be used once Google opens those invitation floodgates."

Reading this, every marketer is likely to ask himself what happens once Google+ reaches [5 million members](#), then 10 million and then soon 100 million? Must he adopt Google+ now, or should he wait and see?

American doctor [Walter Bradford Cannon](#) coined the term [Fight or Flight Response](#) to describe the range of potential reactions that humans face when confronted by imminent danger. Considering their conflicting options (stay and fight or

run for one's life?) at an instinctive level, humans and animals often simply freeze - opting to 'playing dead', as it were.

Looking for the bigger picture

It appears that marketers are expected to manage an ever-growing number of platforms and channels with an increasingly fragmented audience. Should they accept the challenge and adopt Google+, or should they keep working on existing, successful social sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube? Anxiously, they ask themselves, isn't a "wait and see" response an act of freezing, of procrastinating, of not doing anything?

Clearly, what is required is a wide-angle view - the ability to assess the larger picture of the situation. Marketers would therefore do well to take their time before rushing in to take-up, sight-unseen, new channels. An important rule of thumb here is that each channel evolves with its user base. For example - Twitter members introduced re-tweets, hashtags and other elements of what constitutes today's Twitter experience.

Marketers should therefore look to embed themselves in the channel as users would, and experience it as their customers do. Once they learn the lay of the land, so to speak, marketers are likely to find it much more effective, and easier - to use the channel for promotional purposes. It is important to note that "embedded" marketers are not inactive - they monitor the channel's growth and look out for commercial opportunities. As such opportunities present themselves, marketers are well positioned to move in and take early mover's advantage.

ABOUT JOHN GINSBERG

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