

# BRAND<sup>TM</sup> QUARTERLY

## DOES YOUR BRAND INSPIRE LOYALTY?

ISSUE #21

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The New Power Struggle: Brands And Their Customers. Who Will Win?

Seven Steps To Accelerate Digital Marketing Transformation

Why Personal Disruption Will Keep Your Customers Happy

Multi-Generational Marketing: A Must For Any Brand

The Power Of Signature Stories

...and much more inside.



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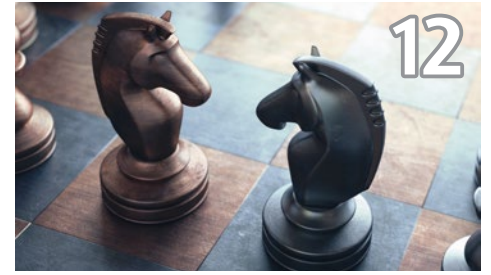
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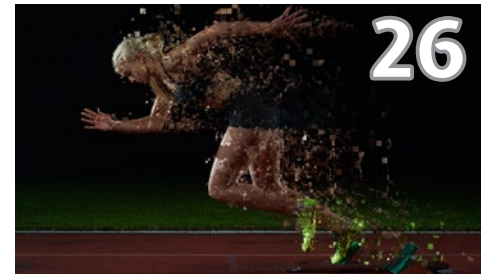
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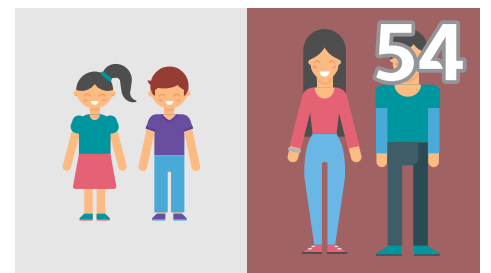
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# From The Editor

Does your brand inspire loyalty? Does it remain top-of-mind? Is it something your customers just can't do without?

You'll find plenty of insights within this issue of Brand Quarterly to help you reach that lofty goal of achieving unwavering brand loyalty, build a host of brand advocates, and to maintain that place in their hearts and minds in the years to come.

Learn how to gain influence (and even become an influencer), build a brand of legend, develop a truly authentic customer experience, and ask the right questions when going through a rebrand. Then accelerate your digital marketing transformation, engage consumers in the right way, and even discover your brand's own unique 'Signature Story'.

Oh - and a bunch more... whether it's social media, leadership, digital marketing, branding (the company and the personal kind), innovation and disruption, multi-generational marketing, or anything in between - we've got you covered.

Also, if you haven't as yet, pop over to the website - once you've finished this issue of course ;) - and check out our recently released Social Media Special Edition brought to you in association with the fantastic team at Sysomos.

And speaking of Special Editions... we are now hard at work on our 3rd annual Global Marketing Special Edition, which will be making it's way to you this September - it's going to be another bumper issue!

Until the next issue, take care.  
And remember - sharing is caring :)

*Fiona*



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# Luxury's Lesson To Brands: Get Your Customer Experience Right

*Ana Andjelic*

"The stuff that matters in life is no longer stuff. It's other people. It's relationships. It's experience," noted Airbnb's co-founder Brian Chesky. Airbnb nearly single-handedly disrupted the hospitality industry by capitalizing on this shift from "stuff" to experiences.



Transformation of businesses from physical items and properties to experiences is best explained through the concept of the core value unit. The core value unit refers to the element (product, service, information, content, social currency, etc.) that is being created or consumed. Traditionally, the core value unit of retailers has been their product. Everything they do to transfer this core value unit to their customers - supply, production, distribution, and marketing - consists of value-adding actions revolving around the product.

In introducing digital economy's core value unit, Chesky isn't alone. Uber, Farfetch, One Fine Stay, Spring, or Hello Alfred don't have any physical products to speak of. They are all in the business of removing friction in providing services and delivering experiences to their customers.

These smart upstarts are gaining in relevance with the next generation of affluents as they redefine what the modern luxury is and how we enjoy it. At its best, luxury today is anticipatory, empathetic and non-obtrusive. It revolves around unique, individual experiences that spiritually and mentally enrich us and are enjoyed in private or with a few selected others.

Modern luxury lifestyle revolves around wellness, mindfulness and environmental sustainability - and around those who can afford them. It is a perfect balance of the ancient Japanese concept of *motenashi* and contemporary consumers' values of time, achievement, self-improvement and entrepreneurship.

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**At its best, luxury today is anticipatory, empathetic and non-obtrusive**

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Luxury today is firmly placed in the domain of seamlessness, convenience, utility, personalization and speed. This intrinsically links it to service and experience design.

If service and experience are the lens of modern luxury, what are their implications for the mass brands?

The answer is putting the consumer at the center. Smart brands today focus on creative ways to improve users' quality of life and offer the most desirable, viable and feasible solutions to users needs in an invisible, intuitive, one-step-ahead-of-you manner.

To succeed in this, brands need to be clear on what their core capability is, and how to translate it in a consistent, holistic and scale-building customer experience delivered through products, utility, content, and campaigns. This experience will then help users move through their decision journey by responding to their emotional, social and informational needs at every moment.

Just like *motenashi*, being intuitive, effortless and flexible with users helps brands strategically guide their allocation and sequencing of marketing investments across touchpoints that are most desirable from the user's point of view and that are critical in user's decision-making process.

Gross-level marketing investment is getting replaced by brands understanding and managing individual touchpoints. This micro-/human-centered and cost-effective focus on every brand interaction makes it valuable and beneficial to users in its own right, outside and beyond their product purchase. Users emotional satisfaction and brand affinity are a byproduct of the pleasure with the quality of experience and service they get.

For example, Tesla, Warby Parker, Net-a-Porter or Patagonia all wrap their physical products into attractive service offerings along the entire customer journey. This allows them to ensure superior end-to-end

customer experience and excellent customer service. It also allows them to win in their industries by proactively creating, customizing and automating their customer's paths, thus creating customer lock-in and fending off competition.

These companies all realized that the decision journey is central to their customer experience of the brand. Consequently, they started managing it as they would any product. Through their journeys, they acquire and retain customers and create finely tuned, white-glove, intuitive and custom experiences that are hard to resist (and steer away from).

Customer data is critical in this process. The fastest growing and most successful brands of today all heavily invested in data mining and analytics, which allowed them to better target, service and convert their customers. Yoox has so much data on their customer behavior that it can confidently claim that Germans are the biggest returners of merchandise; and that the bulk of online shopping happens on Monday mornings when consumers are battling their beginning-of-the-week blues by treating themselves to something nice.

As they reorient their business towards service and experience, brands need to learn how to use the intoxicating abundance of data like butlers and not stalkers. Those who manage to collect and capitalize on a digital wealth of information to offer superior service without scaring off their fickle customers will come out as winners.

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## Brands need to learn how to use the intoxicating abundance of data like butlers and not stalkers

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The days of building brand preference pre-purchase are gone. Modern luxury teaches us that in order to win, brands need to build the impeccable, immediate and data-based presence throughout their entire customer decision journey - from consideration to evaluation to purchase, bonding, advocacy, and loyalty. This used to be true only for brands with long purchase cycles, like luxury, but in the digital economy, it applies to the rest of brands as well.

Design of customer experience is a matter of business transformation as much as it is of management of the social, emotional and physical touchpoints where customers interact with the brand and the way they move through these touchpoints over time. The first step in creating a truly experience- and service design-centric business is to shift the definition of brands' core value unit and the brand capability that's built around it.

Today, as always, a brand's goal is value creation. The difference is that, in order to create value for themselves, brands first need to create value-adding experiences for their customers.



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### Ana Andjelic

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Ana works as SVP, Global Strategy Director at Havas LuxHub, where she helps fashion, luxury and lifestyle companies adapt to the digital economy. An experienced strategist with a passion for new things, she earned her doctorate in Sociology at Columbia University and worked at the world's top advertising agencies. Ana was recognized as one of Luxury Women to Watch 2016 and one of the top 10 digital strategists in the world by the Guardian. She presented at SxSW, Advertising Week, Internet Week, IxDA and Cannes International Festival of Creativity. Ana guest lectured at Columbia University, School of Visual Arts and Miami Ad School. You can learn more about her work at her website (link below).

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# The Secret To Gaining Trust And Influencing Decision Makers

*John Hall*

Trust is the new currency in business and communication. It's the foundation for all that you do, and in the information-filled, internet-driven world we live in, it's more important than ever.

In a world inundated by noise, stale messaging and logos, and company-focused content, what sets a brand apart is its ability to establish a human connection and build trust with its audience.

Unfortunately, as important as trust is to a brand's success, we encounter barriers to that trust every day - especially as relationships are formed. Let me give you an example.

I have a very vivid memory of one of the first networking events I attended as the CEO of Influence & Co. It was simultaneously exciting and terrifying. I was surrounded by industry leaders, but I couldn't seem to really connect with any of them. Everyone wanted face time with the key players right away, and I felt like that sad kid in middle school gym class picked last for dodgeball.

After the event, I spent a lot of time studying exactly what these key players were doing that I wasn't, trying to determine how I could put processes in place to overcome

those trust barriers. I needed to set myself up for success, so I could build the kinds of relationships I required for my company to stand a chance. What did I need to do differently to establish trust and attract more opportunity to my company?

The only way to overcome trust barriers is to identify trust touchpoints and act on them in the right way at the right times: Doing so consistently builds trust, earns you top-of-mind space, and can help you influence decision makers. While that's easier said than done, it's a technique I've found success with.

The following pages outline how it works.

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**Identify trust touchpoints  
and act on them in the  
right way at the right times**

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## Identifying Trust Touchpoints

In any relationship you have with another person - whether that's a consumer, a member of your audience, a key decision maker at a company you'd like to work with, or some combination of these - there will be opportunities for you to build trust and start earning top-of-mind real estate.

Think of those opportunities as targets on the timeline of your relationship. You want to be able to identify those targets and hit them at just the right time; over time (because it takes a while to truly earn trust), that person will begin to see you as a valuable resource that she can trust. Thankfully, there are a lot of ways to hit those targets because there are a lot of ways you can build trust.

It all starts with authenticity. If your only motivation is to make money by selling your product or service, you're probably not going to find much success with this strategy. Earning trust and influence is a long-term process that depends upon your ability to build truly meaningful, valuable relationships, and you can only do that if you're being yourself.

From there, one of the easiest and most natural ways to gain trust is by helping others. We frequently lend help to people - employees, team members, spouses, friends, and family - when we have something of value to offer them. The same idea applies to your approach to earning trust and influence.

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### **One of the easiest and most natural ways to gain trust is by helping others**

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Find out what your contact values, and ask how you can help. Sometimes it's as simple as offering honest, transparent feedback when she asks for your opinion on something.

You could make an introduction that would help her grow her network. You can also put these ideas of authenticity and helpfulness together, sharing your knowledge by educating others.

Executed correctly, these tactics can go a long way toward building trust on an individual level. But it can still be challenging to always hit these targets on the timelines of your relationships at the right moment, and it's more challenging still to amplify this timing to gain influence with a larger group of decision makers.

That's where content comes in.

## Building Trust And Earning Influence Through Content

All these characteristics that build trust - things like authenticity, helpfulness, transparency, and likability - can and should be incorporated in content that you can use to connect and stay top of mind with a bigger audience.

In our information-filled, internet-driven world, we have access to an overwhelming amount of content. Whether your audience members have questions they want to answer, topics they're curious about, pain points they're looking to solve, or products or services they're researching, they can find information on any of these areas independently by searching for content online.

Take advantage of this shift in communication: create and distribute authentic, helpful, and educational content that your audience finds valuable. Creating content like this and distributing it in the outlets that your audience members read can help you hit those trust touchpoints on a much larger scale without losing the human elements that make those touchpoints so valuable on the individual level.

## Create and distribute authentic, helpful, and educational content that your audience finds valuable

And you can always scale your content creation and distribution efforts so you can constantly create and share ideas with the

right people at the right time. Hitting your trust touchpoints that way helps you maintain top-of-mind status with your audience and strengthens your influence.

Between embracing authenticity and adding value to your relationships, it turns out that the secret to gaining trust and influence with decision makers is no real secret at all.



### John Hall

CEO and Co-Founder | Influence & Co.

John Hall is the CEO and co-founder of Influence & Co., a company helping businesses position key individuals as industry influencers and thought leaders. The company focuses on creating high-quality content, coming from its clients, that reaches each client's target audience online. Influence & Co.'s clients range from startups to fast-growing Inc. 500 companies to the Fortune 500. Influence & Co. was selected as a finalist for the Content Marketing Agency of the Year award by Content Marketing Institute. In 2015, John was named Forbes' No. 1 keynote speaker to keep you ahead of digital marketing trends and one of Inc.'s top 25 marketing influencers to help readers dominate 2016.

[www.influenceandco.com](http://www.influenceandco.com)



# WHEN WE SAY

*It will be ready at 10 p.m.*

# WE MEAN

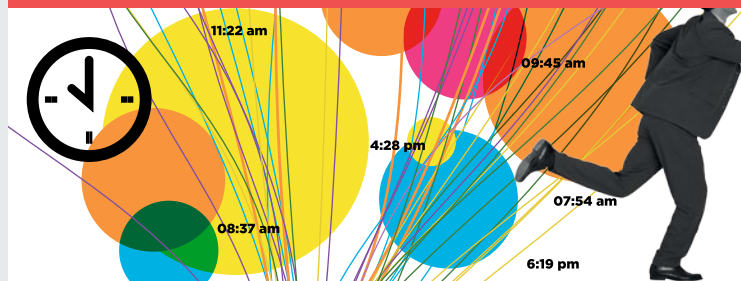
*It will be ready at 10 p.m.*

In our dictionary, the word trust is defined as the most important element of our relationship with our clients.

SeproTec is ranked among the world's top 30 language service providers. With a global presence, we offer translation, localization and interpreting services in any language. Furthermore, our 25 years of experience in the sector have allowed us to earn the most important international certifications.

We can assure you that with us, uncertainty is something that only new clients feel. It completely disappears once you've worked with us for the first time.

## WORDS MATTER





# The New Power Struggle: Brands And Their Customers. Who Will Win?

*Tiffani Bova*

If you are a sales or marketing executive, it should come as no surprise that we are officially in the “Age of the Customer.” It used to be that companies could control the information exchange about their brand, products and services with customers, and position themselves in a way which best served *their* agenda.

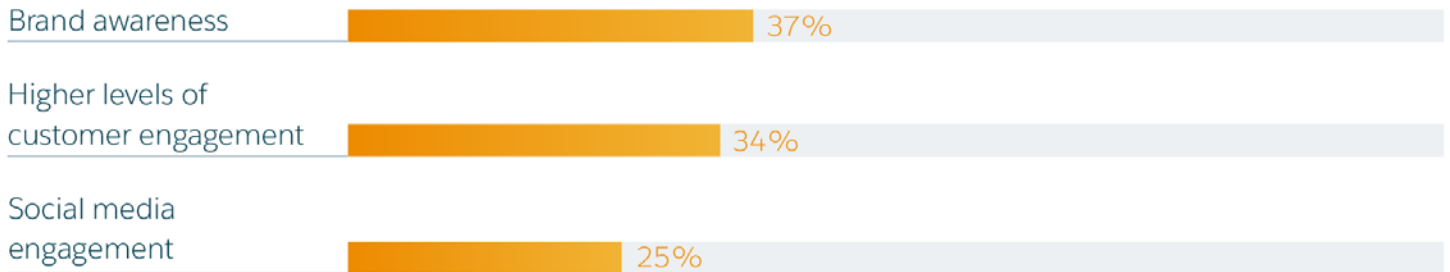
However, with a constant stream of new digital and social technologies, a perfect storm of access (24x7 via multiple devices) and information (branded and non-branded) has been the catalyst for the emergence of new customer buying behaviors and a power shift from providers of products and services to their customers.

Those very customers who used to rely on brands for information are now much more empowered in their decision-making abilities, significantly impacting all aspects of the business. While this power shift may actually have a positive impact on the volume of customer engagement and interactions with brands, it will also be highly disruptive to long-standing sales and marketing strategies for organizations around the globe.

In the recent Salesforce 2016 State of Marketing research report, it was found that customer engagement is a top priority for marketers this year, slightly behind brand awareness. While brand awareness is a longstanding marketing objective that implies one-way, business to consumer broadcasts, customer engagement indicates the rising importance of more personal relationships with customers via valuable two-way communication.

## Marketers Make Customer Engagement a Top Priority

*Brand awareness has been a goal since the Mad Men days, but customer engagement indicates a modern marketer – one who's focused more on creating a personalized experience than brandishing a logo.*



Source: Salesforce 2016 State of Marketing

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### Customer engagement is a top priority for marketers this year

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Furthermore, in this same study, high-performing marketing teams are nearly nine times more likely than underperformers, to agree strongly that they have adopted a customer journey strategy as part of their overall business strategy. Seventy-three percent of successful marketers believe adopting a customer journey strategy has positively impacted overall customer engagement. But top marketers know that identifying the customer journey is an ongoing process requiring context, personalization, and high-value insights, which can't be a one-time exercise.

Responding to a more empowered buyer requires not only process adjustment but cultural ones as well. Recalibrating an organization towards a more customer-centric view is easier said than done.

The first step is to make a company-wide commitment to being more customer driven. It can't only happen in the marketing organization; otherwise, the potential long-term benefit may go unrealized.

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### Responding to a more empowered buyer requires not only process adjustment but cultural ones as well

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Many companies get trapped in their past success and are unwilling to undertake the change necessary to transition from an internally driven sales organization to one which puts the customer's actual decision-making process front and center.

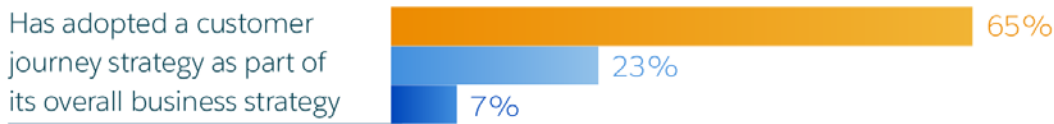
No longer are companies able to apply traditional thinking towards managing customer acquisition - the linear funnel from awareness to purchase has been replaced by a much more dynamic, customer-driven process. The good news is that marketing leaders are using their new digital and technology investments to further understand these more unpredictable customer journeys, which ultimately, should improve customer satisfaction and revenue growth. The bad news is that many organizations are so focused on driving agility into the marketing organization, that they are ignoring the role sales plays and will continue to play in a customer's (preferred) buying journey.

## Top Marketing Teams Commit to the Customer Journey

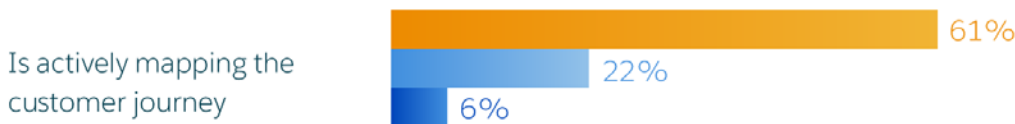
From adopting strategy to actively mapping touchpoints, high-performing marketing leaders make the customer journey a priority.

### Percentage Who Strongly Agree with Each Statement

### High-performing vs. Underperforming Teams



**8.8x**  
more likely to strongly agree



**9.7x**  
more likely to strongly agree

High performers Moderate performers Underperformers

Source: Salesforce 2016 State of Marketing

In many cases, sales is the first “human-to-human” engagement a customer has with a brand. What sales does - what they say, how they engage, and how they add value to the customer is a critical piece of a buyers’ journey. Improving customer satisfaction, customer experience, and loyalty requires sales and marketing to be fully integrated with systems, processes, and people throughout the entire lifecycle of a customer.

This power struggle isn’t going to go away anytime soon - and as digital engagement continues to accelerate with the proliferation of social and mobile, the customer will remain in the driver’s seat of their own buying journey. The challenge in 2016 and moving forward will be how companies can be responsive to the “Age of the Customer” without chasing all the various options available to them. Gaining buy-in from sales on these new digital efforts can and will help win more business, and develop a truly customer driven organization.



### In many cases, sales is the first “human-to-human” engagement a customer has with a brand



### Tiffani Bova

Global Customer Growth & Innovation Evangelist | [Salesforce.com](http://Salesforce.com)

Tiffani Bova is the Global Customer Growth & Innovation Evangelist at Salesforce where she helps Salesforce customers improve sales performance and enhance customer experience by re-imagining how they can not only grow bigger but grow better with innovative business models and technology. She was previously a VP, Distinguished Analyst, and Research Fellow at Gartner covering Sales Strategies and Channel Innovation.

[www.salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com)

# The Power Of Signature Stories

*David Aaker and Jennifer L. Aaker*

Stories are a hot topic in marketing because they have been shown to be superior to facts in getting attention, being remembered, in changing opinions, in stimulating social activity, developing emotion, and, curiously, even in communicating facts. Many firms have added journalists, editors, and filmmakers to their staffs to create or find meaningful stories and present them in a compelling way.





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## Stories are often thought mainly to support tactical communication objectives - but there is also a strategic role

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Stories are often thought mainly to support tactical communication objectives - but there is also a strategic role. Such stories we call signature stories because they represent some form of strategic statement about a mission, values, the brand, customer relationship, or strategic intent. And they can do this much better than a recitation of facts, which usually ends up sounding not only boring but also similar to a host of other firms.

Consider the L.L. Bean firm that would like to communicate its innovation culture, its passion for the outdoors, its commitment to quality, its concern for the customer, and the functional benefits of the Maine Hunting Shoe. Stating such facts is unlikely to create interest, credibility or even a connection to L.L. Bean.

In contrast, consider the following story. Leon L. Bean, an avid outdoorsman, returned from a hunting trip in 1912 disgruntled because of his cold, wet feet. With little resources but a lot of motivation and ingenuity, he invented a new boot by stitching lightweight leather tops to waterproof rubber bottoms. The boots worked so well he offered them for sale via mail order as the Maine Hunting Shoe using lists of nonresident Maine hunting license holders. Unfortunately, most of the first 100 pairs sold had a stitching problem and leaked. Mr Bean faced a defining moment! His response? He refunded the customers' money even though it nearly broke him and fixed the process so that future boots were indeed watertight. This story communicates the L.L. Bean brand far better than any presentation of facts.

So what is a **signature story**?

A signature story is an intriguing, authentic, involving narrative (as opposed to a stand-alone set of facts or features) with a strategic message that enables growth by clarifying or enhancing the brand, the customer relationship, the organization, and/or the business strategy. It is a strategic asset that can be leveraged through time, providing inspiration and direction both internally and externally.

A signature story needs to:

- **Be Intriguing If Not Fascinating** - some combination of thought-provoking, novel, provocative, interesting, informative, newsworthy, or entertaining to the audience.
- **Be Authentic** - the audience cannot perceive the story to be phony, contrived, or a transparent selling effort. Further, there should be substance behind the story and its message in the form of programs, policies, or transparency that support.
- **Be Involving** - the audience member should be drawn into the story which usually, but not always, precipitates a cognitive, emotional, or behavioral response.
- **Have A Strategic Message Linked To The Brand** - that enables growth by clarifying or enhancing the brand, the customer relationship, the organization, and/or the business strategy. It could clarify or advance the brand's visibility, image, personality, relevance, and/or value proposition. Finally, it could help articulate not only the current business strategy but also the future vision for the organization with a story arc for how to get there.

A signature story is an asset with enduring relevance and capacity to inspire and provide direction over a long time period. As it gets retold, signature stories gain authenticity, traction, and influence. A signature story thus can be identified by its anticipated life

as well as its message. It can be contrasted with tactical stories used to achieve a short-term communication objective, perhaps in an advertisement or on a website. There is a qualitative difference between tactical and signature stories that affects how they should be resourced and managed.

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## **A signature story is an asset with enduring relevance and capacity to inspire and provide direction**

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The principle targets for signature stories are employees, and existing and potential customers. Signature stories can provide employees a source of inspiration and a cornerstone of organizational culture and values. The L.L. Bean story supports a higher purpose around innovation, the passion for the outdoors, quality, and the customer. Millennials, in particular, are attracted to firms that are aiming for more than sales and profits, and a signature story can help with making that purpose authentic and clear.

Customers are also a valuable target because there is a segment that will find a brand's values, customer relationship, and strategy important to them as they develop loyalties to brands and firms. Advancing the strategic position of the brand and organization in the eyes of this audience is challenging because of message clutter, media dynamics, growing customer ownership of context, and the complexity of social media. Signature stories can be an answer, providing the ability to not only to provide break-through visibility but also to communicate the basic essence of a brand and organization.

As to what story content would be useful - it is important to understand who you are, what you do, and where you are going. Look to your brand vision and value proposition, drivers of customer relationships, your

organizational culture and values, and your business strategy. What are the priorities? What perceptions and attitudes need to be created, reinforced, or changed to allow the business strategy to succeed?

To find or create signature stories, look broadly for story heroes. Stories around customers, programs, suppliers, offerings, are often employed to motivate customers. Four more; the employees, founder, a business revitalization strategy, and a future business revitalization strategy, are usually oriented to inspiring employees.

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## **To find or create signature stories, look broadly for story heroes**

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The **customer as the hero** can be effective because there is no "my brand or product is better than yours" connotation, and the customer story is likely to be closely linked to either the organizational values or the brand's value proposition. LinkedIn has a series of professionally created one-minute stories around "Creating you own success" that involve leveraging LinkedIn. Dr. Chavez told about his dream of getting pets off of processed foods using LinkedIn to share his big idea. Jenni was laid off during the financial meltdown and several months of intense networking led to a marketing position and, ultimately, supported the decision to be on her own.

The **employee as the hero** can be the source of a strong and memorable signature story because employees are on the front lines. Zappos.com, the online shoe store, has a set of signature stories around its ten core values, one of which is to deliver "Wow" customer service. One such story involves a Zappos.com call center employee, who at 3 A.M. received a call from a customer who could not find an open pizza store. Instead

of gently turning the customer away, the employee actually found a pizza store open and arranged a delivery.

The **business revitalization** story can clarify and motivate a new strategy and inspire employees and customers. Consider Zhang Ruimin, who became the CEO of a troubled Chinese appliance manufacturer, Haier, in 1982. Early in his tenure he needed to replace a customer's faulty refrigerator and found that twenty percent of his inventory was also defective. Zhang promptly had the dud refrigerators lined up on the factory floor and destroyed them with a sledgehammer in front of the whole staff to tell them and the world that poor quality would not be tolerated anymore. From that point on, the story served to define a new strategy and culture that ultimately led to Haier becoming a global leader. The story can work at the outset when the strategy is being implemented and over time as the strategy becomes an ongoing operation.

Not all stories are worth elevating to signature status. There needs to be an evaluation process to identify the strength and promise of candidate stories. When candidate stories emerge, make sure that they are not just a list of facts (or features) but, rather, a narrative that appears intriguing, is perceived as authentic, engenders involvement, and has a strategic message. And make sure your signature stories are managed like the assets they are.



- Article adapted from a paper published in California Management Review, Spring 2016

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**Make sure your signature stories are managed like the assets they are**

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## David Aaker

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David Aaker, Vice Chairman of Prophet consults exclusively for Prophet clients. He is the creator of the Aaker Model™, has published more than 100 articles and 15 books, including his latest, Aaker on Branding: 20 Principles That Drive Success. Prior to that, he authored Brand Relevance: Making Competitors Irrelevant, which was cited by Advertising Age as being among the "Ten Marketing Books You Should Have Read" in 2011 and was named one of the top 3 marketing books of the year by Strategy and Business. In March 2014, he was profiled by California Magazine and called "The Plato and Newton of Branding." He received a Ph.D. and M.A. from Stanford University and a B.S. from MIT.

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<https://people.stanford.edu/jaaker>

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# The Engagement Paradox

*Dion Hinchcliffe*

A somewhat ironic situation has emerged in the digital era today, one that directly affects virtually everyone concerned with connecting with and engaging their stakeholders, whether they are customers, the broader market, business partners, or colleagues.

As the technology growth curve has continued to climb high into exponential realms, most organizations now find themselves dealing with a profound shortfall in digital reach and effectiveness.

The endless flow of new websites, messaging formats, social networking services, mobile apps, communication tools, and collaboration platforms continue to get adopted and used widely across a broad range of consumers - simultaneously becoming an increasingly harder-to-manage challenge. The primary issue is this: Developing a workable and consistent way for our organizations to connect with and engage with the world to keep our businesses operating.

What's worse, standing still even for a short time means falling behind fast as our stakeholders busily move to the next new set of channels.

This has led to a situation known as the "Engagement Paradox." Namely, that the more technologies, devices, sites, apps, and other digital touchpoints we have, the less connected we are.

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## **The more technologies, devices, sites, apps, and other digital touchpoints we have, the less connected we are**

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Out of need for manageability and cost control, this growing channel proliferation and fragmentation - and therefore siloing - has forced many organizations to sharply constrain where they can spend time, how they invest in engagement, and where they are prepared to engage in a manner worthy of their brand.

This complex new landscape often leaves our companies to only commit to providing support for the largest and most important

channels. These typically end up being so-called mainstream ones like major media, large social networks, e-mail, web sites, and now mobile apps - even though it's clear that a long tail distribution of said new channels has formed in front of our organizations and continues to lengthen.

The challenge of coping with so-called long tail markets is well known. First, it means that the bulk of our stakeholders will soon be the most reachable only deep in the tail - in digital places that are relatively obscure and unfamiliar to us.

Second, unless we can find an efficient and economical way to reach across the myriad digital nooks and crannies of the engagement universe in the way our stakeholders most prefer, we're increasingly losing impact and missing the vital opportunities we need to further our business goals.

To further complicate the situation, we are in the midst of engagement overload as well, noted the [Harvard Business Review](#) early in 2016. The most valuable actors in our organizations who are using these news channels find themselves at the center of a demand cycle that quickly overwhelms them. The data is sobering: Up to a third of all value-added engagement comes from as little as 3% of the engaged population.

This state of affairs has led to our most desirable contributors having the lowest engagement and career satisfaction scores. Combined, this is a recipe for underperforming in a market that has an all-time high level of new opportunity today.

Taking all of this into account, what should organizations do with their engagement strategies to better keep up with digital change and the impact it's having on our organization?

First, organizations must develop a clearer picture of the full spectrum of supply and demand for engagement from their stakeholders, and then put plans in place to



meet it. The imperative is this: It's well known that customer experience leaders significantly outperform the S&P 500 market as a whole. Engagement is the primary currency of customer experience today, and without measuring - and then meeting - stakeholder demand across all digital channels, it's leaving a major competitive opening that's ripe for others to enter. This also tells us that there's considerable untapped business value that organizations can access for themselves with a better set of engagement strategies.

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## Engagement is the primary currency of customer experience today

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The good news is that techniques and technology have also emerged to help with meeting demand for engagement, including marketing automation and digital experience management, to name just two, that can offload the burden of understanding and dealing with the constantly shifting sands of digital touchpoints.

Second, organizations must develop a more holistic and integrated picture of the full tapestry of conversation across today's digital channels. Without this, the value of engagement is lost as product and marketing

ideas, sales opportunities, and customer service needs go ignored and unaddressed. It also again leaves critical openings that competitors can use to enter conversations with our stakeholders, and build their own relationships.

New listening tools and the employment of a social media command centers can go a long way towards addressing the issue, but organizations must act on the stream of information that's opened up by connecting better across digital channels, monitoring, and assessing which engagement opportunities are most valuable, and then operationally executing on them.

There's no doubt that today's engagement landscape is the most daunting in history, and it's only going to be more so. However, by becoming more fully aware and proactive about how to organize for mass engagement in a more sustainable way, we can begin to address the engagement paradox and seize a fuller measure of the opportunity that it actually represents.



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## There's no doubt that today's engagement landscape is the most daunting in history

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### Dion Hinchcliffe

*Chief Strategy Officer | 7Summits Inc.*

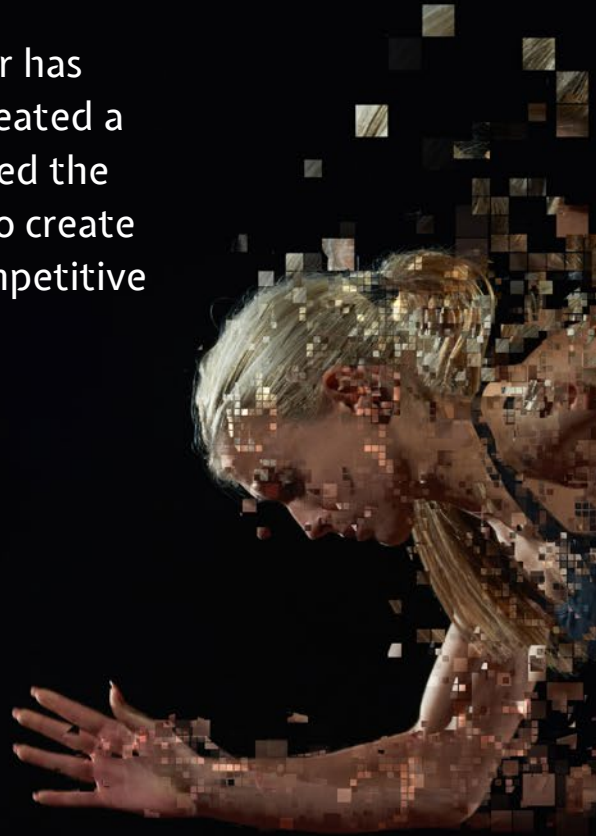
Dion Hinchcliffe is a well-known business strategist, enterprise architect, bestselling book author, frequent keynote speaker, analyst, futurist, and digital transformation advisor. He is currently Chief Strategy Officer at the leading online community solutions firm, 7Summits, is a widely followed ZDNet Contributor, and judges the CIO100 Awards for CIO Magazine each year. Dion works with the leadership teams of large enterprises to drive successful change with new digital methods including online communities and digital business models. Recently, Robert Half Inc. identified Dion as one of the top 20 people globally that IT leaders mention most. Dion can be found on Twitter at @dhinchcliffe.

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# Driving Demand: Seven Steps To Accelerate Digital Marketing Transformation

*Ken Wincko*

Buyers are empowered, and the age of the customer has begun. The proliferation of social and mobile has created a digital divide - with companies who have transformed the way they go to market using data and technology to create superior customer experiences and extend their competitive advantage over traditional firms.





Most companies are struggling with digital transformation. According to a recent study by Forrester commissioned by Accenture Interactive, while 62% of businesses plan to improve the online customer experience this year, only 26% of organizations are completely ready to execute digital strategies operationally.

When speaking with my fellow marketing executives, I see the same challenges over and over: campaigns that are product-centric and deployed manually, channels that are managed in silos, and poor data and analytics, just to name a few.

I can certainly relate. When I started leading marketing at PR Newswire over two years ago, we faced the same issues.

What we needed was a radically different go-to-market approach. By thinking holistically in respect to content, people, processes, technology and data, we implemented a buyer-centric, integrated digital marketing framework that engages, nurtures and converts buyers across the entire lifecycle.

You can use these seven steps to accelerate your digital marketing transformation to effectively drive demand:

## 1. Understand Buyer Behavior

When you first set out to develop your content marketing strategy, it's critical to understand where and how buyers consume information. We know that a large majority of purchases occur across a multichannel journey.

It is also important to keep in mind that buying decisions - both B2B and B2C - have multiple influencers. For example, the average B2B buying decision has between 7-10 key decision makers and influencers.

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## The average B2B buying decision has between 7-10 key decision makers and influencers

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If you want to create compelling and cohesive interactions, your content strategy must be founded on comprehensive buyer personas and journey maps that take the entire customer lifecycle into account.

Through ethnographic research, survey and focus groups, identify the trigger catalysts for each stage of the buyer's journey, then hone in on the informational needs and content preferences that will propel prospective buyers from stage to stage.

## 2. Map Content To Purchase Paths

Providing value is the key to creating content that converts and the only way to provide value, is to tailor your content topics and formats to the specific needs identified in your research by type of organization, role/persona, and stages of the lifecycle.

Before you create anything new, catalogue your current content offers according to the topics, personas, and lifecycle stages each piece addresses. Then, you can pinpoint any content gaps and map out additional offers along the buyer journey.

Collectively, your content should provide a logical activation progression for your audience with more specifics assigned to each stage.

Early-stage content should focus on higher level topics that address buyers' core needs. Mid-stage content should address strategic priorities and establish a context for your late-stage content. In turn, your late-stage content should offer your brand's solutions and present a trigger catalyst for purchase.

Finally, post-purchase content should focus on driving deeper adoption, devotion, and advocacy.

One important note: although your initial market research will help you establish your initial content architecture, you must continually monitor market and industry conversations to deliver the content your audience is craving in the moment.

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## **Continually monitor market and industry conversations to deliver the content your audience is craving**

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### **3. Build A Targeted Database**

You can create valuable content, but your brand will not thrive unless you have the ability to reach key decision makers and influencers.

When we started our transformation, we discovered that 48% of the contacts in our database were outdated and unusable. Of the remaining 52%, roughly 80% were operational contacts without budget authority – leaving **less than 10%** of our database available to target key decision-makers!

After we began consistently maintaining our database, we not only reached 90% data quality, we also tripled it in size. As a result, our marketing “house list” has become our second largest source of pipeline.

### **4. Integrate Your Marketing Technology Infrastructure**

Your audience consumes content across multiple devices and channels, and they expect a seamless experience from your brand. Much like an architect has a blueprint for a commercial building, your content needs to be constructed into a customizable narrative based on system logic.

We integrated all of our channel and analytics platforms with our marketing automation software to create compelling and consistent experiences. Now when buyers arrive at a channel we actively target, we provide a personalized experience that presents content specific to the type of organization, role and stage of the lifecycle the buyer is in.

### **5. Coordinate Multichannel Distribution**

Buyers are exhibiting a high degree of cross-channel behavior - typically consuming content via twelve different sources during the buying process.

Your content won't reach them if it exists only on your website or other owned channels. Paid search, retargeted ads, press releases, and other tactics should be employed to offer your audience a variety of touchpoints across paid, earned, and owned channels.

We have done a significant amount of testing regarding how to best promote our content. When we used a coordinated approach across six digital channels, we increased the number of content downloads five-fold and the conversion rate by over 40%.

Furthermore, after comparing distribution that occurred within one vs two weeks, we found that promoting content on six channels within a few days boosted the number of downloads another four-fold. This demonstrates an exponential impact correlated with a larger number of channels used within a shorter timeframe. So, be sure to run ongoing tests to understand how your content and channels work together to boost results.

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**Run ongoing tests to understand how your content and channels work together to boost results**

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## 6. Optimize Lead Management And Reporting

Great marketers manage the entire lifecycle across touchpoints. You need an efficient process that moves leads effectively from marketing to other front-line staff.

We mapped our lead management process to the sales pipeline stages by gaining pre-alignment with the sales and service teams prior to program launch. After a buyer engages with us, we present relevant content until we have validated buyer interest. By the time a sales or service rep receives an inquiry, marketing has shared the identified budget, authority, needs, timing, and goals.

Keep an eye on lead stage conversions, turnback rates, and closed wins vs losses to identify how you can better align your teams' processes for lead scoring, routing and reporting. Move beyond traditional performance metrics such as page views and clickthroughs to what I call impact metrics, such as pipeline contribution, revenue, and satisfaction.

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**To improve agility, marketing leaders must develop teams of marketing athletes**

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## 7. Create A Buyer-Focused Marketing Team

The skillsets required to succeed in marketing are vastly different today and will only change further going forward. To improve agility, marketing leaders must develop teams of marketing athletes. While everyone on your team may have their own specialization, they should be cross-trained in other skill sets.

On our marketing team, everyone is responsible for creating content, analyzing data and utilizing marketing technology to effectively enhance their impact. We further optimized our impact by assigning roles to manage key stages of the lifecycle.

### The Results Speak For Themselves

The results from our digital marketing transformation have been dramatic.

We have increased credibility with clients and internal stakeholders alike. Last year, we increased our qualified leads by 166% and marketing influenced revenue by 360%, while shortening sales cycles by over one-third.

Now it's your turn...



### Ken Wincko

*Senior Vice President of Marketing | PR Newswire*

Author Ken Wincko is the Senior Vice President of Marketing at PR Newswire, where he manages the company's global marketing strategy and serves on the Executive Management Committee. He has more than 20 years of marketing, product, and business development experience in bringing innovative marketing programs and solutions to market for both B2B and B2C organizations. Ken is an advisory board member of the CMO Council and has been covered in publications such as the Wall Street Journal, Tech Target, Alister & Payne, The Demand Gen Report, and Marketing Sherpa.

[www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com)



# Listening is important. But it's only part of the solution.

## Turn Insight Into Action

Really understanding your customers is more important than ever. They demand to be heard — and they want to see action. Whether it's a negative post gone viral or a fleeting sales opportunity, reacting quickly is critical to keeping relationships alive. Knowing before things happen is even better.

That's what Sysomos delivers: powerful customer insights. We narrow the distance between businesses and customers, scaling one-on-one connections to millions. With more than a decade of research on unstructured data, we are creating a new kind of customer intel; one that helps you predict what's around the corner — and we're just getting started.

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# Most Brands And Agencies Don't Understand Social Media Or How To Use It

*Scott Levy*

Social media...

At this point in time, you would think - you would hope - that brands understood what it is, the importance, how to use it, and how not to use it. But unfortunately, that's still not the case. Unfortunately, even many "social media experts" don't truly get what social media is.

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## **Unfortunately, even many “social media experts” don’t truly get what social media is**

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Here it is: Social media is “media”. It’s a newspaper, it’s a magazine, it’s a newscast, it’s a TV show, it’s a Netflix series, it’s a good book, it’s a newsletter.

Social media gives you an international public platform to produce content on and engage with the public. So you need to ask yourself, ask your brand - would people be interested in tuning into our content? Would they set their DVR to record it, would they talk about your show - your content - around the water cooler the next day? The big question - would they share that content with their friends, family, and co-workers?

The idea is to create such compelling, interesting media, that people will feel the need to share it. Thus exposing your BRAND to hundreds, to millions of new eyeballs.

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## **Create such compelling, interesting media, that people will feel the need to share it**

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Take Facebook for example, any engagement is great, likes and comments are rewarding for sure, but the victory is when someone shares your post. Recently we had some pretty amazing victories, having content go beyond viral for some very traditional not-so-exciting brands. They wound up having their posts seen by a combined 20+ million people - between just posts. That’s extraordinary Super Bowl style reach that would typically cost Super Bowl style money to achieve. By creating compelling content, incredible brand exposure was achieved for substantially less

money than Super Bowl ads. That’s ROI, that’s the money shot, and what great social media is all about. The potential to expose your brand, to millions upon millions of people for not only far less money, but also a level of exposure simply unobtainable by any other manner.

So with that being said, no matter what the platform - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest or the next great thing to show up - you and your team need to be working feverishly on compelling content and asking yourself, will people share this? Ask yourself, would I even share this on my page?

## **VALUE – It’s What We Look For In Content**

Things like amazing tips, news, information, shocking moments, breaking news, things that will make people’s lives better, easier, cheaper. If you’re a plumbing company, share DIY tips on how to save money on water usage, how to vet potential plumbers, how to fix something yourself. If you’re a Hedge fund, while you don’t want to provide investment advice, within the “money space” you can provide value by sharing money saving tips, planning, wealth management concepts. If you’re a tool company or hardware product, how about sharing garage projects, DIY tips, how to properly use tools, cool facts and did you know blurbs.

What it’s NOT about is “hey look at me”, or “use our product it’s the best ever”, or “we are now 6% cheaper”. Nobody cares; nobody will ever share that. I can’t drill it home enough - provide value. At Fuel Online, we have teams of people that do nothing but scour the web for amazing content to use today, tomorrow, for special occasions, events, holidays, etc. Then we also have people who create their own tips, ideas, projects, and imagery.

## The Second Biggest Takeaway I Can Give You Guys Is - ENGAGE

It's one thing to have great content, but aside from being the largest media platforms in the world, it is also a 2-way conversation. It's an incredible opportunity to talk to people - current customers, potential customers, or people who just enjoy your content.

There is nothing worse than having something to say to a brand, taking my time to tweet them and getting nothing but crickets back. When your brand is on social media, you have a responsibility to be listening and engaging with people.

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### When your brand is on social media, you have a responsibility to be listening and engaging

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Large brands need to have social media customer service teams who monitor 24/7, have protocols in place, and are empowered to solve problems. Smaller brands still need to check daily, even hourly for comments on their posts, questions, private messages to their pages.

I LOVE angry, negative customers on social media. I know it sounds crazy. But I tell our clients to embrace it and to be excited about the opportunity. Yep, every single nasty

complaint, or gripe is a huge OPPORTUNITY to show the world on an international platform, who you are and what your brand is made of. Not only that, but it's an opportunity to identify someone with a complaint that you might not have gotten the chance to know about.

It's an opportunity to turn a nasty, angry complainer, into a raving fan who loved the way you handled it, and what you did for them - how you made it right. Often righting the wrong, adding a little discount for a future purchase, sending over a \$5 or \$20 gift card depending on the situation, can EARN a lifetime fan and brand champion via social media. It's very powerful, and only truly available thanks to the power of social media.

Beyond that, you have the chance to crowdsource, asking your fans questions and for feedback, or thank them for being loyal and passionate about your brand. Reach out to people, just saying hi, or thank you for their comment can make their day - and yours, when they become a passionate brand champion because you care and are a likeable brand.

The bottom line is, if you're going to do social media (and you absolutely must today) then do it right, do it at a high level. It's no longer a small portion of your marketing strategy. It is your marketing strategy, and should be a substantial part of your marketing budget.



### Scott Levy

CEO, Founder | Fuel Online

Scott Levy is the CEO/Founder of Fuel Online the Premier Digital Agency. He's one of the original pioneers of digital marketing, a thought leader, and teacher. Scott is also a best-selling author of the book Tweet Naked, which is used as a course book at universities, and a guide for social media professionals everywhere. He's an investor, technology geek, and is often involved in startups. Seen in Forbes, Entrepreneur Magazine, CNN, SiriusXM, and more. Beyond digital, Scott is an avid outdoorsman, entrepreneur, and passionate NFL Football fan. You can follow him at his website below, or @FuelOnline on Twitter.

[www.FuelOnline.co](http://www.FuelOnline.co)



# Brands Should Have To Pay To Reach Consumers

*Carrie Kerpen*



There I was, (ironically) sitting in my Facebook feed.

The death of Instagram for brands, posted by the publisher Techcrunch, appeared organically in my feed, and then it was re-posted by my good friend in a social media group discussion. The irony hit me hard.

The reality is, brands **SHOULD** have to pay, to proactively reach users on social media. Here's why.

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## The reality is, brands SHOULD have to pay, to proactively reach users on social media

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### 1. On What Planet Do Brands Get To Advertise For Free?

Let's put this in perspective. When television or radio was just starting out, was it free for brands to advertise? How about print? Why do brands expect to have a free ride on social media? Pre-social media, let's say you wanted to build a community on your website. You'd have to invest money to advertise to get them there.

When you buy media, you are buying an audience. There is really zero difference. We love to say that social media "humanizes" brands - and to some extent it does.

But if corporations aren't people, then brands aren't humans. If they want human eyeballs to see them, generally, they must pay.

### 2. It's Supposed To Be 'Social'

Users are typically on social media to spend time with their friends, to network, to connect with communities of interest. If a brand has something that adds value to their life, great. But otherwise, they are an interruption. Advertising on these networks allows brands to target their message to the right people at the right time. And, if the message is good, it will travel organically from there.

When brand voices are a free-for-all in your social stream, they very quickly take over. With advertising, it's ensured that the message is a commercial break, and not a takeover of the feeds of people who are looking at pictures of their friend's babies, weddings, and nights on the town.

Brands should have to pay to interrupt that, and networks should take every effort to protect that.

### 3. Spending Money On The Distribution Of Content Keeps Brands Accountable

Did you ever get something for free and grossly undervalue it? Like you get free tickets to an event, and you don't show up, because... hey, it was free?

This is how I think many brands tend to treat their content. There's so much talk about how easy it is just to test something on social. Just throw it up there, and if it works - great! If not, no worries. It's social!

When a brand is paying to advertise, they're much more focused on the results. And, with the recent algorithm changes for Instagram, if they follow Facebook's suit, it will be difficult to get any results without putting some money behind it. To me, when I see a company investing in paid social, I think it makes them invest more in the content itself. And that makes the world better for all of us.

Better content, being targeted more effectively... who doesn't win there?

And since I brought up the algorithm, let's talk about networks that have switched to an algorithm model. Of course, we have Facebook. Take a look at [their earnings](#). Despite all the "Facebook is for old people" talk, they're killing it. Why? Because they understand what users want - and what advertisers want.

You know who didn't do an algorithm? Twitter. Your feed is a recency stream of everyone you follow - unfiltered. And the funny thing is, Twitter hasn't been *doing so well lately*. I'm not saying that's entirely due to the lack of an algorithm. I am, however,

saying that despite all the noise from techies, users want and need to be protected from organically filled social feeds filled with brands talking to themselves.

Networks have a valuable service for users, and therefore a valuable audience that can - and should be - monetized by advertisers looking to reach them.

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**Users want and need to be protected from organically filled social feeds filled with brands talking to themselves**

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**Carrie Kerpen**

CEO | Likeable Media

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# The What, How, And Now Of Effectively Leading Change

*John Michel*





*"Loss is nothing but change and change is nature's delight."* - Marcus Aurelius.

No matter where you look today, it seems as though once mighty organizations are tumbling down on a routine basis. Think Compaq, Circuit City, Borders, Blockbuster, and more. No industry is immune. Be it automakers, microchip producers, ride-sharing providers, or leading retailers, organizations are failing at an accelerated rate.

So what's behind this relentless pattern of disruption and destruction?

Simple.

These companies are failing to adapt quickly enough to an ever-changing operating environment characterized by unprecedented levels of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (or VUCA, for short).

VUCA is an acronym developed by the U.S. Army after the collapse of the Soviet Union to describe an increasingly dynamic, interrelated, and multipolar world.

**Volatility** reflects the ever-increasing level of change and subsequent turbulence caused by the speed at which change occurs.

**Uncertainty** refers to the decreased levels of predictability individuals and organizations now face when making decisions.

**Complexity** speaks to the growing interdependencies of systems - be it in managing supply chains or as seen in globally connected economies and societies.

And then there is **Ambiguity**, reflecting a world awash in options and potential outcomes, making the implications of our choices and consequences of our actions all the less clear.

Most leaders today understand the importance of organizational flexibility, as well as effectively managing change. As a result, they assemble teams with the skill to run parts of a change program and develop a process to organize the effort.

And yet the VUCA environment in which we operate often creates blind spots that can undermine our best efforts and intentions. So much so, in fact, that data from leading researchers confirm 90% of large change and innovation efforts fail to deliver desired results on time and on budget. Change, as it turns out, is harder than ever to successfully pull off.

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## 90% of large change and innovation efforts fail to deliver desired results on time and on budget

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Effective leaders, however, anticipate and mitigate these blind spots. They do so by ensuring they accurately and adequately address the fundamental “what, how and now” of leading change, and then get busy moving out to meet the evolving demands of their industry. Specifically, they make it a priority to clearly address, answer, and articulate the following critical questions:

- **What** do we want to achieve?  
(And why is this important?)
- **How** will we get there?  
(And how can we best support our team?)
- What must we do **Now**?  
(And what might get in the way?)

Of course, asking questions without providing answers won't get anyone very far. Here are five proven practices to set you on the path to success:

### Pursue A Common Understanding

The key to unlocking high performance is to remember that disciplined thought facilitates intentional action. Taking the time to assess where you are (your organizational “As Is” state) and where you want to end up (your “To Be”) generates a powerful, shared understanding that forms the foundation of your collective change journey. Some call this vision casting. I consider it creating a coherent frame of reference that informs everyone of *why* you are doing *what* you are doing.

As my former boss and now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine General Joseph P. Dunford Jr., likes to say - *"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."* Wise words that remind us, establishing a clear and compelling case for change is the catalyst that propels people out of their comfort zones and into a journey of discovery and possibility.

## Create The Space For Success

Effective leaders recognize how an organization's capacity to manage change can be easily overwhelmed. What might seem to be a logical sequence of well-intentioned change initiatives to the leader, can feel very different to someone on the front line, being asked to engage with several new efforts at once while also being expected to carry out business-as-usual.

Like a sponge soaking up water, individuals can absorb only so much and no more. Adding new expectations without reducing or eliminating existing workload is a recipe for failure.

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### **Effective leaders recognize how an organization's capacity to manage change can be easily overwhelmed**

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One way to prevent this is to identify the people most affected by a change and chronicle what the organization has asked them to do in recent months outside of their normal duties. By mapping these activities, you can anticipate in advance when people will get stretched too thin and then work to create the required space, eliminating lower priority requirements or delaying the desired effort at hand.

## Communication Early And Often

One of the single greatest reasons so many efforts fall short is the failure to create a shared language for change. By language, I mean establishing a well-defined set of priorities and shared measures of success. Taking the time to implicitly communicate how you intend to forge forward aids in squeezing out volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

It also enables you to focus your energy and attention on a relatively small number of performance measures (my rule of thumb is no more than 4-6) which, in turn, serve as the proverbial "mile markers" needed to coherently guide you from your current reality to your desired future objective.

## Steward Smartly

If we are honest with ourselves, it's very likely we've experienced one or more change or development efforts that wasted resources and needlessly squandered human talent and effort. If implicit communication is the fuel which keeps your organization moving toward its objective, transparency and accountability is the currency that buys you the confidence to know you are taking the most judicious and responsible path forward - for your people, your customers, your constituents, etc.

Hence, stewarding smartly means you never stop questioning what you are doing, how you are doing it and if you could be doing it better, smarter, cheaper, or faster. Inquire insistently and communicate frequently. Keep your team from guessing what is most important.

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### **Never stop questioning what you are doing, how you are doing it and if you could be doing it better**

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## Selflessly Celebrate Success / Swiftly Acknowledge Setbacks

Positive progress in any endeavor stems from seeing failure for what it is - an opportunity to learn and begin again, only better. Since Peter Senge wrote his groundbreaking book *'The Fifth Discipline,'* the value of being a learning organization has been well established.

The ability to create dynamic feedback loops to encourage people to leverage real-time wins and, more importantly, courageously share setbacks, is the secret sauce of high performing organizations. The challenge, however, is actually delivering on this desire.

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### Positive progress in any endeavor stems from seeing failure for what it is - an opportunity to learn

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The most effective change leaders recognize the importance of creating an environment that routinely rewards those who are responsible for success.

I'm not talking big dollar bonuses here. I'm suggesting (and research confirms) genuine recognition by someone in a position of influence, often in front of peers.

At the same time, making it a corporate priority to make pain points a valuable commodity and success a generously celebrated reality separates the good from the great - the mediocre from the extraordinary.

500 years ago, Niccolò Machiavelli famously wrote, "*... it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success and more dangerous to implement than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.*"

Change was hard then, and still is today - the only difference being that today, the level of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity has increased dramatically. But you need not fret.

Make it a priority to address the What, How, and Now of change and you are well on your way to not merely surviving, but thriving through change.



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### Make it a priority to address the What, How, and Now of change

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## John Michel

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# Branding From The Inside Out: Why Personal Disruption Will Keep Your Customers Happy

*Whitney Johnson*

This is the era of disruption - an unavoidable, sometimes uncomfortable, always immensely powerful force. Businesses underestimate it at their peril. But a conscious effort to harness this energy polishing an internal brand, attractive to employees, and an external brand, irresistible to customers, can reap big rewards.

## Employees Ain't Happy (Ain't Nobody Happy)

As a marketer, you know better than most that consumers avail themselves of a wealth of information provided by fellow consumers when making purchasing decisions. The same methods are used by job seekers. Through social media platforms such as Twitter or LinkedIn, or dedicated online review sites like Glassdoor, potential employees can vet companies before accepting an offer of employment - or even bothering to apply. Like it or not, your brand as an employer is an open book.

Meanwhile, prospective hires are often not just looking for work, or for a paycheck; they are looking for opportunities for self-expression, creative development, and a chance to realize personal dreams through meaningful employment. In a very real sense, when they take a job, they are 'hiring' you to meet their needs as much as you are hiring them. To compete for top talent, make sure that yours is a book these individuals want to read.

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**Like it or not, your brand as an employer is an open book**

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What is true of prospective employees is equally true of the already employed. The ever-pressing corporate imperative of driving performance is colliding with a massive cohort of millennials bringing their dreams to work. Companies that support and encourage their employees' dreams - the engine of disruption - breed loyalty, resulting in higher profitability. According to Towers Perrin, Intl., organizations with a highly engaged workforce increased operating income by 19.2%, while low engagement led to a 32.7% decline in operating profits.

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## **Companies that support and encourage their employees' dreams - the engine of disruption - breed loyalty**

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A raft of other studies support the same conclusion: the higher the engagement level of your employees, the less likely they are to be looking elsewhere, the more likely you are to retain them, and the greater advantage the company will derive from their performance. What could better endorse your brand as an employer than a cadre of happy, high-performing employees?

How do we develop this highly engaged workforce - the one that will drive profitability - within our own business? The answer lies in encouraging personal disruption.

Here are a few suggestions:

### **Provide Stretch Assignments With Real Potential For Failure:**

Encourage employees to explore dreams and ambitions, and cumulate the competence and confidence to risk playing where others aren't - a hallmark of innovation. People tend to rise to challenges but sink to low expectations. Consider the tendency of even top-ranking athletic teams to play their worst games

against poor-quality opponents. Allow, or even generate, opposition.

### **Reward Talent Developers:**

A real leader is not envious or repressive about the abilities and successes of others and would be willing to promote the person who could replace them. Often the human resources we need are already available in-house, awaiting discovery and development; valuable managers search for and recognize untapped talent, and build morale and momentum by nurturing it. Reward those who create that advantage.

### **Celebrate Strength:**

Assess how well you are accessing your available talent, and redeploy employees to contribute where their strengths lie. Speaking at a large multinational not long ago, I learned that only 5% of the attendees believed they were playing to their strengths. How can that number be so low? Managers are leaving an enormous quantity of human resources off the table. Be willing to rearrange the pieces of your personnel puzzle to achieve a better fit.

### **Value The Step Back:**

Disruption may require moving backward in order to grow. Challenge employees to acquire new competencies by moving to tasks for which they show aptitude and potential, even if it requires temporary positioning on a lower rung.

## **Personal Disruption**

Ensure your employees are relevant, and your brand will be too.

An alluring internal brand that attracts high-value participants to your company is an important first part of the business equation, but, of course, an attractive, high profile external brand is absolutely critical. After all, you can't afford to pay the employees without customers.



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## Ensure your employees are relevant, and your brand will be too

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Disruption theory suggests a number of techniques that can help differentiate your company in a congested marketplace. They include:

### Companies Don't Disrupt; People Do:

Incorporate the guidelines for personal disruption recommended above.

If your people are stagnant, your business will be too.

### Embrace The Right Kind Of Risk:

Too often, company leaders still speak in terms of competitive risk: how to go head-to-head against the competition and come out victorious. But market risk is the real playground for disruption. Identify a need that is not being met - potential customers that are not being served by your current offerings. Find a way to meet this need, be the first player in this as yet undefined market, and your brand will be the one consumers associate with it. Accept that risk, and according to the theory of disruption, your odds of success are 6x higher, and your revenue opportunity 20x greater.

### Play To Your Strengths:

In the same way that individuals do best when they disrupt to areas of personal strength, so do companies. Standing out in the crowded marketplace is different than trying to 'be' the marketplace. When you bring your 1-2 top strengths to work, and then use them deliberately, you are more likely to stand out.

### Avoid Entitlement:

In the 1980's, WordPerfect owned the market for word processing applications. In the early 90's, WordPerfect, comfortable and perhaps feeling a little entitled, hesitated to shift from DOS to Windows. But it's misleading to say "WordPerfect." The decision was made by a handful of complacent individuals in top management. They trailed Microsoft with Windows by a year and a half, and their initial release in the new platform was dead-on-arrival. Entitlement kills initiative. So does stagnation. Avoid the danger of these quiet assassins by integrating ongoing disruption as part of business strategy.

Disruption isn't a one-time for all-time shift. As employees have the opportunity and encouragement to disrupt themselves, your enterprise will be reinventing itself. Encourage personal disruption, and your brand will evolve to remain fresh, appealing and relevant to prospective employees and customers alike.



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## Whitney Johnson

*Speaker, Author | Disrupt Yourself*

Whitney Johnson is the author of the critically-acclaimed *Disrupt Yourself: Putting the Power of Disruptive Innovation to Work*, and was recently inducted into Thinkers50 as one of the world's leading management thinkers. She is a frequent contributor to *Harvard Business Review* and a co-founder of *Forty Women Over 40 to Watch*. You can follow her on Twitter at @johnsonwhitney.

[www.whitneyjohnson.com](http://www.whitneyjohnson.com)

# Tesla's Building A Legendary Brand And So Can You

*Bryan Eisenberg*

Recently, Tesla Motors started taking \$1000 deposits for the new Model 3. In the first week, they collected 325,000 deposits, representing about \$14 billion in sales. That's a lot of cars. And about what GM's Buick brand sells in a quarter.

Tesla is building a legendary brand. Buick is rebuilding their brand - and there's value in considering both of them.





In the heyday of *Mad Men* and GM, there was an accepted wisdom. Tell your customers a great story and success was the likely outcome. The velocity, volume, variety and transparency of communications changed that forever. Today it is not what you say about your brand that matters. It is what your customers say that determines the value of your brand.

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## **It is what your customers say that determines the value of your brand**

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### **GM, And Buick In Particular, Have Been Working On Improving Quality For Years**

Buick has a lot to be proud about. It was the first American car brand to crack Consumer Reports' Top Ten auto brands in 2015 at #7. Buick ranked #2 among all car brands on J.D. Power's 2015 Vehicle Dependability Study. In addition, there was a real improvement in customer service at the dealerships. In fact, J.D. Power ranked Buick dealers #1 among the top 20 mass-market brands for a second consecutive year in 2015.

This is good news. Buick's reputation is on the mend after decades of neglect. Offering new models that are class leaders makes Buick more profitable per sale. Better brands sell at premium prices, with fewer incentives.

### **Why Quality Matters So Much This Time**

This is not GM's first rodeo. In 1988, Oldsmobile wanted to appeal to younger people; because their buyers were aging and dying off. They introduced a new story to buyers with the slogan - "Not your father's Oldsmobile."

The story changed but the quality of the cars and the drivers' experience did not. Young people knew it was still their father's Oldsmobile. The misleading ads alienated Oldsmobile from its existing older market, yet it failed to win them a younger market. Oldsmobile launched its new messaging without any new product or market. The Oldsmobile brand lingered, then was put down in 2000.

### **Buick Sees Itself Real**

"That's not a Buick!" and "Is that a Buick?" are slogans that use self-deprecating humor based on the customer's perspective of the brand. Unlike Oldsmobile, the campaign narrative does not run from Buick's recent history. In the ads people, both young and old, are surprised to find the car they're in is a Buick.

Buick campaigns now have a consistent story across all marketing platforms. The message might resonate with customers because it shows Buick as friendly and candid, as their agency tells it. That story also matches the reality customers perceive. When the story you tell matches the story customers tell and experience, you have a thriving brand.

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**When the story you tell matches the story customers tell and experience, you have a thriving brand**

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### **Customer Experience Drives Tesla's Brand**

Tesla customers tell a great story. Tesla may become the Apple computer of the car industry. Like Apple, it sells a product that intends to be a radical improvement on what has come before. Like Apple, it focuses

on great products and innovation. It also owns its retail distribution; there is no Tesla franchisee anywhere. Last, but not least, it controls the entire customer ecosystem.

Tesla's user forums and online community play key roles. They encourage owners to interact with the company and the community with transparency. This virtuous loop provides rich customer-centric content for prospective buyers. Oh, by the way, Tesla doesn't spend a penny on ads.

Tesla sells great products and extends the product by orchestrating a legendary buying and ownership experience.

## Building And Rebuilding Your Brand

You may need to measure success differently, or at least expand the definition. You have to balance data-driven decision making with the needs of the customer. Neuroscience has proven that focusing on numbers suppresses empathy. The minute your head is in a spreadsheet or data-filled dashboard, you lose empathy for what it is like to be your customer.

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### You have to balance data-driven decision making with the needs of the customer

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## Bryan Eisenberg

*Partner | BuyerLegends*

For almost two decades, Bryan and his brother Jeffrey have been recognized by their peers as authorities in marketing optimization, analytics, and customer-experience design. While deeply grateful for their success, they remained unfulfilled by unanswered questions. The two most common troubling questions asked by executives and entrepreneurs were, "What is the secret to selling more?", and "Why isn't the team firing on all cylinders?" What they found was that their most successful clients, without exception, embraced using customer narratives in some form. If you want to learn more about building legendary brand stories, check out Bryan's twenty-five-page book *Buyer Legends: An Executive Storyteller's Guide*.

[www.buyerlegends.com](http://www.buyerlegends.com)

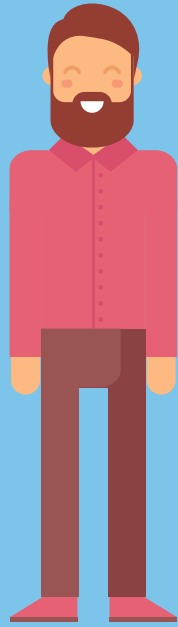
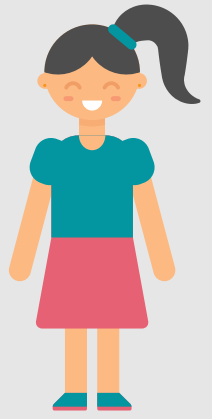


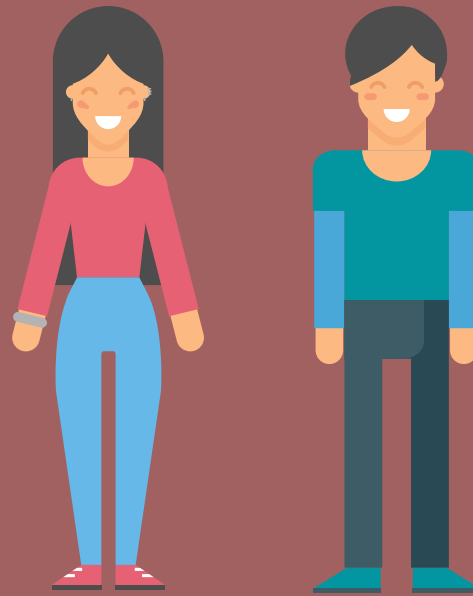
There is a counterintuitive opportunity; shift the spotlight away from the numbers (impressions, sales, conversions, etc.) and focus on building a great customer experience. Great customer experience is no accident. Designing and optimizing customer experiences has become essential to building a legendary brand.

Whether you are a retailer, service provider, or SaaS company, your entire organization needs to be aligned in order to deliver a great customer experience. While many companies think they are centered on their customers, not many customers feel like companies actually care about them.

Powerful stories influence customers. Stories communicate your company's core values. Can you point to tons of stories that illustrate what your CEO means when she says, "We are a customer-centric company?" If you can, then share those stories! Just like the legendary customer service story of an associate from apparel retailer, Nordstroms accepting a return of snow tires inspiring their teams to stretch the limits of their service. If you can't, then build a true story that aligns everyone - from the board room to the stock room - and you will build your brand.







## Multi-Generational Marketing: A Must For Any Brand

*Kristin Kelley*

Remember the days when one marketing approach generally worked pretty well? They're gone.

Unless your brand appeals only to one audience demographic, you must tailor your branding, marketing strategies and tactical executions to four distinct generations: Baby boomers, Gen X, Millennials and - fast-moving, soon-to-take-over-the-world - Gen Z.

You must pay particular attention to Gens Y and Z, which combined, will comprise more than 50 percent of the workforce in 10 years, according to the Department of Labor.

Today, we're amid a marketing perfect storm, with every generation - actually, every individual - hungry for and expecting marketers to engage when, where and how they choose. One size definitely doesn't fit all.

Never before in history have different generations had to be marketed to so distinctly. What makes it so particularly challenging, is that each has different patterns of behavior and preferences for engagement.

Is your brand up for the challenge?

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## **Never before in history have different generations had to be marketed to so distinctly**

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### **Baby Boomers And Gen X: Still Kicking**

If you're a CMO or senior marketing executive, there's a good chance you're a part of the baby boomer or Gen X cohorts. And you've been marketing to them - in essence, yourself - for years.

For that very reason, we won't spend much time analyzing them here. Been there, done that. But you can't discount them.

Especially baby boomers, who are staying in the workforce longer than their predecessors, and are thus still in the market for many products and services - especially those geared toward working and raising a family - that their retired-at-65 parents had long-since jettisoned.

Of course, those that *are* retired won't have a huge impact on brand positioning going forward. But as the parents and grandparents of younger generations with billions in buying power, we need to be mindful of their influence.

I feel I really know Gen X - probably because I'm myself a member. We're at the peak of our earning and spending powers. We're thinking about how to send our children to college, and prepare for retirement. Sure, we're technology users, but not technology natives. We're set in our ways, and beholden to the brands we love.

While we might frequently try other brands, we tend to be creatures of habit and stay comfortable with those we know and trust. Thus, hardcore sales tactics and tried-and-true marketing approaches tend still to work pretty well on us.

### **Millennial Mashup**

Millennials - currently the largest consumer demographic - are the generation that has done the most to ignite a marketing transformation. Their focus on and preference for online engagement has changed the way organizations market to them; they are the reason why executives have blogs, companies embrace Twitter and LinkedIn, and press releases are posted on Facebook.

Engage them online and you've got it made, right? Oh, if only it were that easy.

Millennials are far from being one distinct and holistic group. In fact, many hate the thought of being lumped into one cohort - likely because they are the most diverse demographic in history. Various research and consulting groups have identified as many as 12 distinct segments within Millennials, a notion sure to cause heartburn for budget-conscious marketers.



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## Millennials are far from being one distinct and holistic group

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But there are some general rules for reaching Millennials. When deciding on a purchase, they do their research - primarily online - and also rely heavily on the advice of individuals they trust or admire. Thus, authentically linking your brand to an objective third-party influencer can have an enormous impact on both brand recognition and even purchase intent.

That doesn't mean, however, a lengthy white paper or encyclopedic brochure will capture their interest. Millennials have about an eight-second attention span, so you'd better hit them quickly - via short messages or video - in ways that prove you understand their demands.

They also care deeply about who you are, not simply what you offer. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is important to them, and can often be the deciding factor in whether or not they buy from you. Showcasing sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and social responsibility efforts are essential - but, just like your marketing, it must be authentic. Millennials can tell if you're blowing smoke.

### They're Here! ...Gen Z

And on deck - with billions in buying power already at their disposal - are Gen Z. With the elder statesmen of this cohort barely out of their teens, it may be easy to dismiss them as irrelevant - unless your company offers mobile apps or hoverboards.

Not so! In the blink of an eye, the entire generation will be out of college, fully entrenched in the workforce and tilting the balance of commerce in their direction. And unlike their elder siblings - Millennials - this cohort has more in common with their grandparents. They value privacy, are keenly

aware of safety and security issues, and are determined to pursue meaningful careers.

Yet, they are distinctly different from grandpa and grandma too. Multicultural and socially liberal, they are oblivious to preconceived notions about race, gender, and ethnicity. And the term "global" doesn't faze them, not when they can Snapchat with friends literally on the other side of the world.

Sixty-million-plus strong, Gen Z members are true digital natives, raised on tablets, smartphones, and social media. Indeed, a 2014 Wikia Study found that more than half would rather give up their sense of smell than their smartphone.

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## Gen Z members are true digital natives, raised on tablets, smartphones, and social media

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But they are realists, raised through 9/11 and threats of terrorism. They are eager to consume and share information - and just as likely to ignore it when they sense it is not authentic.

For marketers, this means offering info in small doses - opt-in texts, YouTube shorts - rather than longer form, text-heavy content. Bits and bytes across numerous channels will enable them to absorb your brand's messages - as long as they're compelling.

Tell them the truth, make it fun and you've got a chance to snag their attention - for a while.

But don't assume they know who you are just because their parents do. A few years ago, we sent a student onto a California campus, where she asked pending grads and grad students how they expected to find their first job. Interestingly, the Tinder generation expected it would come through a personal connection, with a boost from their parents' networks.

And not only had they never heard of Randstad - one of the world's largest recruitment and staffing organizations - they didn't even know our industry existed!! Yes, we've got some work to do, too!

## What's Next?

If you're feeling left behind, don't despair. You're only as good as your next campaign, and marketing missteps of the past can be pushed into the background... if you're meaningful *now*.

Some of the most important elements of successful marketing haven't changed. Creativity still counts, but the tactics employed have evolved from the Mad Men era.

While research has been integral to smart marketing for decades, the quantities of data and technologies at your disposal to quickly aggregate, dissect and analyze it into actionable insights can truly be transformative. Big Data and advanced analytics are integral weapons in any marketer's arsenal; they are the key to understanding varied audiences and making smart, quick decisions to reach them.

The point is... from baby boomers to babies, consumer audiences are more diverse than ever before. As marketers, we must embrace agility and digital forms of communication, and have the resources to pivot quickly to gain a competitive advantage.

Marketing's perfect storm isn't just brewing. It's here.



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## Kristin Kelley

*Chief Marketing Officer | Randstad North America*

Kristin Kelley leads the strategic marketing and communications initiatives to shape Randstad's brand in the U.S. and Canada. Under her leadership, Randstad has launched innovative strategies to raise brand awareness, built integrated strategies to drive commercial value and position the company as a thought leader in the industry. Kelley is a frequent speaker and panelist at industry events, she also directs the company's corporate social responsibility programs and is a member of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce's Workforce Development Committee and Women's Chamber, as well as an advisor on CareerBuilder's Empowering Employment Steering Committee.

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## 9 Vital Questions To Avoid Brand Growing Pains

*Andrew Vesey*

What does your brand want to be when it grows up?  
An important question - one every entrepreneur and marketer should ask.

And, more importantly - how do we get there?



Rebrand, rebirth, or a coming-of-age, every brand goes through stages of growth and decline in its (hopefully) never-ending lifecycle. When it comes time for that change, ask yourself these questions, and you'll be that much closer to the dream of your brand taking flight again.

## 1. Do We Know Where We've Come From?

It's tough to find where you need to go if you don't know where you're starting. To effectively guide your brand forward, you must have a stable baseline.

Understand your core values and how you currently communicate them. Immerse yourself in your brand's backstory. Discover its successes and failures.

## 2. What's Driving Our Current Brand Review?

Brands aren't (or at least, shouldn't be) born or reborn in a vacuum - there must be a reason why you are considering these brand adjustments.

I say 'considering' because the first decision in a brand review should be "Do we need to make adjustments or not?" - If you've jumped straight to "What do we need to change?" I encourage you to take a step back and ask if it's even necessary. You will always find something to change if that's your only goal.

Knowing whether this is a scheduled brand health-check, has been inspired by concerning market feedback, is the result of an agency pitch, or is in reaction to poor sales performance, will shed light on what - if anything - needs to be done.

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## Brands aren't (or at least, shouldn't be) born or reborn in a vacuum

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## 3. We're Growing Up - Is Our Target Audience?

Your brand is maturing. Your offerings may have changed, or perhaps your core values have experienced a shift. The same may be true for your target audience.

Are you targeting an age group, generation, or a particular type of person? If it's the latter, then ensuring your values are aligned to attract the right people is key. When targeting for a generation, you need to look at how recent disruptions and culture shifts have changed their outlook.

And, if your target audience happens to be a particular age group, you might be in for a major overhaul. Depending on the size of the age bracket, you may be facing a whole - extremely - different generation than you were, even five years ago.

## 4. Whose Vision Is Guiding Us On This Journey?

I believe this to be a fundamental question that's often overlooked. Are you building your brand around the vision of its founder, its board or employees, or are you focused on your customers' vision?

There's no hard and fast rule as to what works best here. It depends on your brand. Whether you are building from within and attracting those who share your values or aligning your brand with your customer's values, the key here is that you know where your passion, inspiration and direction are coming from. This will help keep you on the right path.

## 5. Are We Innovating, Iterating Or Imitating?

OK, I'm not 100% sure why I even put that third one in there - just don't do it.

Imitation may be the highest form of flattery, but it's also the biggest waste of your money and time. Be different, brand different.

Right, with that said, let's continue...

Just like an individual, your brand should be ever-growing, ever-evolving - and on occasion, may need to reinvent itself. Understanding what is required for your brand to grow - or survive, in some cases - will ensure all of your energy and resources can be focused effectively.

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**Just like an individual,  
your brand should be  
ever-growing, ever-evolving**

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And focus you must.

When evolving, maintain those links to your roots, work your history and traditions, and keep that connection - this is just the next step in your brand's natural progression.

Simple iterations may be in order, to adjust your 'flight pattern' slightly. Or if an advantageous technology / customer insight avails itself to you, be open to the opportunity and innovate.

On the other hand, a major shift from your current brand needs to be easily 'noticeable' (no half-measures please), but also easily 'understandable.' Brand innovation is useless if people just don't get it.

## 6. What's Our Brand Prototyping Process?

You know why you're rebranding, whose vision is behind it, and what your target audience expects - so, armed with this knowledge, how will you make sure you're on the right track?

Focus groups (formal, informal, social), stakeholder surveys, employee engagement, industry experts, trusted advisors, boardroom 'discussions' - these are all possible avenues for effective checks and balances throughout your rebranding progress.

That's the 'who.'

The 'who' is the easy part.

The real challenge comes with deciding 'how much,' 'how often' - and just 'how.'

You can build your rebrand 'by committee', or you may prefer a singular decision maker (or small team) with ample, controlled, avenues of feedback.

My personal preference is the latter; as I believe it usually leads to less compromise and a closer adherence to the core brand - as long as the right decision maker is selected.

Also, consider your use of drafting, review and approval channels. Pen and paper may not cut it anymore.

## 7. How Will We Guide The Brand Through This Transition?

What plan do you have in place to implement your new improved brand? Consistency is key, and confusion is a killer.

Are you heading for a 'big reveal', or do logistics call for a longer term implementation strategy? How you execute your brand changeover will be a major player in how well (or poorly) it catches on.

## 8. How Will We Measure Our Success?

Let's take a quick step back to questions one and two. You know where you are, and why the change is needed – so logic tells me that we can probably work out a metering for success based on that. Clearly define success indicators – before you start – and ensure you share the focus over both the short and long term.

The trick here is to measure not only the success of the rebrand itself but your entire rebranding experience. How smooth was the transition? Did your prototyping feedback match with that of the live brand? If not, what went wrong? These things can save you time and resources, and increase your rebrand ROI next time around.

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**Measure not only the success of the rebrand itself but your entire rebranding experience**

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## 9. Do We Have The Resources And Expertise That We Need?

Before you launch into action, it's time to review and ensure you have all the requisite pieces in place. It will be much easier to succeed if you have the right tools and talent around you.

### Andrew Vesey

*Chief BrandMan, Founder | Vesey Creative & Brand Quarterly*

Andrew is an experienced brand and marketing professional with over 15 years in the industry - a majority of those have been as the Chief BrandMan at Vesey Creative, which he co-founded in 2003. In 2011, driven by his passion for branding, business and education, Andrew made the move into publishing by launching Brand Quarterly - this very magazine - and in 2014 Brand Quarterly Online. When not writing or developing partnerships and new initiatives for Brand Quarterly, Andrew works with a select number of clients - spanning the globe, from New Zealand through to the United Kingdom and the United States - developing, refreshing and implementing brands for both products and companies.

[www.BrandQuarterly.com](http://www.BrandQuarterly.com)

Get the right technology in place to research, review, rebuild, and relaunch your brand. It may not be a case of buying new systems at all, rather, updating software and adjusting how your current systems perform. Find a balance that allows you to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the rebrand, without adding any more unnecessary change management headaches.

Then address the rebrand team. How much of it is internal, and how much will be handled by external contractors? Check for missing or weak links in the brand supply and support chain that may hamper your success.

Done well, your new brand can last you a lifetime. The only question is, how long will that 'lifetime' be?

The lifetime of a technology? A generation? Or do you have research confirming the average brand lifecycle for your industry?

Because, in this ever-changing world, no brand can remain motionless forever, and we all have dreams to fly to new heights.



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**Done well, your new brand can last you a lifetime. The only question is, how long will that 'lifetime' be?**

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# B TALKS

WITH **Leonard Kim**  
Managing Partner | InfluenceTree



An expert in 'getting noticed' and building a platform of influence online, Leonard, is a successful content creator and influencer, as well as Managing Partner of InfluenceTree.

Let's get talking – entrepreneur insights, building a personal brand, and growth hacking your social media following... with Leonard Kim.

***BQ - What's the best piece of advice you've ever received as an entrepreneur? And what's the worst?***

*Leonard -*

The best piece of advice: Plan out your long term success.

The key factor that got me to where I am today was going out and building something that would have long-term results. From 2007-2013, almost everything I worked on fell apart. I worked hard at marketing x product or y startup, but each time I put in my effort, I came to realize something: When the startup went under, so did my resume.

Trying to find a job, or even getting the motivation start anything else was heart-breaking. To top it off, I had no credibility due to the startup failures that I had poured my efforts into. There was no trust. There was no credibility. There was nothing.

When I started investing in my personal brand, something that actually would have life-long results, everything in my life changed. I used to market and make tons of cold calls. Now, people come to me.

The worst piece of advice:

Fake it 'til you make it.

When you fake it 'til you make it, you turn into a liar. Not just to the world, but also to yourself.

You can't go out and build up something you know nothing about. This is especially true in today's age, where people look for someone with a voice of authenticity and social proof to advertise what they have done.

When you fake it 'til you make it, you won't only disappoint yourself, but your clients as well. That will cause long-term damage to your reputation.

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## When you fake it 'til you make it, you turn into a liar. Not just to the world, but also to yourself

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***BQ - In your opinion, how closely should entrepreneurs tie building their business and their personal brand together?***

*Leonard -*

Your business and your personal brand should be nearly synonymous. In December, I started a company called InfluenceTree. But no one really wants to feature my company, let alone any other company, in their publications, unless they are world class.

On the other hand, people like me as a person. They want to showcase my expertise and advice, so they ask me if I can write articles for their publications.

Within 30 days, I wrote one piece in *Entrepreneur* and had the opportunity to get featured in both *Inc.* and *Fortune* magazines. This generated well over 100 double-qualified leads for our business. They read the piece in the publication and wanted to find out more about what I did. So they looked up my business. Then they decided that they wanted to learn more about our program.

Why all the hoops to jump through?

Because it's so hard to trust a company nowadays. With movies like *The Wolf Of Wall Street* and *The Big Short* depicting the horrors of the economy, people are extremely cautious about who they choose to work with. They want to find a company they can trust. But the only way they're going to find a company they can trust is by looking to the leader of the company - you - and trusting you first.

***BQ - Personally, what have you found to be the most challenging part of building your brand?***

*Leonard -*

The hardest part of building your brand is getting your message out there. Back in 2011, I tried creating a blog and figured that if I made content, people would read it. After writing three posts, I gave up. My simple minded strategy didn't work.

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## The hardest part of building your brand is getting your message out there

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As time progressed, I discovered networks out there that already had other prebuilt networks. A couple of examples of platforms with prebuilt audiences are Medium and Quora.

Medium has multiple publications with tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of followers. Quora is an Alexa-ranked top 150 website focused on sharing knowledge.

Both these companies have prebuilt networks, and by investing in syndicating my content onto these platforms, I was able to go from 30 views on my sad 2011 blog, to garnering 2 million views on my content from May 15 to December 31, 2013.

Now, my content has been read over 10 million times, and I have picked up well over 100,000 social media followers.

**BQ - When trying to build a reputation through content writing, do you believe the focus should be niche or on a wider variety of topics?**

Leonard -

When you are first creating your brand, you need a niche. At least, until you get around 10,000 to 20,000 followers. From there, you can shift and move to a wider variety of topics.

I started my brand with a niche that many people fear sharing. With zero credibility, I worked with the only thing I had: my personal failures. As soon as I built my initial social proof, I moved to creating content on a wider variety of topics.

The reason you need to focus on a niche is because you need to create a solid, loyal following as quickly as possible. Once you have that loyal following, you can create content about whatever you want. Your audience has already decided that they like you, making them more than willing to share your content.

**BQ - Where would you recommend people start if they are looking for the credibility of being 'published' by top-name publications?**

Leonard -

It's a multiple step process:

**1. Analyze the site**

If you want to be in a top-tier publication like *Inc.*, *Entrepreneur* or *Fortune*, you have to do some thorough analysis into what kind of content they already create on their site. How long are the articles? How are they formatted? What kind of content is on there?

**2. Practice writing content like the other writers**

Stories are great for building your personal brand, but chances are, the story will not end up in a publication - unless you want to go with something like Thought Catalog. However, after your analysis, you will get an idea of what kind of content they publish. Usually, these are 'listicles' written in between 500-800 words.

*Inc.* and *Entrepreneur* may have more conversational voices. *Fortune* and *Forbes*, a bit more authoritative and refined.

Learn to match their style. The easiest way to do this is by copying word for word what someone else wrote, then trying to write your own pieces.

**3. Add value**

What do you know that no one else in the world does? Or what would you charge \$10,000 to teach someone?

This is the type of content that needs to be in your piece, your absolute best knowledge. You want people to be able to read your content and think, "Wow, I didn't know that! I'm going to try that today!" or "Wow, that was so powerful! I need this person to implement this strategy for my company!"

If they're thinking through your content in this way, readers will be geared up to tell their friends about your brand or even hire you for a project. That's the type of content that publications are looking for.

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**You want people to be able to read your content and think, "Wow, I didn't know that! I'm going to try that today!"**

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#### 4. Place your content on a platform with a social syndication team

If you try to pitch the publication directly, it is highly unlikely you'll get a response. However, there are many platforms out there that have media syndication teams. Quora and Medium are my favorite two.

Both platforms have people who work strictly with publications to syndicate their content into different outlets. If you're creating content with actionable takeaways that are formatted in the same way the publication already uses, your chances of having your content being syndicated and featured in these publications will increase significantly.

***BQ - What's your take on social platform selection for building a following? Are there some must-haves? Should it be limited, or should you try to hit them all?***

*Leonard -*

Most people don't realize this, but if you try to appear on all social platforms, that in itself is a full-time job. It's probably easier to outline what I do.

I write content. I put it on my *Inc.* column or on Quora. My assistant takes the content I wrote and copies it onto my website, Medium and LinkedIn's publishing platform.

She then shares links to the article on my personal site, on my public Facebook page, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Google+.

I have other social media platforms that I rarely use, but these are my bread and butter.

***BQ - How do you feel entrepreneurs can break through the digital noise and make a real connection with their followers?***

*Leonard -*

People are sick and tired of hearing success stories. Everyone wants to be a hero, but most people forget about the back-story. People follow Batman and Spiderman because they have a captivating back-story about how they became orphans. It's these back-stories that lit the fire on the path to their dreams.

The only way you'll break through the digital noise is by building out your character. Do this through your own authentic voice and expand your audience. With all this in place, you will be able to blow people away with your expertise.




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**The only way you'll break through the digital noise is by building out your character**

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### Leonard Kim

*Managing Partner | InfluenceTree*

Leonard Kim is managing partner of InfluenceTree. At InfluenceTree, Leonard and his team teach you how to build your brand, get featured in publications and growth hack your social media following. Leonard's content has been read over 10 million times. He has amassed a social media following of well over 100,000 people. He has been profiled and/or featured in publications ranging from *Inc.*, *Fortune*, *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes*, *Huffington Post* and more. He has been on more podcasts than he can name, ranging from *Success Hackers* to *Ask Altucher*.

[www.leonardkim.com](http://www.leonardkim.com)



# More Popular Articles On BrandQuarterly.com

## Strengthen Your B2B Brand By Leveraging The Power Of Art

*Mitch Duckler*

Although not immediately obvious, a healthy relationship between art and business can be a powerful tool in a company's general brand strategy. Art seems far removed from the business world, but many B2C brands have learned to use it for their benefit. Well, there is a big opportunity for B2B brands...



## 3 No-Nonsense Ways To Measure The Value Of Your SEO Strategy

*Sam Hurley*

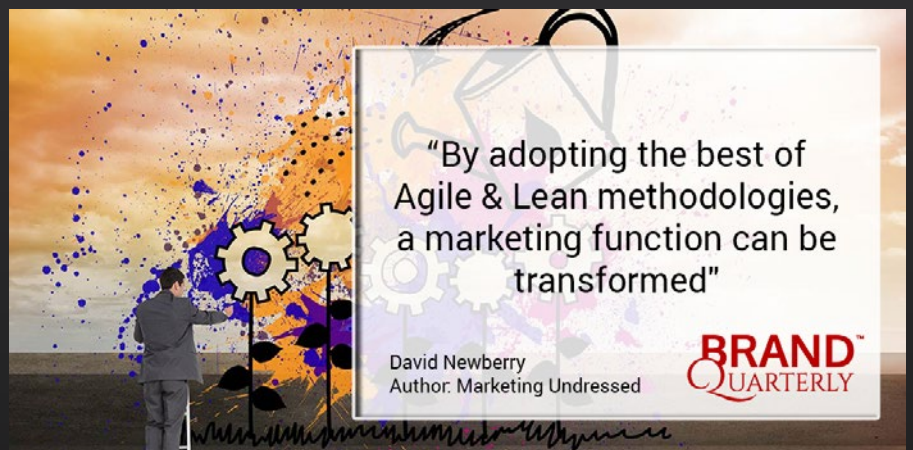
Creating and implementing an SEO strategy requires vast amounts of hard work and sustained efforts. Once the initial hurdle is overcome and a brand realises the importance of SEO, it comes as great relief to finally feel as though progress has been made. The next obstacle is actually...



## How Agile And Lean Can Transform Marketing

*David Newberry*

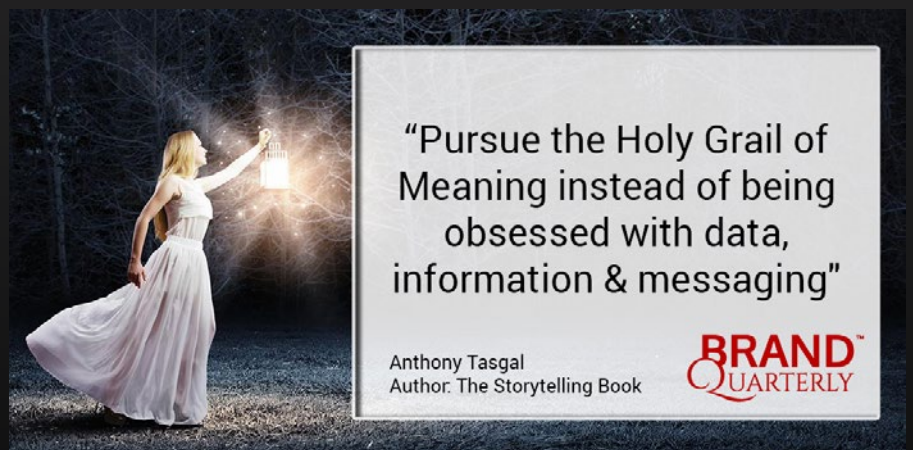
The role of marketing is to connect an organization with the market in a way that benefits both customer and company. In simple terms, marketing is accountable for ensuring there is a discernable need in the market, which the company can address in a unique, differentiated and profitable way. To achieve this, marketing must bridge the roles of both the voice of the customer...

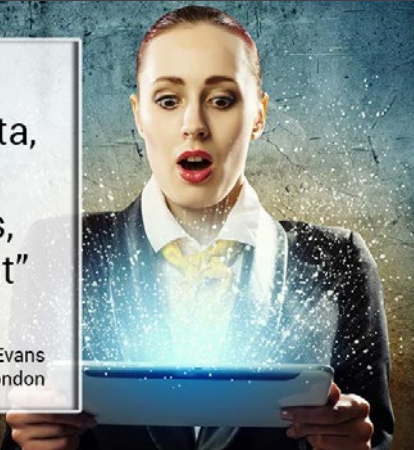


## Returning Meaning To The Heart Of Communications

*Anthony Tasgal*

The brand and comms business have become obsessed with messaging and information transmission, and need to remember that human beings are Semavores - who consume meaning. So, let's ensure we derive and deliver meaning for our brands...





**“The creative use of data, rather than working with a set of statistics, provides the Big Insight”**

Jane Evans  
ais London

**BRAND QUARTERLY**

## Big Data Won't Drive Creativity, Big Insights Will

*Jane Evans*

A key focus for businesses has been how to meet the big data challenge. However, the emphasis has been on the quantity, rather than quality, of data and while being overwhelmed by volume, businesses have missed the real opportunity – the Big Insight. The problem is that marketers aren't quite sure where to begin. They should take a leaf out of the book of Behavioural...



**“Marketing has a responsibility to blow up the silos in our work”**

Lynne Jarman-Johnson  
Consumers Credit Union

**BRAND QUARTERLY**

## CMOs: How To Become A Chief Silo Buster

*Lynne Jarman-Johnson*

The changing landscape of brand intimacy in marketing doesn't allow any team to work on an island unto themselves. Marketing has a responsibility to blow up silos - we must build the teams and communication lines to succeed in our roles, and to provide the best service to our customers...



**“It is not enough to just reach prospects, marketers must deliver experiences that engage at every touch-point”**

Gavin Finn  
Kaon Interactive

**BRAND QUARTERLY**

## Interactivity: Engaging Prospects At Every Stage Of The Buyer's Journey

*Gavin Finn*

Content Is Not Enough.

Because the B2B “buyer's journey” has evolved dramatically, due to the proliferation of information on the Internet, savvy marketers have focused on providing “content” to match the needs of buyers at each stage of their journey. Content...



**“Marketers can't afford to ignore how Millennials and their predecessors, Gen Z, consume”**

Anne Gherini  
StumbleUpon

**BRAND QUARTERLY**

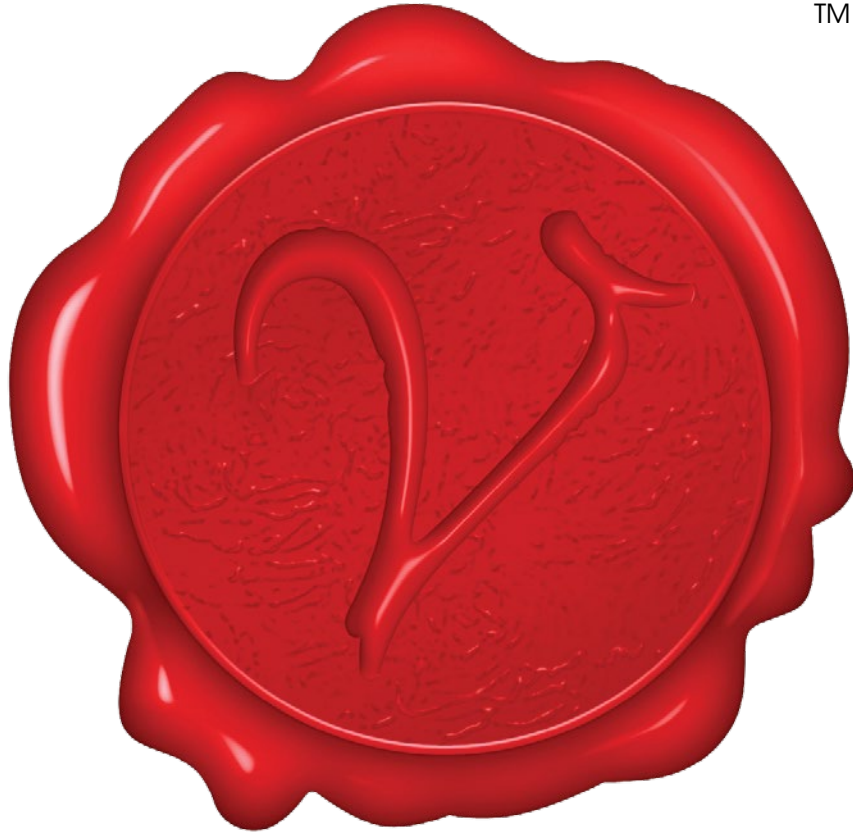
## The Death Of The Banner Ad

*Anne Gherini*

How Mobile Is Forcing Marketers To Look Beyond The Click...

June 7, 2007, was a date that changed the landscape for marketers. As Steve Jobs stood in front of a crowded room of Tech geeks and lovers he held up the first iPhone and said, “Your Life in the Palm Of Your Hand.” Now, many of us who already had a love for our iPods and iMacs were intrigued...

TM



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