



RETHINKING REAL TIME:

How Brands Can Really Matter in the Moment

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PUBLISHED
October 2014

THE **RUNDOWN**

Today, most of us watch TV—especially live events—with a smartphone in hand. We’re connecting with others, sharing the same experience at the same time. Brands are trying hard to become part of these collective moments. When it works, it’s magical. But it’s hard. Through our work with two brand partners, Nike and Electronic Arts, we’ve found that relevance is key. It entails giving people something that’s a real companion to the main event. We also learned that even though it’s real time, it means planning ahead.

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There's a reason tickets to the Super Bowl go for thousands of dollars. Watching an event live, sharing the moment with other fans, is a singular and special experience. To a great extent, technology has brought that experience into our living rooms. Even if we're watching an event alone—not just sports games, but awards shows, reality shows or the season premiere of our favorite show—we can talk about it with other people *as it happens*. Friends, rivals and strangers can watch together; and even if separated by geography, they are united by a shared experience.

"When a big event is happening on TV, or right in front of us, we turn to our second screen and search."

Over the past few years, much has been said about marketing in real time. But it isn't easy to pull off, and that's why there are so few success stories. Ironically, acting quickly requires some planning, both from a media and creative perspective. I'd argue that to be truly successful, we need to rethink what real-time marketing actually means.

Mobile connects us in the moment

First let me say this: It's no wonder we're still figuring this out. A dramatic shift in consumer behavior—a [shift to constant connectivity](#)—happened practically overnight. Between the 2010 and 2014 [World Cup finals](#), Google Search traffic from smartphones more than tripled, from 18% to 70% of total volume. That huge jump reflects our new reality: When a big event is happening on TV, or right in front of us, we turn to our second screen and search. Right after that, we [watch highlights on YouTube](#). The following day, we might use our smartphone to [buy a dress we saw on the red carpet](#). Nielsen research suggests that 84% of smartphone and tablet owners use their devices as second screens while watching TV (Nielsen, The Digital Consumer, February 2014).

Real time is all about relevance

The numbers tell only part of the story—the what. To get at the *why*, we headed out into living rooms across the country and spent time with sports fans. We sat with them,

cheered with them and held our heads in our hands with them. And we saw up close and unfiltered how they use mobile devices during games, uncovering three key motivations:

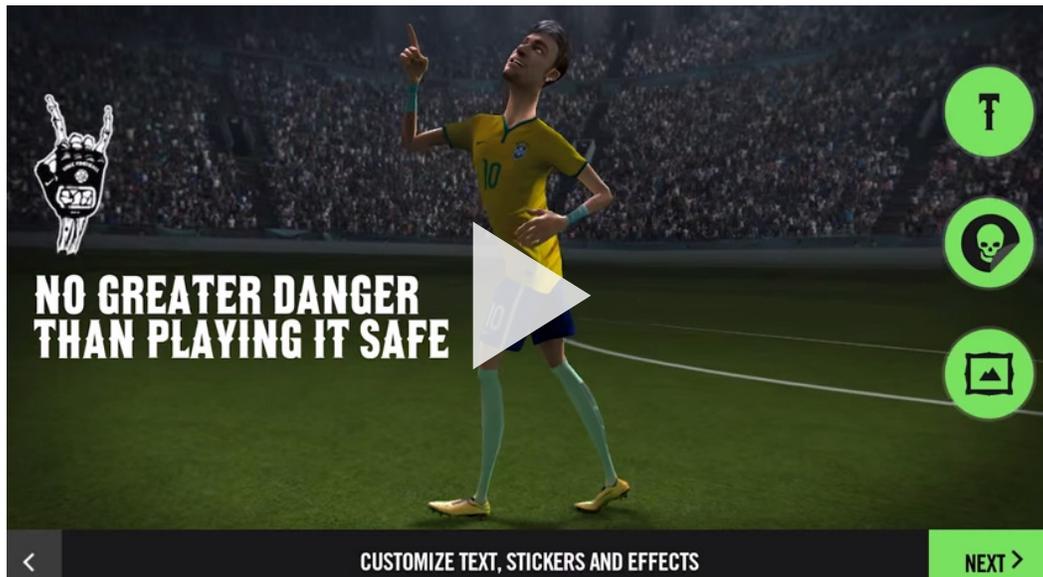
- To feel closer to the action: experiencing a more intense, more real, more visceral moment
- To share their feelings on the events they were seeing: jumping into chat, social streams or fan forums
- To get information they could share in real life: finding facts and stats to sound smart at the watercooler the next morning

"Nielsen research suggests that 84% of smartphone and tablet owners use their devices as second screens while watching TV."

What's clear is that in real time, people are simply looking for *relevance*—for something that *adds* to their experience. When viewing it this way, the goal shifts away from filling social streams and battling for likes to making people's experience richer. It means giving something that's a real companion to the main event, not another distraction. And it means planning ahead, not just reacting. Over the past six months, Google's Art, Copy & Code team has been exploring how to do this with two iconic brand partners, Nike and EA.

Nike takes a "Phenomenal Shot" at the World Cup

In our work with Nike, Wieden+Kennedy, Grow and Mindshare around the World Cup, we focused on the first two fan motivations: the need to feel closer to the action and the desire to express how we feel. For "[Phenomenal Shot](#)," we created rich 3D ads featuring Nike athletes in their signature celebratory poses inspired by the animated film "[The Last Game](#)." These ads ran within seconds of a goal being scored. A [mobile web experience](#) let users do things they couldn't do on a desktop, such as pan around a 3D version of Neymar Jr. by just tilting their phone. Fans could also remix and share these winning moments—all through the ad. Over 2 million fans created more than half a million "Phenomenal Moments" of their own.



Phenomenal Shot helped Nike deliver on its promise to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world like never before. “The technology is an exciting way for us to scale our interaction with athletes in real time and deliver content to them that will help fuel their conversations,” says Davide Grasso, chief marketing officer at Nike. “It’s a very powerful way to engage with Nike during some amazing moments in sports.”

Fans riff on GIFs with EA Madden’s GIFERATOR

More recently, to support the launch of EA’s Madden NFL 15 video game, we tackled all three motivations with the [Madden GIFERATOR](#). With EA SPORTS and its agency, Heat, along with our agency, Grow, we built a content engine that could generate around 100,000 different ads, depending on the player, the play, and the team. All of these were created out of Madden NFL 15 in-game footage and turned into animated GIFs. We married this content engine with a live feed from the NFL that has details about every game across the nation. This allowed us to both create and deliver ads in real time. In the first four weeks of the NFL season, fans created more than 340,000 GIFs and EA served 970 real-time-relevant ads across the web (on desktop and mobile), where fans were following the game and reading NFL news.



The team at EA is excited about how the GIFERATOR is adding a new dimension to the engagement the brand has with its fans. "People are talking about the NFL in real time, and we need to be able to talk to our fans and engage them around the things that are happening," says Anthony Stevenson, vice president of global marketing and brand at EA SPORTS. "We know that things trend and then in 20 minutes they're gone. If we're not there, we're not going to be part of the conversation. We've almost completely eliminated the time between the event and when the fans are engaging with our brand ... that allows us to have a personalized and hopefully long-term relationship with our fans that we hope they're passionate about."

*"Think about the experience on mobile before anything else.
Make ads for small screens, don't just downsize desktop creative."*

Ads that don't just reach, they resonate

Nike and EA were quick to recognize the value of creating advertising that doesn't just reach an audience but resonates uniquely in that moment with that audience. If

brands can do that—connect with people in the moment, not take them out of it—then everyone’s a winner. We’re all writing the playbook in real time, and here are some things we’ve learned so far:

1. Start with the data

In moments of need, curiosity and excitement, we search. This creates a database that can reflect our collective thoughts and interests like nothing else can. It’s the world’s largest consumer panel, one that’s uniquely vast, timely and authentic. For marketers, it’s a potential gold mine. Examining [this data](#) can help with not just what we create but when we present it to the world.

2. Add to the experience

Marketers have long known that reaching people at the right moment is crucial. Technology has made that possible in ways we’d never imagined. But we can’t let the technology lead. To be truly relevant, we have to figure out how to add to the experience.

3. Plan for all possibilities

Since you can’t predict what’s going to happen, build yourself a plan that can be tweaked on the fly. Technology now allows you to dynamically adjust creative based on what’s actually happening in the moment.

4. Go big on small screens

The dramatic shift to constant connectivity, fueled by mobile, is at the root of real time. It’s a mobile-first behavior, so your marketing should be too. Think about the experience on mobile before anything else. Make ads for small screens, don’t just downsize desktop creative. Create mobile web experiences and apps that take full advantage of the platform.

5. Make companions, not campaigns

When creating tools and content for the second screen, it’s crucial to remember that you’re the cheerleader, not the quarterback. So instead of creating whole new campaigns, distracting from the action, one way in is to make “companions”—ways to fuel the passion without getting in the way.



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