

Teleonomy Newsletter

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Editor: David Dawson

Phone: 01524 382000

E-mail: david.dawson@teleonomy.com

Teleonomy Group Plc

London Office: 7th Floor, 3-8 Carburton Street, London, W1W 5AJ

Tel: + 44 (0) 207 655 4350

Fax: + 44 (0) 207 665 4351

Lancaster Office: Research House, Caton Road, Lancaster, LA1 3PE

Tel: + 44 (0) 1524 382 000

Fax: + 44 (0) 1524 388 899

www.teleonomy.com

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The Waves and William James

By Michael Hulme

Over the years I have been asked on many occasions what is the significance of our wave picture, and overlaying quote from William James, that forms our home page on the website and is included at the beginning of many of our presentations. It could of course be there as some perverse means of eliciting such questions, without having any real meaning. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The combination of the James quotation and the waves picture is a powerful symbol of our philosophy and values and is fundamental to our practical research and businesses position. Understanding this is key to understanding us and, I would like to think, helpful to us all in thinking about both our business and private lives.

William James (1842-1910) was an American thinker and academic, a Harvard man, trained in medicine, was a non-practicing MD, and psychologist. However his first love was undoubtedly philosophy. His thinking was essentially what today would be called ‘inter-disciplinary’ in as much as he was prepared to synthesise many subject areas in attempts to find coherent explanations. In this sense Teleonomy can be seen as continuing this tradition, as we pull together insights from a range of disciplines to ‘shed light’ on empirical data.

James was active and influential in his thought at a critical time for both America and the World. Many of the institutions and fundamental concepts that drive our modern world were created or conceived out of the ferment of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. There is a strong parallel between then and now, the opening years of the twenty first century, as many of our institutions, values and the position of the individual in society are being questioned and reappraised.

Whilst James wrote and contributed to many debates, he is perhaps best known for his thinking in relation to pragmatism and process philosophy. These two conceptual positions are fundamental to the way in which Teleonomy approaches research and are the reasons why James is quoted.

To attempt a discourse on pragmatism is beyond the scope of this article; suffice to say that as a body of thought it was very strong in America, with key proponents including C.S. Pierce and John Dewey. Scruton defines pragmatism as “the view that true means useful. A useful belief is one that gives me the best handle on the world: the belief which when acted upon, holds out the greatest prospect for success”.

Stated another way, for an account to hold true it must be derived from external experience and this must be verifiable within a broader context. Applied to Teleonomy, this becomes the role of gathering detailed empirical/experiential evidence to provide insights/findings/beliefs that are practically useful. It is our goal to provide ‘actionable’ work of immediate relevance to our corporate clients i.e. having some direct profit/cost benefit.

A second element of pragmatism deals with context. James observes that to “an observer standing outside of its generating causes, novelty can appear only as so much ‘chance’, while to one who stands inside it is the expression of ‘free creative activity’”. For Teleonomy this becomes our deep involvement in the area of consumer and organisational behaviour in relation to media, virtual/physical communication and relationship channels. Our specialised concentration and understanding is sufficiently profound as to ensure we stand within the events that are shaping our area of study, and we are therefore able to locate important, yet at times small, developments or changes that could have profound future competitive or strategic implications.

The theme of context is reinforced in James's process thinking. James "saw the world as a sea of flux (hence the waves image) ...that are not a clear-cut replacement of one hard-edged state by another but a melting and fusing of boundary-less processes that lead into one another". Practically, one might say that the relationship between the consumer and, say, a mobile phone is deeply contextual and interconnected. The phone will change the behaviour of the consumer, the consumer may well use the phone in a manner or manners not anticipated by the manufacturer, and each change evolves the other.

In this manner, changes are not binary (on or off) but complex, nuanced and if not understood as such may, through analysis, be reduced to over simplification or at worst the absurd. We have seen a prime example of this in recent times in much of the early research surrounding the dot.com retail bubble. At Teleonomy we endeavour to handle complexity and the inter-relationship of processes and behaviours without reducing arguments to the absurd. This places a particular burden upon us, as, whilst we are comfortable with such context dependent data, we must always ensure we communicate our thoughts and findings in an actionable and pragmatic manner to our clients. Ours is not a simple path but it is the most likely to lead to successful outcomes.

William James attempted through his thought to provide frameworks by which one could derive meaning from, and make practical sense of, the world in which he lived. This is also, although in a much narrower sense, the role of Teleonomy. James adopted a framework of thought particularly adapted to the times of change in which he lived; I believe that those 'tools' and modes of explanation remain powerful and useful today.

Sources

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Creating Customer Touchpoints

By Paul Hudson

Customers aren't happy. In an increasingly crowded, competitive market, time-poor customers are becoming the harshest critics of customer service, and evidence is emerging that top-level management of the channels available between the consumer and company is essential for increasing customer experience and satisfaction.

Marketers have traditionally found it very easy to communicate with people because there were a limited number of channels with extraordinary reach: television, press, direct marketing etc. But consumers are now segmenting into niche groups and adding new media to the mix, including their mobile/PDA, the PC-based Web, and iTV.

To add to the problem, the different media create different emotional effects, so it becomes necessary to communicate in a variety of increasingly subtle ways to retain – or create - brand loyalty. Research by Teleonomy shows the following:

- Customers want to feel empowered and in control of their custom – they want to feel in control of their relationship with companies

- People are increasingly buying according to their mood, which is prone to disappointment when that mood changes
- People want companies to approach them in a transparent way.
- People are much less tolerant of any shortfall in service

All of these channels to the customer have to fit together to build consistent brands that connect and communicate effectively, being applied in different ways for different reasons and situations. Brand building needs to be based on a bottom-up perspective like an upside-down organisation pyramid, integrating all staff in the branding process. But typically, the customer helpdesk is controlled by the Call Centre, the website is controlled by the e-Commerce team, and the retail store is controlled by a separate division.

How often are we, as consumers, frustrated by the apparent lack of communication, co-ordination and ability of the organisation to listen to us? How often, when we call them does it feel that they don't really understand us, don't really care about our problem and never really commit to keeping past promises? How often does it feel like it *our* problem and never *theirs!* In the new and evolving world, where the consumer has more control over the contact, where it is harder to 'access' them through mass-media marketing and where there are many methods to interact with an organisation it will be true that those companies that have a strong brand will also be those that have effective communication 'touchpoints'.

Over the last 20 years, Teleonomy have been researching, measuring and building methodologies to help our client understand the service levels being provided through their customer channels. Our new methodology, *TouchPoints*, helps to unravel this complex situation, providing management with quantified indicators of success across their company, along with case studies of best practice and strategic insight.

TouchPoints benchmarks the effectiveness of different channels, highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the customer relationship. For more information, visit the following page:

<http://www.teleonomy.com/waves/tnewsletter/2003/02/page5.htm>

Or contact Natalie Turner, Director of Consultancy, on 01524 382000 or <mailto:Natalie.turner@teleonomy.com>

The Impermanence of Life

By Caroline Chipperfield

The shops are out of chocolates, Interflora is fully booked and you need to drop the name of a Hollywood star to book a restaurant – yes, Valentines Day is upon us once again.

This might seem a bizarre theme for a Teleonomy article, however, new technology – and our use of it – is even impeding on this most romantic of holidays.

Years ago, our Grandmothers would keep all the letters and notes their suitors gave them during their courtships in a box under their beds.

Indeed, most women of my mother's generation will have a shoebox or two with letters, cinema tickets and treasured items from their beaux.

However, the women of my generation are the first to see technology make a notable change in the way in which we communicate with our families and friends and more specifically, with our significant others.

Whilst we too may have received letters from our first boyfriends, more recently the items we cherished have become less tangible. Women who may have bundles of love letters tied up with ribbon may also have a collection of floppy disks storing hundreds of e-mails.

Even the growth in the usage of text messaging in the last few years has affected our communication patterns. Certainly, receiving messages wherever you are, whatever you are doing and having the opportunity to re-read them on the train, the tube etc has its advantages, but the fact is, that those once tangible memoirs of our feelings for our loved ones are gradually getting more and more impermanent – or rather, intangible.

Those with basic mobile phones are also discovering another aspect to text messaging which distinguishes them from formats like e-mail - which we can only store up to 15 messages at any one time. Which brings us to a dilemma –

To delete or not to delete?

If you don't delete a text, which is 'quite' special, do you run the risk of an earlier, MORE special message being deleted when your friends deluge you with disposable, instant texts?

Even for those with a greater phone message capacity there is still a problem – if your telephone reaches its 165-message capacity, do you really have the time to sift through and save those 'special' ones? Anecdotal evidence suggests not! A 'delete all' instruction is sent and those digital sweet nothings are gone forever.

At the moment we have one option – to use the software often available free with your mobile phone, which requires an infrared port – mainly available on laptops, which are mainly for work. Although this does allow you to type text messages to directly from your PC, amazing people with your swift responses but enables you to store them.

However, not only do you have to set up your PC to beam to your phone, Teleonomy research has noted that as yet, text messaging is not used in business, so why would you want to store your personal text messages on your company laptop?

The solution is on its way however, Microsoft is working on a system they are calling myLifeBits which will hold all the indispensable memorabilia and documents which most people have on top of a wardrobe.

One of the many benefits is that it will be searchable, so if you are looking for valentines cards from Tim, you will be able to search by 'valentines', 'cards' or 'Tim'. One of the disadvantages is that bundles of cards held in ribbon may well be a thing of the past!

In the meantime however we may as well embrace the season – using digital technology of course, and if you aren't expecting many cards this year, perhaps you should try a visit to www.Cosmiccupid.com to generate a few!

MRA Members' News

Diary Dates: -

26.03.03 Joint event between Wave Crest Alliance and the London Business School Futures Media Forum on Digital Radio at the London Business School

29.04.03 Wave Crest Alliance Spring Event at Henley Management College

09.10.03 Wave Crest Alliance Autumn Event at Henley Management College

News

The Media Research Alliance was closed to new members on December 31st, 2002. Agreement has been reached with Henley Management College for MRA members to be the founding community of our joint initiative 'The Wave Crest Alliance'. The changes reflect the input from members on what they most valued and wanted from membership.

The **Wave Crest Alliance** will continue to be research-based and aims to bring together understanding and insight into changes and complexity surrounding both internal and external organisation relationships. It will look externally at both physical and virtual channels to market, i.e. CRM issues, but also include consideration of purchasing and procurement, whilst internally it explores how organisations structure themselves to meet new challenges and changes. The Alliance is structured to provide practical opportunities for considering the strategic implications of the insights provided.

There will still be a quarterly output of research, but the format will be in a more accessible style and will utilise the extensive academic links available through Henley to make available more leading edge academic thinking – see '**Wave Crest Journal**'

Wave Crest Alliance Events

There will be two full day events per year, both consisting of a morning with guest speakers - including both academics and practitioners. The afternoon is in workshop format using a case study presentation to discuss implications for individual businesses. These events will be held in the conducive atmosphere of Henley Management College.

29.04.03 The Spring event will be around - 'Emerging Trends in Consumer Behaviour' this covers the broad environment including physical i.e. more than virtual channels). This first event will include the original research findings from the brand project.

09.10.03 The Autumn event will be around - 'Media and Consumer Interaction – Organisation Structure and Process implications'.

The days will be informed by Teleonomy research activity and members may suggest topics and themes for the Journal and Event Days.

There will also be an annual London Briefing Event, such as the LBS event on Digital Radio due on 26.03.02, for which you should have received your invitation.

Wave Crest Journal

The Winter Desk Research Output is a 'special' brand issue and introduces the new format magazine style. The Wave Crest Journal will provide contemporary analysis and commentary, including articles and academic papers. The Journal presents emerging themes in organisational relationship development in a quarterly, magazine format, delivered electronically to members.

The new style **Wave Crest Journal** is to be available from the end of February.

Wave Crest Alliance Desk Research Option

Former MRA members are being offered first refusal on an innovative new membership option. A maximum of 20 Wave Crest Alliance members may elect for the Desk Research Option. This gives Wave Crest Alliance members access to Henley Management College Desk Research Capability for the equivalent of approximately 10 days desk research during the year of membership for a premium of £1,000.

The year in which this facility is available would normally be the same as the period of membership of the Wave Crest Alliance, but for MRA members due to renew from May onwards, a pro rata arrangement to link to their normal renewal point can be accommodated. There is no facility to 'carry over' unused time at the end of the year. Additional desk research time can be negotiated beyond the 10 days, for an additional, but similarly discounted, fee. This facility is available on a first come, first served basis.

MRA members may still access the MRA desk research archive on the website until December 2003 (subject to holding a valid membership). To access this from the new site use the following link:

<http://www.teleonomy.com/mra/protect/login.htm>

MRA@teleonomy.com

If you have any feedback to offer, ideas or suggestions for the alliance, or queries on any aspect of the MRA/Wave Crest Alliance, please contact MRA@teleonomy.com or call 01524 382000.