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Your Brand Is An Avatar: Lessons From Consumers And Their Favorite Artists

Urban Brand-Utility: Turning Brand Communications Into Urban Resiliency

Supercharge Content Marketing With Engagement And Participation

Best Practices In Executing A Global Customer Experience Strategy

Empathy, Distillation, Clarity: The Principles Of Brand Simplicity

...and much more inside.

Featured In This Issue:

From The Editor

Target acquired: brand success. Strategy Incoming…
…from 18 wonderful contributors, inside this bumper, 100+ page 'Strategy' issue.

I'll keep this editor's note short, as I feel the authors and articles within these pages really speak for themselves. Just long enough to say thank you to our contributors, our Brand Benefactor sponsors, and you, our readers, for all of your support. We couldn't do it without you.

Looking ahead, we are now accepting submissions for both September's 'Technology' issue, and November's 'Experience issue, so if you'd love to be featured in one of these issues or as one of our weekly thought pieces, head over to our contributor's page for more details.

I hope you enjoy this issue. We're trying out some longer format pieces this quarter, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on using more of them in the future - hit me on Twitter @ATVesey or email me on the address below. Have a great one!

Andrew

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Your Brand Is An Avatar

**Lessons From How Consumers
Identify With Their Favorite Artists**

Brian Solis

I'm fascinated by younger generations and just how different they are from generations prior. You should be too. Generations Y and Z (Millennials and Centennials) represent a dramatic "C" change where a new genre of "Connected" consumerism is forcing business as usual to cater to an always-on, accidentally narcissistic, empowered, informed, demanding, and counterintuitive generation.

Yet, as their behaviors and belief systems evolve, executives still don't get it. It's almost as if the more they ignore the fundamental shifts in how technology has forever affected human norms, values, and aspirations, the more things will return to normal. But, they won't.

Instead of understanding behavior change, executives tend to judge younger generations on the premise that they're different and therefore cannot be right or valuable as is. This creates the opposite of genuine customer engagement and instead fosters an "us vs. them" perspective and culture. As such, executives blind themselves from seeing how the future is actually playing out and how to thrive in times of great change.

It's not uncommon to hear how decision-makers discredit connective consumers because of their so-called "everyone got a trophy" entitlement and obsessive relationship with technology, messaging, selfies, FaceTime, and doing anything and everything rather than being in the moment. This legacy-based perspective unfortunately prevents empathy and the emotional drivers that would compel any normal person to arrive at either an "aha" or "uh-oh" moment: "We better do something because what's happening right now is so fundamentally different than what we're investing in that we are on a path to the 'too-big-to-fail' dead pool."

In A World Of Disruption, Humanity Is The Killer App For Survival

By taking a few steps back, however, we can see digital Darwinism in full effect across all industries. Technology and society evolve, and in some cases, beyond a point of no return. But, executive perspectives, methodologies, and processes are simply not keeping pace. Regardless of your industry, take a look around. Retail, music, beauty, automotive, banking and finance, travel, work, healthcare, insurance, you name it; every industry in its own way is affected by the relationship between technology and its impact on culture, society, and human beings. How today's connected consumers psychologically and emotionally relate to and identify with products and brands is no longer hierarchical; it's becoming something more orbital and additive.

Compare and contrast the differences in perception and value of your older and younger customers as a homework assignment. One way to do so is to create an X-Y spreadsheet with one axis labeled, "Boomers," "Millennials," and "Centennials." Here, you will document the expectations, preferences, values, and aspirations of each demographic. Consider it a light persona development project. On the other axis, you'll list out common consumer services.

You can use this list as a starter:

- Cars
- Banks
- Beauty Products
- Music
- Travel
- Retail
- Work

The goal is to understand how the generations think differently about each service, how they play in their life today, and what value propositions/benefits/purpose they align with.

Using Google and readily available third-party data and insights, you can fill in the blanks between how previous generations value, relate to, and identify with brands and products versus how younger generations do. You'll quickly realize that the brand pillars, messages and value proposition, existing customer experiences, and journeys and associated metrics are all designed for those born before 1990. In fact, I'd bet that many of the human resources and work systems your company has in place today were also designed and implemented before the Internet was commercially accessible.

Your brand, product, and overall experience must deliver value to people who appreciate different value sets. There is no universal approach now. Your brand, its purpose, the experience, the emotional connections, and its overall value must be re-imagined to deliver new value now and over time.

Some key questions to ask will help us build meaningful and empathetic ties to customers we don't really know or understand:

- What brands and artists do Millennials and Centennials love and why?
- What devices, apps, and technologies do they use, and how does it affect their world?
- What is important to them and why?
- How do they see themselves in society today and tomorrow?
- What are their aspirations and goals?
- What are the things holding them back today?
- How do they relate to older brands/products?

A Magazine Is An iPad That Doesn't Work

Younger consumers represent the present and future of basically everything. They control tomorrow's spending and influence. And, they do not and will not see things your way if you don't first appreciate their point of view. Organizations that insist on engaging these digital natives through dated perspectives, processes, and systems will not demonstrate irrelevance; they will become yet another statistic in the companies that faced digital Darwinism and lost. It's a matter of #AdaptorDie. It's a choice.

As I've learned through my years of research, these connected consumers aren't just born with digital DNA; they live a digital lifestyle that, for the most part, is maturing in a way that's significantly dissimilar to that of Generation X, Boomers, and Matures. How we govern everything, create, market, sell and serve, and teach and learn is mired in a rut that caters to the ways things were rather than the way things are actually progressing.

Connected consumers aren't just born with digital DNA; they live a digital lifestyle

We essentially force analog procedures upon a digital generation that naturally seems counterintuitive… because it is. Yet, process-makers and managers today are too busy or too stubborn to realize that change benefits everyone.

Matures	=	Analog first
Boomers	=	Analog first
Generation X	=	Analog first/Digital progressive
Generation Y	=	Digital first/Progressively analog intolerant
Generation Z	=	Digital only

Generation Y largely represents the first generation where the experiences of living the analog-to-digital life are something that's learned rather than intuitive. Generation Z right behind them, are exponentially analog intolerant. It's literally something they have to learn.

Think about the workplace for a moment.

Ignorance + Arrogance = Irrelevance

Millennials are forced to learn how to work and collaborate using technology and adhering to processes that are at best counterintuitive and, at best, tolerable in exchange for a paycheck. But, in the end, old ways of working affect productivity, and that's counterproductive by design. Most likely, the existing paths, guidelines, and guardrails that Millennials are exposed to are pointless in their eyes.

In a separate study conducted by Millennial Branding, it is expected that by 2025, Generation Y will represent 75% of the workforce. That's right around the corner.

Think about that for a moment. Not only will Millennials dominate the workforce, they too will command your markets, with the even more connected and narcissistic Generation Z following right behind them. As you and I know well, change is not an overnight occurrence. The old guard isn't releasing control. At the same time, younger employees are coming up fast. Older managers are working longer before they retire, and this only perpetuates the problem until we start to work toward solving it.

What's playing out in work is the same thing that's occurring in markets and vice versa.

Rather than debate or whine about the need to change, I study it. The reality is that change either happens to you, in spite of you, or because of you. It's more productive to learn and also unlearn as a means to discover or create solutions than to fight. One way to do so is through social science. In my work, I approach it much in the same way an anthropologist approaches a field study. By observing behavior, we can learn how to adapt processes and products, develop more relevant products and services, and learn to communicate and engage in more meaningful ways.

Change either happens to you, in spite of you, or because of you

It's not just digital DNA that's conjuring an alternative future; there are also very real shifts in expectations, values, and aspirations we must consider. We can only grow, become more relevant, and deliver greater value with learning and unlearning. We can visualize new solutions that are not solely based on the world *we know*, but instead a world we can build together.

Organizations can only earn relevance among an emergent group of consumers who would otherwise remain elusive to the existing myriad of (traditional) business decision-makers today. We just have to empathetically see the world through the digital lens of a more connected, focused, and discerning group of young adults.

So, what does change look like? What's the future?

That's for each of us to discover. As we do, our paths will become visible. One of the ways that help me understand change is to look at other industries. I particularly study the music industry and the evolving relationship between artists and fans and the resulting impact on commerce and markets. What's happened/happening to the music industry is a strong predictor for every industry.

Baby, I Was Born This Way

When you study the relationships Millennials have with brands they love, we start to surface distinct nuances that weave together the fabric of bonding and how it changes the game for affinity and advocacy.

Generation Y is the group that the music industry initially labeled as thieves, accusing them of stealing the music they consumed. But they didn't know any better. Technology was enabling them to associate a different kind of value with music. Do I agree with it? No. But my opinion doesn't change an entire generation of consumers. My point of view either prevents or inspires me to get closer to understanding how they will impact economies and, more importantly, what we can do to have a positive and beneficial impact on the future.

For five years, I hosted the Pivot Conference, an annual event that explored brand, technology, and societal evolution. In late 2012, one of the presentations delivered an unforgettable aha moment that I'd like to share with you.

MTV's Alison Hillhouse opened the door to how younger generations think differently about artists and the value of music that connected the dots for much of my work in digital transformation and anthropology. Entitled "Music(m) - Music to the Mpower," the discussion shed light on what the world of music looks like when we focus on how Millennials think and act.

To say that Gen Y has significantly wrought the music industry might well be a great understatement. They are forcing, albeit slowly and painfully, an entire industry to rethink its business model, product, and overall value. Because of technology and access, Millennials forced the emergence of a decentralized, non-hierarchical marketplace. In doing so, they also impelled artists into an era of digital transparency.

MTV's study challenged me to think about how this behavior, paired with evolving expectations, preferences, and demands, could play out in other industries. I'd like to challenge you to join me with an open mind.

Brands As A Form Of Self-Expression

With traditional branding in mind, the first takeaway from MTV's research is that relationships are forged through self-expression. I think about Harley-Davidson, Apple, and Nike, just to name a few shining examples of brands that loyal customers adore, in some cases, religiously.

But with Millennials, something *contrastive* this way comes.

Music is now democratized. Napster was just the beginning. Apple iTunes built a centralized platform for the sale and distribution of digital music. Then, streaming services, such as Spotify, offered consumers music for free in exchange for paid advertisements. Even though subscriptions were also offered for higher-quality bit rates and more exclusive

access, the baseline for consumer minimum expectations equated the value of music to "free." As a result, expectations and, ultimately, behaviors changed. Music became, in large part, a series of cultural accessories rather than generation-defining movements.

This change is not unlike the impact of digital on the photography industry. Kodak is to this day widely regarded as a cautionary tale of a brand that chose to invest in legacy over innovation or, more explicitly, film over its digital patents. While digital became the standard for everyday photography, and Kodak did indeed miss the boat, disruption was more tied to how the culture of photography changed as a result of the shift from film to digital.

Digital picture-taking was somewhat free compared to the cost per picture on film. This eventually shifted the role and value of pictures in our society from that of preserved memories to the capturing and eventual sharing of real-time experiences. The once nostalgic and precious "Kodak moment" had now turned into an abundance of moments.

You could make similar comparisons to the impact of Netflix on Blockbuster or Amazon on Borders. New technologies and services changed how people behave, consume, and align with brands.

Music Makes The World Go Round... As Long As I'm At The Center Of Everything.

When the perception of music becomes free, the dynamics and economics that define artist-fan relationships are by default disrupted. In March 2017, Fleetwood Mac's Stevie Nicks explained to Rolling Stone the extent to which the economics of music has changed:

"I don't think there's any reason to spend a year and an amazing amount of money on a record that, even if it has great things, isn't

going to sell. I don't think we'll do another record. If the music business were different, I might feel different. What we do is go on the road, do a ton of shows, and make lots of money. We have a lot of fun. Making a record isn't all that much fun."

What's the return on an album investment if streaming royalties quickly evaporate?

This is why understanding the dynamics of how younger consumers consume music and also align with their favorite artists reveal the future of branding and commerce.

Artists Are Satellites In The "Egosystem"

Younger generations see their favorite artists - and one can further deduce favorite brands as an analogy - as their own personal avatars. They don't hold them up on an aspirational, self-projected pedestal the same way as older generations.

When it comes to brand, this new behavior could be a predictor of things to come for brands and customer loyalty. For example, some Millennials are loyal advocates for their favorite artists. MTV refers to these consumers as superfans. But, being a superfan is a little different today than it used to be. It's a lot more about the Millennial's personal brand than the artist. Millennials are puppeteers, choosing which artists are part of their show and which take the stage, when, and how to best represent who they are in the moment and who they want to be.

They are in control.

For those born before 1990, many consumers worshipped their favorite artists and wanted to become just like them. Somewhere along the way, technology empowered people to become their own brands. Today, people are brands and brands are people. The artists and songs of the moment now become temporary satellites in a consumer's "egosystem." It shifts the traditional power of the relationship

from artist to fan to that of a peer-to-peer model (or as MTV refers to it, "Artist as a Friend") that changes with the trends. An artist or song is just one of the many rotating satellites in their egosystem.

In This Digital World, There Are No Strangers To The Open-Minded, Only Friends They've Not Yet Met

According to MTV, Millennial music fans demand not just a VIP pass, but complete access to their favorite celebrities, artists, and entertainment experiences. They are, after all, the center of their digital universe. In its research, MTV set out to examine expectations of younger consumers and better understand their relationship with artists.

MTV's findings revealed the ways social media has dismantled barriers between artist and fans and uncovered a "zero-distancing" effect, or the collapsing distance between artist and audience. The same can be true for brands. As such, the research was divided into three stages: 1) Discovery, 2) Affinity, and 3) Advocacy.

Early on in the report, MTV introduces us to Jennie, a 22-year-old consumer who gives readers a taste of how Gen Y learns about and values music:

"I was 10 when Napster hit," she shared with interviewers.

Jennie doesn't really know of the cultural importance of once music-industry staples, such as Tower Records or Wherehouse, either. She has no idea of what it means when people refer to the days when pencils would fix tangled cassette tapes. Yet the gap that exists between how she sees the world and how older decision-makers see the world is on absolute contrasting sides of the universe.

There's the way executives see the world, and then there's the way that the world is actually progressing. To help, MTV introduced three

compelling thought starters to consider as you go on your way. I've added to each of the questions to make them also applicable to brands.

1. How will you recognize and reward consumers as-PR-machine? Think of consumers as not only their own egosystems, but as digital tastemakers and influencers.
2. How will you offer unprecedented intimacy? How will consumers always feel like the VIPs that they believe they are?
3. How will you collapse the existing hierarchy and give consumers control? How will you democratize the brand so that it represents the experiences and shared experiences of customers and stakeholders?

To help get to the answers, let's explore those three stages set out by MTV; Discovery, Affinity, and Advocacy.

1) Discovery

It's no surprise that peers are among the greatest influencers in our society. What people say, think, experience, and share has direct and indirect effects on our impressions and actions. In the discovery stage, it should also come as no surprise that friends impact the decisions of others. It is in the "how," though, that opens windows to new opportunities.

As friends share videos, links, and pictures, and color each with personal perspective, opinions, and reactions in social networks, each play a part in branding and marketing. Meet the new "friendorsers" - aka influencers.

Experiences are more important than ever before. It's not so much what you say about your brand that counts; it's what consumers experience and, in turn, share with others that defines the Ultimate Moment Of Truth (UMOT) for your business. In a social web, with a web that has a long, collective, and searchable memory, it is the experiences and

The Key Role Of "Friendorsers"

Frankie Whyte
I like this kid

Meek Mill - Amen ft. Drake [Official Video]
www.youtube.com
. For More New Music .

My friends are definitely the go-to people for new music. I have a specific friend to go to for each music genre. They're the coolest and most credible source.
- Leonard

@MTVinsights

words of others that often out-markets your best marketing efforts. Those experiences must be designed to be personal, relatable, aspirational, and, more so, shareable.

2) Affinity

If you look at the traditional customer journey, advocacy is often among the last phases of a desired lifecycle. But with the Millennial, advocacy is not a given stop in their organic journey. Advocacy, and better yet, affinity, is earned not just because they like the product. Relationships are formed because brands are also accessible, relatable, and supportive. They share the same values. They're BFFs.

With the Millennial, advocacy is not a given stop in their organic journey

In a video made to accompany the research, one twenty-something told the story of how an artist shared a screenshot of one of his tweets. His reaction was both honest and revealing: "Holy sh#t. He's listening to me." He's now a fan for life. But it takes more than recognition, which shouldn't go without saying. Fans want their idols (or brands) to be open. They don't just want to be included in their world; they expect it.

Technology changes the way people learn about music and how they interact with other fans. It takes more than a "fan page" to grab their attention of course; it takes understanding, appreciation, and genuine engagement. The Millennial needs to feel like they're connected to the person behind the brand or what it is that the brand stands for. In fact, 76% say that they feel a stronger connection to musicians who are open about who they are, and another 91% say it's OK if they have flaws - it makes them human.

This is so important.

Brands feel like they always have to be on message and persistently in front of consumers. And, executives are conditioned to speak to the public through an entangled process of PR spin and legal approvals. There's a reason why every year Edelman's Trust Barometer shows deflating trust in executives and rising trust in employee representatives. It's because people want to be engaged by people or brands that act like they get "them."

To support this, MTV found that 53% of Millennials believe that the more "an artist" (also think humanized brand) shares online about who they really are and what they truly represent, the closer they're drawn to them or feel about them. It opens the door to more personal, relatable engagement, which is what today's connected consumers expect. As a result, this ushers in a new era where the artist or brand assumes a position of "friend" or BFF.

I know what you're thinking. Relationships are nice, but at the end of the day, the "R" in ROI isnt relationships; it stands for return.

Millennials, however, aren't willing to buy just anything, so approaching them transactionally is short term at best. This is, after all, a generation that is, fortunately or unfortunately, well versed in getting what they want either for free or at a notable discount. They are willing to pay more for something if they can trust it, align with it, or if it carries

Artist As "Friend"

One of the first people I followed [on Twitter] was Nick Jonas. It makes him seem like an everyday guy that's down-to-earth just like everyone else. The more I can relate to an artist, the more I feel connected, and the more I focus on their music.
- Lena   @MTVinsights

social impact. More so, they are willing to pay more if they know the experience is worth it.

When it comes to music, paying for it is a big deal. They grew up with Napster, Kazaa, Pandora, and now Spotify. They use YouTube as their personal radio. But, it's when they feel more connected to the artist or the brand that they are more than willing support them financially and socially. It shifts from an engagement of transactions to one of patronage, where people become supporters of the things that provide value. It shifts the balance of power toward the consumer.

In an interview with MTV, Devin shared an honest and telling perspective to explain the role of the empowered consumer: "When I want to support an artist that I respect and connect with, I buy their music."

In the report, MTV noted, "Buying is symbolic patronage." It's a reflection of the physical connection between fan and artist and also the symbol of the importance of earning relationships.

The lesson?

Engage people on their terms and define new value that they also value. Get to know your customers. Earn their support by "getting" them, befriending them, and creating incredible experiences that align with their values and aspirations.

The ROI is reflected in a transaction, but the real benefit is in the long term when the "R" shifts to relationship. As MTV found, 81% of Millennial consumers express support with their money. As one consumer expressed, "The closer I feel to an artist, the more likely I am to support that artist by purchasing music."

3) Advocacy

Revisiting the traditional sales funnel of yore, a great assumption was made that customers would naturally fall into the advocacy camp if products and services met or exceeded needs. But, we all know that a happy customer may tell some people about their experience, but an unhappy customer will tell everyone.

Millennials, on the other hand, subscribe to the Latin philosophy of quid pro quo - you give me something; I'll give you something. Remember, everyone believes they boast a personal brand. This new generation of digital consumers is incredibly savvy, connected, and expect something in return for their precious networks and the word-of-mouth influence they may wield. Advocacy now almost resembles that of mercenary. They are not standing by to be part of your branding machine. They are a branding machine.

I Am Your Branding Machine
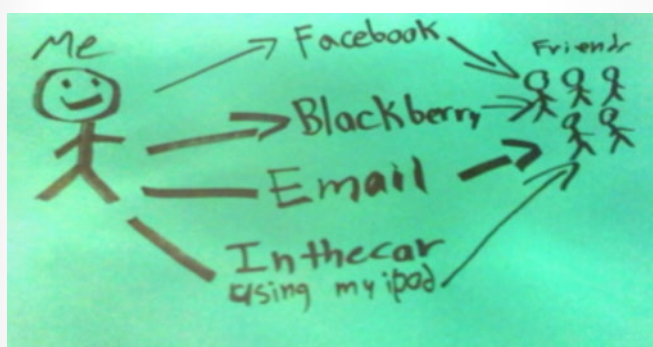
Yeah, I know that when I share, I'm working for them in a way... I know that matters and they need that to succeed... I expect somethin in return for that!

- Sarah

@MTVinsights

The shift from fan to superfan occurs when people are recognized, empowered, and also rewarded. Brands can't control experiences if they just react to them. But they can shape and steer them if they understand how to be relatable and, more so, how to become shareable. As MTV learned, Millennials become advocates when artists provide a framework to explore their identity.

Millennials become advocates when artists provide a framework to explore their identity

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Even though there's not an "I" in Team, there's a "me" in both team and social media. This new generation of empowered, and by default entitled, consumers realize that when they share with their friends, they are playing the equivalent role of the celebrity spokesperson within their own egosystem. They also understand that they earn leverage in their social graphs. Brands that take this social capital for granted miss that customers who share experiences create new touchpoints in the brand journey. Essentially, shared experiences help strangers make decisions.

This is why social science is so incredibly important today. The psychology of sharing reveals that rewarding fans or superfans is just the beginning. Your brand, products, and overall mission / purpose must also be something people are willing to stand beside. Community is much more than belonging to something; it's about doing something together that makes belonging matter. It must be important or beneficial enough to where ROI is worth expending social capital toward helping you while helping themselves shine within their network.

Brands must invest in a social construct that empowers consumers to share and strengthen their position in their community

while also reinforcing the relationship they have with the brand. In the case of music, MTV found that 58% of Millennials (76% of Music Enthusiasts) are: "… motivated to post and share music when I get feedback (e.g., likes or comments)." Another 64% expressed: "I like to be the source for new music among my friends."

When brands matter, and when brands engage people to create communities that matter, branding becomes human and social.

Chamillionaire is a good friend of mine. Over the years, we've spent a lot of time exploring how emerging tech can help him build stronger relationships with fans and rethink traditional approaches to the music business. In the spirit of quid pro quo, Cham took a gamification approach that rewards fans with tangible goods for engagement.

The 'Chamillitary'

Image: Arnold Turner / wireimage.com

This is very similar to the community strategy that adventure retailer Giant Nerd takes to foster and recompense engagement, loyalty, and advocacy. For every authentic product review on the Giant Nerd website by actual customers and users of said product, points are received toward future purchases.

People want to feel like they're part of something where they are valued and where they can have an impact. Build an engaging social marketplace, and they will come. Reward them for their engagement and their social capital, and they will come back

and shape the future of the community. Underestimate or underappreciate them, and they will move on.

> *The way I see it, the attitude or culture surrounding a musician I love gives me 'ideas' for ways to act or dress; but I compile those together and don't let one thing shape who I am.*
>
> - Jessica

What was once a fandom with a hierarchical structure is now a community with expectations of peer-to-peer engagement, including the artist (and brand). It comes down to identity. People aren't willing to let artists represent who they are; they want the artist to symbolize aspects of their life. The same is true for brands.

To shed light on this finding, MTV asked participants to rank themselves on a spectrum between semi-fan, fan, and ultimate fan for their favorite artists. Surprisingly, not one claimed to be an ultimate fan of any artist regardless of how much they love or respect an artist. Why? An ultimate fan is seen as someone who has given up their own identity. No artist or brand is immune.

It's the difference between assimilation and accommodation, according to MTV. The artist (or the brand) becomes an avatar for the Millennial; the artist doesn't define them.

The artist (or the brand) becomes an avatar for the Millennial; the artist doesn't define them

The key is to define a branded domain - a world - to create an experience that gives fans a domain where they can emulate ideas, lifestyles, and objectives for fans to make their own.

ARTIST

ME

ME

ARTIST
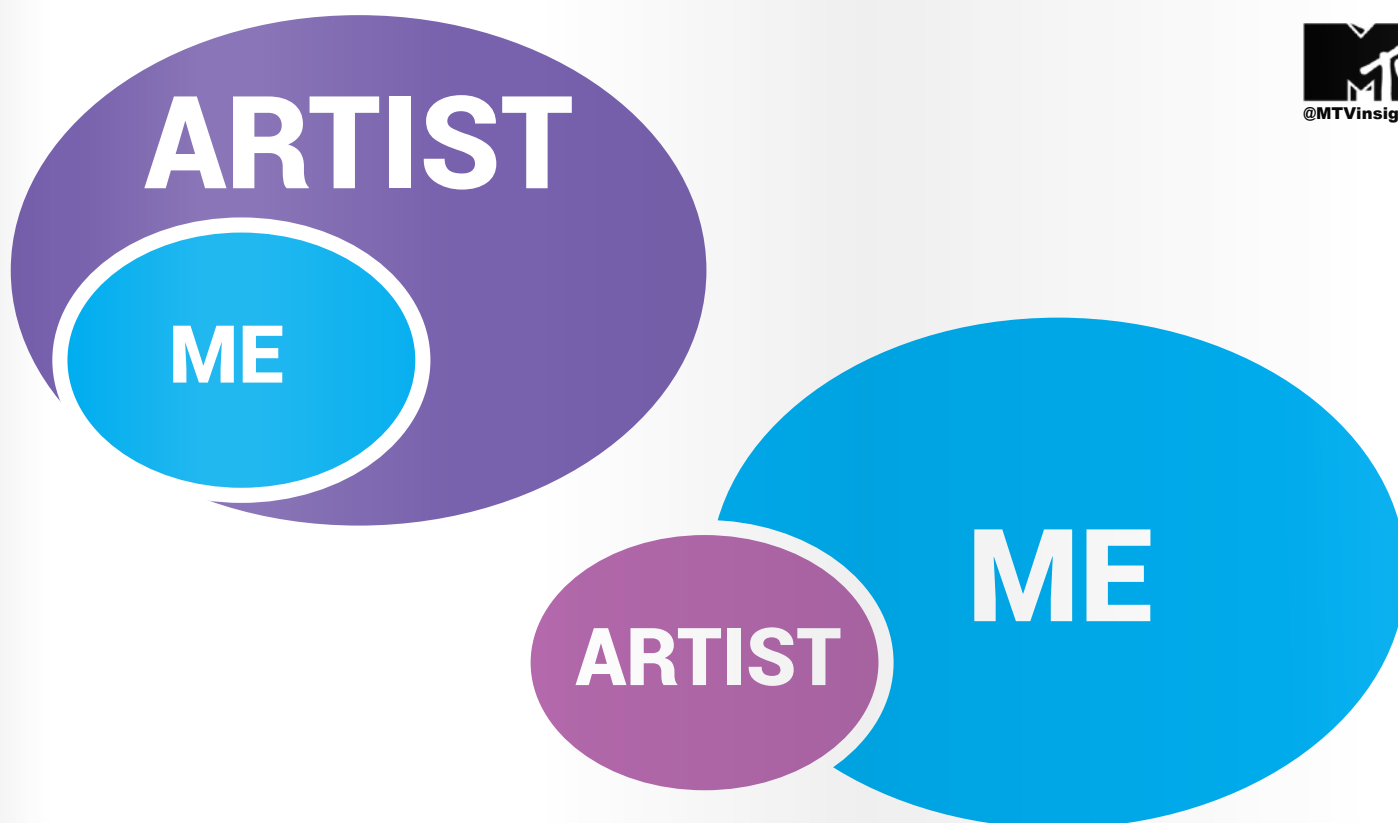
The Self Expression Tool Kit

MTV refers to this notion as a self-expression toolkit. For brands, think about this as a brand style guide 2.0 or, better yet, an experience style guide. Experience design shifts consumer engagement from perceptions and impressions expressions, experiences, and conversational commerce. If people believe that sharing your work, your story, and your mission helps them increase their social capital, then help them help you.

Create a brand narrative, product experiences, and a relevant purpose that are equally meaningful and shareable to a new and evolving generation of customers. You have to connect on an emotional level, not a promotional one. Understand what they value and how you can boost their social capital and the experience for everyone in their egosystem. Doing so requires you study customer behavior, as well as their interests, norms, values, and aspirations. Experiences will be shared, so define them and the

benefits up front and provide customers with a natural and easy-to-understand "how to engage"… right out of the box!

You have to connect on an emotional level, not a promotional one

This is very much about building something bigger than the product or the music. It's about building an immersive universe, a complete experience, where people are free to explore new territories while aligning with a greater purpose to shape the impressions, expressions, and aspirations of human networks online and in the real world.

Encore: Who Wants Honey?

While on stage at SXSW 2012, I had the opportunity to interview Billy Corgan, Founder, Vocalist, and Lead Guitarist of The Smashing Pumpkins. In front of a few thousand people, he shared his advice for artists and fans and was direct and honest in the process of doing so. He believes the future of artist and brand engagement starts by designing relevant experiences that matter to people who are not you or me.

According to Billy, artists must first create their world, beyond "viral" music videos and hit singles. But both artists and fans must assume responsibility for the future of music. Corgan believes the future of sustained relevance is about meaningful engagement… again, beyond the music. Brands, that also means that you have to think beyond the product, packaging, and marketing.

What's happened, and is still happening, to the music industry represents the collapse in hierarchy between fan and artist. This is playing out in every industry between brand and customer, employer and employee, and organization and key constituents.

The question is no longer, "Are you experienced?" The question is now, "What is the experience, and what should it be in ways that are relevant, relatable, and aspirational to a new generation of connected consumers?"

Answering that question represents the future of your business. And, we're not done yet. The Centennials, right behind Millennials, continue the trend of evolving behaviors, preferences, values, and aspirations.

We are the product of our collective experiences. You and I come to this moment right now based on the experiences that define us. We are who we are because of the life we've lived. And we bring those experiences to our work and, ultimately, the decisions we make. If we take anything away from this research, it's that we might actually be working against ourselves. Our experiences, the way we see the world, and our place in it are suited when designing strategies for people like us.

But here, the Millennial and the Centennials that follow are something so different, unique, and important that our next steps are practically counterintuitive. To reach them takes a dedicated approach if we are to truly earn attention and sustained relevance.

This isn't just a music revolution; this is a full-scale market revolution.

Brands that understand this important twist in customer engagement will unlock something so profound, something so potent, that the future of the brand drives your work in digital transformation, customer experience, and brand innovation.

Welcome to the jungle.

Brian Solis

Author, Keynote Speaker, Principal Analyst | Altimeter, a Prophet company

Brian Solis is a principal analyst at Altimeter, a Prophet company. He is also an award-winning author, prominent blogger/writer, and keynote speaker. A digital analyst, anthropologist, and futurist, Solis has studied and influenced the effects of emerging technology on business and society. His research and books cover digital transformation, culture 2.0, and innovation and are meant to help people better understand the relationship between technology and humanity. His book, X: The Experience When Business Meets Design, introduces the experience as the new brand, bringing the worlds of CX, UX, and BX together to re-imagine the customer journey and lifecycle.
www.briansolis.com

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Best Practices In Executing A Global Customer Experience Strategy

Clint Poole

As brands expand globally in search of new growth opportunities, the diverse number of buyer personas and ways to reach them rises at an exponential rate. At the same time, customers now expect relevant brand touch points to be delivered to them in real-time, and across multiple channels and platforms. The need to generate a flawless personalized experience for consumers is more important than ever.

A major component of that personalized experience requires adapting content and communications for the buyers' language and cultural preferences. Today's brands must ensure that all content and messages are locally relevant while maintaining the most universal and relevant parts of their brand consistently.

Forrester reports that 64 percent of CMOs are now responsible for delivering their organization's customer experience (CX) strategy. With this in mind, CMOs need to be laser focused on understanding their customers' needs, preferences and desires and ultimately drive innovative strategies that will deliver the best possible CX. Specifically, CMOs should gain a deep understanding of how their organization operates and build operating models that will enable a cohesive, global CX strategy across markets. Here, we'll explore what that workflow should look like.

Build operating models that will enable a cohesive, global CX strategy across markets

Every organization is unique, and there is no standard approach. Finding the right method for a global CX strategy will depend on a number of factors, from budget to business goals and in-market resource availability. A good starting point is identifying the key decision makers for campaign planning, content development and marketing execution. From there, it's crucial to understand who of these decision makers is responsible for providing input and how much influence they hold over approving certain tasks. By engaging key stakeholders in these discussions, marketers can gain a better understanding of how their organization works, streamline communications and avoid any potential bumps down the road.

Create Global Marketing Operations

To create a seamless CX strategy and produce quality global marketing campaigns, brands must work to keep communications open between corporate/regional leadership and local in-market resources. This can be accomplished by creating global marketing operations which can help facilitate:

- Efficient and effective campaigns that leverage local insight
- Organizational control, resulting in consistent messaging on a global level
- Controlled costs while maintaining efficient operations

While every organization has unique needs and will require some customization, brands should embrace these key best practices to build a centralized workflow and generate quality results. This includes:

Establish Global Marketing Priorities

As a first step, marketers located at headquarters should determine who their target audience/market is, what the main message is, as well as what languages to localize. From there, they can prioritize marketing activity accordingly.

Utilize Field Marketers

Field marketers should be utilized to develop go-to-market strategies as well as translation best practices. Most importantly, these marketers must fully understand the local nuances of each global market. For example, one region may benefit from digital campaigns, whereas for another region, in-person events are more effective. As a final step, field marketers should communicate any local strategies and campaigns back to headquarters to ensure that each region has the relevant and necessary resources needed to succeed.

Field marketers should be utilized to develop go-to-market strategies as well as translation best practices

Work Closely with Content Creators

With plans in place, content creators can now begin creative production. In this step, marketers must ensure that the content aligns with brand guidelines and is cognizant of any cultural nuances or sensitive topics. At the same time, images and graphics should be built using global design practices to ensure consistency.

Vet Content for Translation

Next, local marketers should determine which content needs marketing translation and what requires transcreation. By the token, it's essential to collect feedback from local marketers to ensure that information is consistent and relevant for their region.

Prepare for Localization

Prior to sending all content for localization (including transcreation and copywriting), brands should provide their translation partner with terminology glossaries and style guides. Ensuring that information is up-to-date on brand guidelines is essential in this step of the workflow.

Final Steps

Finally, field marketers should review all translated or transcreated content submitted in the process above. Translated content must align with branding standards and portray the right global brand voice.

Furthermore, reviewers must understand the difference between translation errors and preferential edits. Translation and terminology errors should be changed, but preferential edits should be communicated back to corporate headquarters, as style guides may need to be revised.

> ### Translated content must align with branding standards and portray the right global brand voice

Looking Ahead And Moving Forward

By following these best practices and processes, organizations can successfully execute a global CX strategy and publish relevant, compelling content in all priority regions and target markets. In addition, creating global marketing operations can enable centralized operations, resulting in controlling and reducing costs, while maintaining local relevancy across markets.

Marketing leaders that embrace these best practices will rise from their competitors and ultimately enhance customer experiences, while driving brand loyalty now and in the future.

Clint Poole

SVP and CMO | Lionbridge

Clint Poole (@clpB2B) is the chief marketing officer and senior vice president for Lionbridge, where he leads all aspects of the company's global go-to-market strategy, demand gen, and branding initiatives. He joined the company in 2012, bringing over a decade of experience in developing and enhancing brands and improving marketing performance to drive revenue growth for private and publically traded professional services companies. Prior to joining Lionbridge, he served as director of marketing for Korn/Ferry International, a global professional services firm, where he focused on growth strategies and demand generation. Clint has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of New Hampshire.

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Three Steps To Achieve Personalization For Consumers AND Your Business

Megan Harris

If your business is not up to speed on offering consumers a personalized digital experience, then it's time to catch up quickly. Personalization is no longer trendy or optional. On the contrary, personalization is rapidly becoming a consumer expectation.

Businesses are seeing the rewards of capturing and analyzing data, which includes both consumer advocacy and increased revenues. They understand their consumers more intimately, can create more rewarding and enriching experiences, and can market more effectively.

With a full understanding of the consumer's journey, one can create a personalized, useful experience
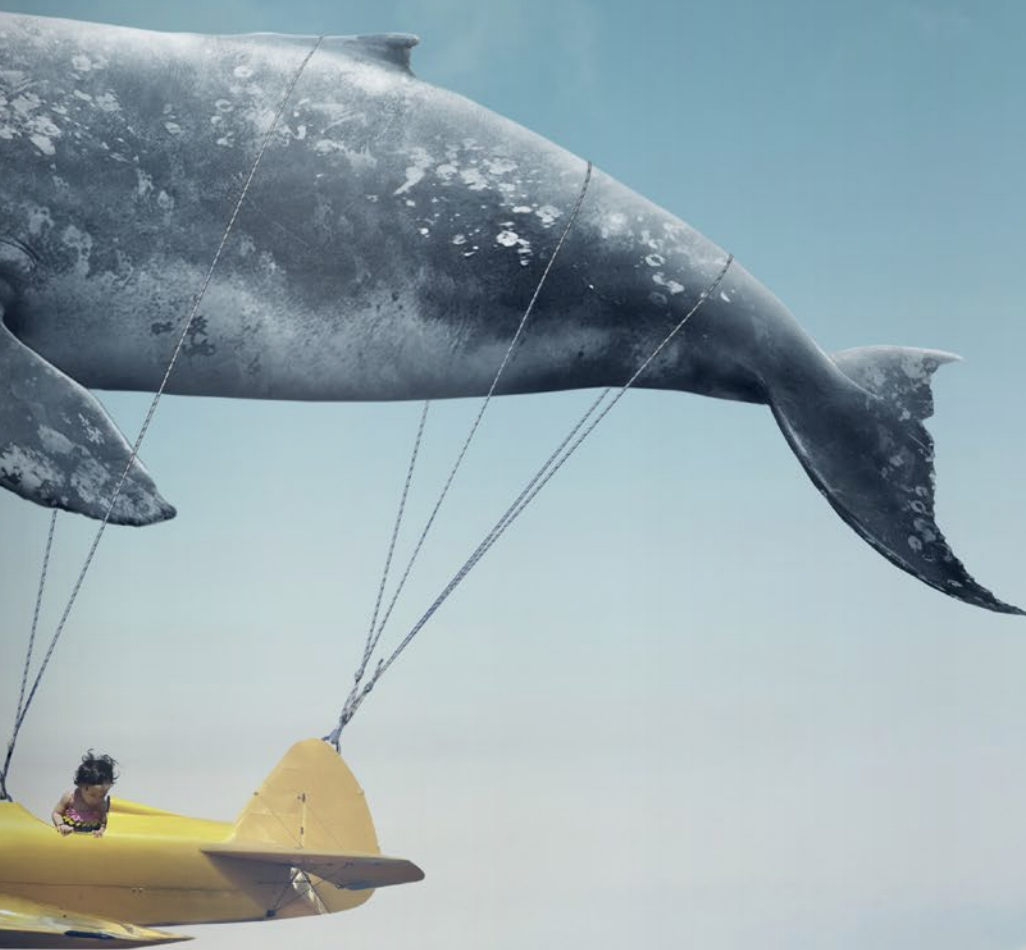
Achieving the win-win of personalization requires time, attention, and technology. The payoff is commensurate with the effort required.

Personalization And Big Expectations

Today, personalization means so much more than emails with the consumer's name in the salutation. In a highly digitized world, with their smartphones always nearby, consumers expect their brands to know them and to deliver what they need on demand.

In the not-too-distant past, consumers had only local purchase options promoted by traditional advertising to guide the way. Now, everyone is trying to connect with the consumer in real-time, through every channel and device. Consumers trust sites such as Yelp, Google Reviews, and TripAdvisor more than the brands they grew up with. Given this noisy landscape, brands need to prepare to engage with consumers on their terms.

Today's connected consumers can quickly look for products and services and have the power to be far more selective in the decision-making process. They no longer want to spend money to procure a product - they want a customized product accompanied by excellent service and the one that's best suited for their professional or personal needs. Consumers have set a high bar.

The Business Benefit: The Universal Consumer View

Consumers do not materialize from the vastness of space to make a single purchase and then dematerialize back into the ether. Treating them as such will eventually be fatal to businesses. Instead, brands need to create a universal consumer view. That's the process of tracking the consumer's digital journey and conducting a holistic analysis of their behaviors across channels and devices.

By combining the way in which they interact with advertisements and how they shop, when they open emails, visit other websites, and other factors, it is possible to learn what motivates them and their communication preferences.

With a full understanding of the consumer's journey, one can create a personalized, useful experience that will speak to them at a time they are most receptive, and in the format they prefer. When done properly, a personal algorithm is mapped, and consumers feel as though you are truly in tune with their needs.

The actionable data, which is collected to personalize each consumer's shopping experience, has significant implications for the profit and scalability of the business. Analyzing the data can reveal significant trends, segments, and channel preferences. Use these insights to reach new consumers more efficiently. But first, a business has to first prepare for personalization if it wants to achieve profitable results.

For example, *The Economist* is an old-school media property that evolved themselves quickly with an up-to-the-minute understanding of personalization. Using programmatic advertising techniques keyed to potential subscriber behaviors and locations, *The Economist* determined the best articles to show each consumer along with a tailored subscription offer. The campaigns were deployed over social channels and grew the millennial subscription base by 165%.

The Three Steps To Personalization

The first step is to agree on the objectives and key performance indicators of the personalization initiative. Desired outcomes of the initial testing might not tie to hard performance metrics such as revenue, but instead, aim for increases in consumer engagement levels and interactions. Leave room for a flexible framework so the data can guide the testing.

Second, merge data sources. This does not have to be overwhelming when the right tools and partners in place. First-party data (the information held by the brand about their consumers and their web properties) is married to third-party data (the information collected and syndicated by adtech vendors that push consumers to a brand's purchase point). Some brands also merge second-party macro data such as real-time weather data and gas prices. Clearly, merging data requires greater levels of technological sophistication.

And that's the third step: Mine your data for insights you can use to test, learn, and refine customer experience and marketing initiatives. In a perfect world, merged data would uncover needle-moving insights such as discovering a new audience segment or a crucial gap in a digital journey. In most cases, the data reveals micro insights that enable businesses to continuously optimize the consumer's experience.

Mine your data for insights you can use to test, learn, and refine customer experience and marketing initiatives

As you go through this process, it makes sense to evaluate outside expertise. Businesses rarely have the in-house resources to accomplish the personalization process for themselves. As consumer demand for a personalized experience continues to grow, companies that invest in an integrated planning approach facilitated by industry experts will be positioned to maintain a competitive advantage.

Consider The Big Picture: The Win-Win Of Personalization

It's easy to see why personalization is valuable to a consumer. They don't feel as if their time is being wasted with marketing messages that are largely irrelevant to their journey in life. These personalized deals, products, and services deliver the greatest value to their specific interest at that moment.

Helping companies understand the value and getting them to make the investment seems more challenging. However, when presented with increased conversion rates and other hard data, the value quickly becomes apparent. For a business, it will not be enough to just offer consumers high-quality products or services. They already have an overabundance of options. The companies who delight their loyal and happy consumers will be those offering an experience that makes them feel valued and understood on a personal level.

Investments in time, attention and technology can create a personalization win-win for consumers and your business.

Megan Harris

Managing Director | SYZYGY

A gifted communicator and thoughtful millennial leader with deep insights into digital marketing, Megan Harris delivers keynotes and emcees large-scale events and industry conferences. She moved to lead SYZYGY's New York office after nine years with Razorfish, where she headed media in the EMEA region and sat on the Razorfish Board of Europe. Megan earned a degree in journalism from the University of Oregon. She has won numerous awards for her work with brands such as StarwoodResorts, Ralph Lauren, Mondelez, and Avis.

www.syzygy.net/new-york

Urban Brand-Utility

The Regenerative Strategy That Can Turn Brand Communications Into A Network Of Creative, Urban Resiliency

Sérgio Brodsky

Noisy, ugly, and dirty.

Advertising has polluted cities, annoyed consumers and jeopardised its own existence. Beyond a mass-media cacophony, brand communications' significant carbon footprint and runaway consumption are certainly contributing to what economists labelled as market failure.

But contrary to Jerry Seinfeld's 2014 infamous line at the Clio awards calling out the advertising sector to its face "I think spending your life trying to dupe innocent people out of hard-won earnings to buy useless, low-quality, misrepresented items and services is an excellent use of your energy", marketers and their brands can [and should] move away from being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution for sustainable development and the industry's own sustainability.

Offering A New Outlook

The urbanisation megatrend wholly underpins other forces shaping the way we live, now and in the future, as indicated by the UN, the World Bank and CSIRO, to name a few. Although cities only occupy 2% of Earth's landmass that is where 75% of consumption and an even higher percentage of brand communications concentrate. Because of increased demand for ever more comfortable lifestyles, the existing urban infrastructures have been feeling their "growing pains" for over a decade now.

From energy to education, health, waste-management or safety, cities' services are struggling to keep up with their larger, older and "hungrier" populations. Therefore, the strategic opportunity is to reframe brand communications from the promotion of conspicuous consumption to becoming a regenerative force in the economy of cities. That means, using brands' touch points as more than mere messengers, but rather delivering public utility services. I coined it "Urban Brand-Utility", an approach that can meaningfully and profitably reconnect people, brands, communications agencies and local government.

When The Poison Becomes The Antidote

The Urban Brand-Utility conceptual framework flips the current advertising model by enhancing, instead of interrupting, moments of brand interaction with relevant, urban experiences. In fact, an American Express research from 2013, showed that

Reframe brand communications from the promotion of conspicuous consumption to becoming a regenerative force

63% of a total of 1600 participants had their heart rates increased when they thought they were receiving great service and, for 53% of those respondents, receiving good service prompted the same cerebral reaction as falling in love!

For example, Indian energy company Halonix communicated its brand through LED billboards that lit up at night making streets safer. This campaign supplemented Delhi's energy grid, the need to bolster its police force and is helping remove the city's stigma as India's rape capital. In fact, following explicit requests from the Indian population, the campaign is rolling out nationally. By creating new meaning in an unprecedented way, Halonix achieved the feat of decommoditising energy, exiting enduring price wars.

That does not mean creativity will be killed by utilitarianism. On the contrary, new paradigms will push it to the edge!

In terms of road safety, Uber set up a Breathalyzer installation outside a Toronto pub where people could test their alcohol intake and when above the permitted limit, a car would be sent for their collection. A simple, brilliant solution was delivered in Salzburg, by beer Stiegl, by replacing its bottles' labels with free public transport tickets. Besides shelf-disruption, helping curb drunk-driving would indirectly optimise public-health services from fewer patients in ambulances, emergency rooms and receiving medical aftercare.

When it comes to education, Universidad Columbia, from Asunción (Paraguay), sponsored an entire bus line with educational tours supplementing the population's low levels of literacy, as well as increasing enrolments in 35%.

Regarding our environment, in 2013, UTEC - the University of Technology of Lima (Peru) - deployed billboards able to transform humidity from the air into 96 litres of potable water per day as well as having increased enrolments by 28%. In 2014, UTEC did it again

by deploying air-purifying billboards, each claiming to be as effective as 1200 trees, occupying a much smaller area.

Much more is required to create a reliable network of creative, urban resiliency. But according to the 2015 World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on the Future of Cities: *"Cities will always need large infrastructure projects, but sometimes small-scale infrastructure can also have a big impact on an urban area"*. A case in point was the deployment of smart bins by Internet provider Portal Terra across ten parks in Mexico City. By rewarding dog owners when throwing their doggy bags in the bins with free Wi-Fi connectivity, this micro waste-management infrastructure helped counter the 10.000 tons of dog poo randomly dropped every year and the city's incurring cleaning costs.

However, the above (and several other similar campaigns that preceded and followed) were all one-off activations. Those are great for consumers' awareness and advertising award entries but short-sighted in terms of embracing a bigger commercial opportunity while addressing society's most pressing issues.

Towards An Urban Brand-Utility Infrastructure

Urban Brand-Utility aims at optimising municipal budgets by supplementing public utility services or creating new income streams. Through the mechanisms of Public Private Partnerships and the use of open-data, urban media company Sidewalk Labs (an Alphabet Inc. subsidiary), harnessed the opportunity by repurposing New York City's now obsolete pay phones. Through its LinkNYC totems, a free utility service is now provided to residents and visitors. Besides supplementing New York's broadband network, LinkNYC also shares its ad revenue as part of the terms of a 12-year contract projected to bring an incremental US$500 million to the city's pockets.

To enable a virtuous circle, cities would then arrange for tax breaks, rebates, R&D contributions or other types of incentives. Just like the idea of a circular economy where products and services go beyond an end-user's finite life-cycle, Urban Brand-Utility looks at brand communications as closed loops by designing a system bigger than fixed campaign periods, target audiences and business-as-usual KPIs. This way, marketing budgets are effectively turned into investment funds with returns in the form of brand cut-through, happier customers, social impact and more effective city management.

As a comparison, PwC estimates that in 2017 global media spending in brand communications and entertainment combined will reach US$ 18 trillion but, according to the Pike Institute, by 2020 investment in Smart City infrastructure will not surpass US$108 billion; an 180:1 ratio respectively.

In other words, by slightly repurposing marketing budgets towards Urban Brand-Utility programmes, more incentives would be made available - eventually mainstreaming the approach - and accelerating the development of the smart cities industry.

The University of Melbourne already confirmed that the impact assessment of Urban Brand-Utility programmes is possible and would inform new revenue models and policy-making efforts. Dr. Savvas Verdis, Infrastructure Economist at Siemens and Senior Research Fellow at LSE Cities at the London School of Economics is equally convinced: *"I am sure that Urban Brand-Utility will provide some much needed expertise and transformation* [in the brand communications industry] *and particularly in generating new business opportunities for infrastructure, development, tech companies and others tendering with cities through an innovative use of media"*.

In this more useful and integrated new world, agencies and their clients would partner with cities and media-owners via open data, matching brands with specific urban challenges and forming the foundations of a network of creative, urban resiliency. Radically innovative skills and propositions would emerge from the frictions between marketers and creatives working closer to urban planners, policy-makers, landscape architects and many others. Interestingly, in September 2016, the City of Gainsville (Florida) and design firm IDEO, co-created the Department of Doing, aiming at creating a more competitive economy and becoming more citizen-responsive.

According to Sidewalk Labs CEO Dan Doctoroff "2017 will be the year when technology and government leaders shift their focus from providing connectivity to imagining how it can radically transform cities and help reduce inequality". With one billion people migrating to cities by 2030, a billion-dollar opportunity is emerging for pioneering marketers to make an impact that goes beyond their target audiences and brands' bottom lines.

But do brands have the legitimacy to support a cause and make a political stance that is not seen as opportunistic self-promotion? According to a 2014 study entitled "Business and politics, do they mix?" by public affairs and research firm Global Strategy Group (GSG), the answer is "yes!", as demonstrated by a few key findings below:

- 56% of respondents think corporations should "take a stance" on political/cultural issues, even when they're controversial,
- 89% believe that corporations have the power to influence social change
- 80% think that these corporations should take action to address our society's most pressing challenges

The general population does want brands to be more civically engaged, however, the difference between "telling" and "taking

action" is that the latter can make people prefer a brand over another. After all, as one of the tribunes asks the crowd in Shakespeare's Coriolanus: "What is the city but the people?"

Brand City: Accelerating A Smarter Future

Governments worldwide are some of the biggest spenders of brand communications, which could be reduced if services provided were more effectively designed and deployed. For the sake of perspective, in 2015, Australia spent approximately US$ 80 million on taxpayer-funded advertisement, the UK US$460 million and the USA over US$1 billion, that is, excluding the actual provision of those services.

Governments worldwide are some of the biggest spenders of brand communications

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Despite heavy communication efforts, the overall quality of services (or positive behavioural changes) on those nations and their cities have not necessarily improved. Governments then resort to behavioural taxation tactics. In Australia, in 2012, the federal government raised more than US$ 10 billion from alcohol and tobacco taxes and for over a year now has been enforcing strict lockout laws on Sydney's hospitality venues and general alcohol consumption.

Although violence has decreased by 40%, there is no evidence proving people are drinking less. However, a study from Dr Mikayla Novak from Australia's Institute of Public Affairs, provides evidence that besides removing citizens' autonomy, behavioural taxes rarely achieve their goals (i.e. making people drink less) but they change behaviour in unpredictable

ways, encourage black market activities, disproportionately affect the poor and hurt small businesses.

The traditional model of taxpayer-funded government is not going to change any time soon but Urban Brand-Utility could represent the innovation required to reduce public [and, at times, negative] interference over private life, supplement public services and boost cities' brands.

Seeing is believing. By upgrading its communication efforts onto actions that deliver real-time services, governments would not only reclaim trust but spend people's fiscal contributions more effectively. Additionally, cities' diverse human and natural resources would create Urban Brand-Utility specialism niches, becoming a magnet for the right talent and investment.

A smarter planet where interconnected systems guide our choices to increase the likelihood of desired outcomes, is central to South Korea's attempt to promote an industry around the design of smart cities and accomplish the vision of 'The City as a Service'. However, there is a darker, Orwellian downside that may see our lives being downgraded into data-sets.

Democracy minus privacy are variables that could become part of the Urban Brand-Utility equation and jeopardise its success. As criticised by urbanist Adam Greenfield, author of *"Against the smart city"*, smart cities risk becoming vast, efficient robots where giant technology companies hope to profit from big municipal contracts.

On the other hand, brands in free markets represent a dynamic ecosystem involving individual judgements about what to buy and from whom. Thus, Urban Brand-Utility programs are an opportunity to give back power to the people to, beyond transacting, transform their cities through their shopping decisions. In this "Brand City" construct, consumers "emancipate" as citizens with every purchase effectively counting as a vote,

electing the most useful brands to constitute a more integral part of their individual and communal lives. Importantly, this new model allows brands to connect with people in a more meaningful way and cut through the clutter that is suffocating the industry.

Urban Brand-Utility programs are an opportunity to give back power to the people


Redefining What We Value To Unlock Our Worth

Since its launch in July 2016, *Meet Graham* has been one of the most talked about brand campaigns worldwide, branded a "new weapon in the fight against death on the road". The commissioning of a deformed humanoid by Australia's Transport Accident Commission (TAC) to celebrated Australian sculptor Patricia Piccinini was an interesting approach to promoting safer driving and reducing death and trauma on roads.

The already award-winning campaign became a social media phenomenon and continues to make headlines worldwide. From the New York Times to London's Daily Mail, the Washington Post, BBC, CNN, India Today and Al Jazeera.

Despite all fanfare and a brand-funded art piece, what is the true value of Meet Graham?! Has it delivered on its promise?

As of December 2016, 270 people had lost their lives on Victorian roads, 36 more than the 2015 toll. And, this was the number that client and agency did not promote. Moreover, how can a hyper elaborated, expensive and convoluted way of telling people something they already know have become so unanimously praised? *Haters gonna hate…* but this indicates how poorly-oriented our industry's values have become.
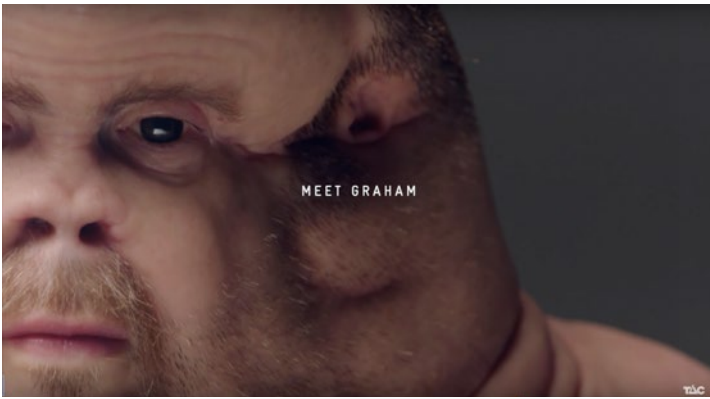
"Meet Graham" vs "The Bad News Bag"

How might Urban Brand-Utility respond to TAC's brief? In fact, it already did. But effectiveness does not generate the same buzz as wackiness. Delhi's Police Bad News Bag campaign used newspapers' tragic reports on car accidents as the wrapping for bottles in local liquor stores' points-of-sale. This happened on the night of 31st December (2012), when the road toll spikes up. As it turned out, drunk driving fell to 574 from 620 with only one accident reported on Delhi's roads. Since then, the initiative now covers other celebratory dates and cities.

In 2015, Tweeting Pothole was an initiative launched by Telemetro Reporta, an influential news show in Panama City. Tweeting devices were installed inside potholes, sending complaints to the Department of Public Works' Twitter account every time a car runs over. As a result, potholes started disappearing.

Brand communications have borrowed plenty of inspiration from the arts. Yet, the real artfulness lies in implementing great ideas that solve real problems. As we enter the era of purpose-led brands, useful actions need to speak louder than buzz.

As an industry we need to celebrate more the value of utility as a driver of business results and social impact. This way, brands can finally bring innovation to the centre and raise the bar of their worth.

> As an industry we need to celebrate more the value of utility as a driver of business results and social impact

Now is the most exciting time to be in the marketing communications industry. Let's chase the things that really matter and be the change we want to see in the world!

Sérgio Brodsky

Head of Strategy | Initiative - Australia

Sérgio Brodsky is an internationally experienced brand marketing professional having worked for some of the world's leading strategic communications agencies. Sérgio is a proven thought-leader, acting as a regular columnist for Marketing Magazine (AUS) as well as a sought-after speaker and lecturer. He is passionate about cities and culture and the role of brands and technology in society. Sérgio is multilingual and holds a BA in IP law, an MBA in global brand strategy & innovation and is a scholar of highly esteemed The Marketing Academy. Follow him on Twitter: @brandKzar.

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Navigating The Corporate Solar System Through Value

Larry Ackerman

It's easy to forget that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. That for all the freedom we have to shape our businesses, that freedom exists within the confines not just of our immediate world, but within the limits of our Solar System, which orders everything we do.

Does this sound too "far out there" to be relevant or worth remembering? It isn't. In fact, the Solar System itself offers us a powerful model for how to manage our companies for greater success.

Our Solar System is the product of countless factors, which combined to create it more than four billion years ago. For all of the many forces that explain how the Solar System works, there are three we can look to that offer useful ideas we can apply to the corporate world with practical and lasting implications.

- The first is the notion of *orbital resonance*. Orbital resonance is when two or more orbiting bodies - e.g., two planets - exert gravitational influence on each other. Orbital resonance greatly increases the influence these bodies have on one other; i.e., their ability to alter or constrain each other's orbits.
- The second is the fact that most of the planets in the Solar System have *secondary systems* of their own, which are being orbited by planetary objects called natural satellites (or moons).
- The last, and perhaps most important, is the fact that the *Sun*, through its massive gravitational force, keeps the planets aligned in their respective orbits.

The combined effect of orbital resonance, secondary systems, and the Sun highlights how the Solar System creates a natural order to things, making life, as we know it, possible.

Enough science! How, exactly, does the Solar System relate to corporations?

The business equivalent of our Solar System is the *Value Circle* - a model of corporate life that takes into account all of the relationships that make that life possible.

Introducing The Value Circle

The Value Circle focuses on value creation through the lens of all stakeholders. By "value," I refer to the proprietary contribution a company is capable of making in the marketplace, and the world.
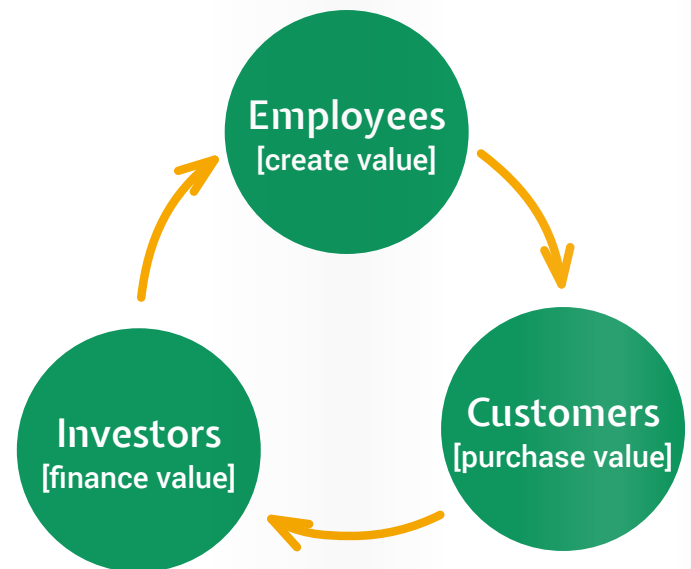
At its base, the Value Circle reveals the fundamental cause-and-effect relationship among employees, customers, and investors - the central "planets" within the corporate solar system.

The Value Circle illuminates deceptively simple truths about the interactions among stakeholders. One such truth is that companies don't have a collection of stakeholders; they have a system of stakeholders - there is a natural order to them all that affects the life of the corporation.

Companies don't have a collection of stakeholders; they have a system of stakeholders

This "system" is based upon the economic interdependence among employees, customers, and investors. Here's how the system works:

- Everything begins with employees. *Employees create value* through their ideas and innovations, their talents, their experience and skills, and through the products and services they build, market, and sell.

- *Customers purchase value* to the extent that they like the offerings - that is, the "value" - employees create. At stake are sales, profits and reputation.
- In turn, *investors finance value*. Depending on whether they "approve of" the earnings that flow from the value "purchased" by customers, they put capital back into the organization. This act closes the loop on the Value Circle, fueling its self-perpetuating momentum.

But more drives these relationships than pure economic interdependence. *Employees need customers* to affirm their collective impact as one enterprise - the things they are and do as one "team." It is as much a matter of pride and purpose as it is about a paycheck. *Customers need employees* to improve their businesses and lives through better products and services. *Investors need employees*, for they are the wellspring of ongoing earnings growth.

Another truth revealed through the Value Circle is that no one stakeholder group is more important than any other. It may still be fashionable in some circles to talk about the primacy of investors, but it is foolhardy to operate that way. To do so usually means maximizing near-term profits, which can rob a company of vital growth capital. Compromising the future for the sake of the present weakens the enterprise. In the final analysis, investors are best served by seeing themselves as the beneficiaries of the value created through the interactions between employees and customers.

The leadership challenge is to maximize the productivity of the Circle by keeping the interests of all principal stakeholders in balance. Smart employees need to appreciate the crucial role of investors; smart investors need to appreciate - and consciously "invest in" - the critical role employees play. Both groups need to recognize their particular relationship to customers, without whom neither value for customers nor wealth for

investors is created.

The "orbital resonance" that exists among employees, customers and investors is inviolable. Managing these relationships with this fact in mind is the first step towards maximizing value creation.

The Value Circle Expands

The Value Circle not only orders relationships among employees, customers, and investors; it also aligns other constituencies around the value creation process - the "secondary systems" that directly affect value creation.

For instance, suppliers are best positioned close to employees, for they have a direct effect on creating value through the parts, equipment, and credit terms they provide. The same goes for unions and government officials, both of whom influence the company's ability to create value - the former through their effect on wages, benefits, and other work standards, the latter through regulation and legislation.

In this same vein, it is easy to see how segmenting customers and investors into their component parts leads to a deeper appreciation for the role each of these groups plays in the value creation process.

Identity: The Sun At The Center

What energizes the value circle - what gives it its 'juice' - is putting a company's identity squarely at its center - i.e., the unique characteristics that reveal the organization's value-creating potential. On its own, the Value Circle is a powerful tool for managing vital corporate relationships. But it takes on far greater meaning when a company can see itself clearly within it.

The best way to understand the power a company's identity infuses into the Value Circle is to consider the Sun. Through its gravitational force, it is the Sun that keeps the
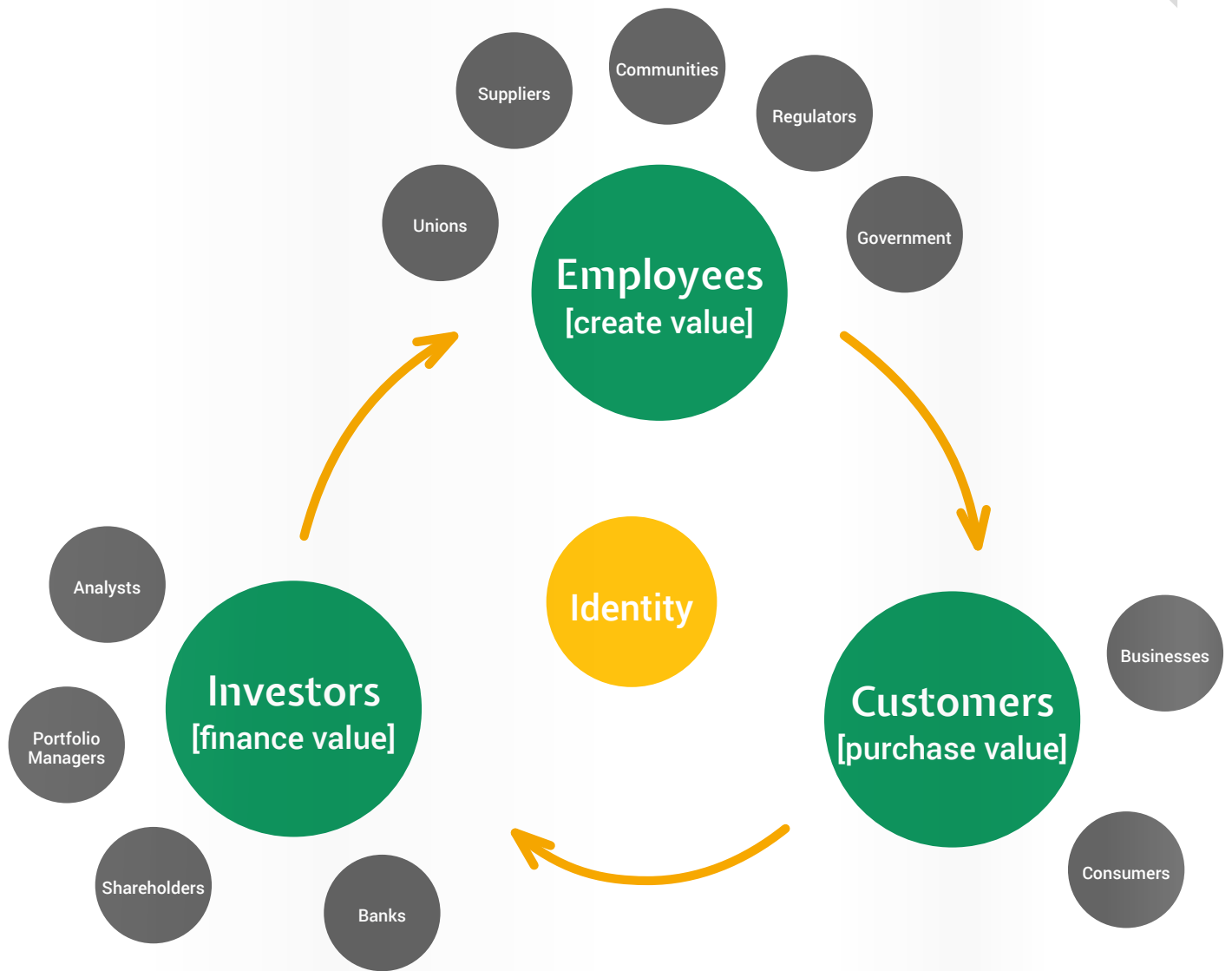
planets aligned in their respective orbits, and it is the Sun that warms the earth, allowing us to live. A company's identity is the "Sun" at the center of the corporate solar system.

A company's identity is the "Sun" at the center of the corporate solar system

Dow Chemical's drive to improve what is essential to human progress, AARP's passion for helping people navigate ageless realities, State Farm's need to ensure safe passage over time - these fundamental identities are the centers of gravity that make the Value Circle come to life in ways that are distinctly relevant to the organization.

With identity at its center, the Value Circle begs a crucial question: *Who must know what the identity of the company is?* The answer isn't obvious; it isn't, first and foremost, customers. It is, rather, the employees because they constitute the physical, mental, and emotional fabric of that identity. They must know who, in the collective sense, they are - what they "add up to" as one enterprise. And then they must operate accordingly.

The next most important group includes suppliers and others (such as unions) who have a direct effect on the employees who create value. Carefully designed, their products, services, and policies have the potential to strengthen the identity of the company; not just improve its operating efficiency.

Another group who must understand an organization's identity is its investors. Shareholders, money managers, and financial analysts need to appreciate 'who' they are actually investing in, and what the business and economic implications of this investment truly are.

The situation with customers is different. For customers, experiencing an organization's identity is far more important than the ability to articulate it. Customers need to see evidence of identity in all aspects of their relationship with it. This evidence comes in many forms: in the products and services they buy, in the return policies and warranties that measure the company's confidence in its offerings and itself, and in the sense of loyalty customers ultimately feel in doing business with it.

For customers, experiencing an organization's identity is far more important than the ability to articulate it

Building A Relationship Advantage

The main goal in working within the Value Circle is to help companies build a *relationship advantage* with all stakeholders, by aligning their diverse interests through the identity of the enterprise.

By relationship advantage, I mean that the company succeeds in getting as many people as possible to *work for* it. This translates into

- getting more customers to buy its products and, in turn, deliver more revenue;
- getting more suppliers to agree to better credit terms, allowing for better cash flow;
- getting more employees to innovate through the lens of identity in order to discover new ways to increase competitive differentiation;
- getting more investors to keep their capital in the company longer, thus reducing the cost of portfolio turnover and providing greater financial flexibility;
- and getting more communities, figuratively speaking, to issue a "license to operate" to the organization so it can find the most advantageous locations for its business.

Building a relationship advantage through the Value Circle makes a company more efficient on a grand scale.

Leaders who want to realize the many economic, business, and reputational benefits that come by managing stakeholders as interdependent parts of the corporate Solar System, should embrace the Value Circle as the most logical framework for creating value - and wealth in return.

Larry Ackerman

Founder And President | The Identity Circle LLC

Larry Ackerman is the founder and President of The Identity Circle LLC, a consulting and coaching firm in Westport, CT. He is a leading authority on organizational and personal identity and its impact on brand, leadership, and culture. His clients have included AARP, Fidelity Investments, Lockheed Martin, Maytag, National Geographic and State Farm Insurance, among others. Larry is the author of two groundbreaking books: Identity Is Destiny: Leadership and the Roots of Value Creation and The Identity Code: The 8 Essential Questions for Finding Your Purpose and Place in the World.

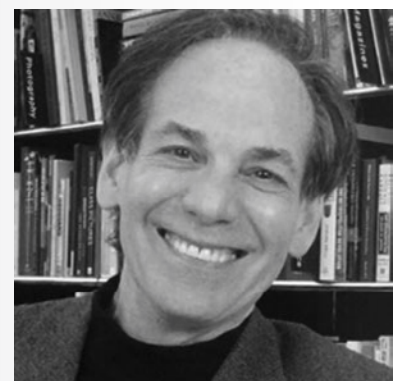www.larryackerman.com

The Rise Of The Consultative Brand

Gabe Weiss

Marketing modernization is allowing brands to connect with customers with more agility and scale than ever before. But to what end?

With all this power and capability - from machine learning and data-driven decision-making, to personalized content experiences - marketers have had to rethink their engagement approach. They can no longer blast message after message into the void and expect success. They need to find a new way to break through, a new paradigm of engagement, and a new way to matter.

Customers want real-world help from a trusted source. Enter the consultative brand, which helps people think through a particular problem they face instead of forcing a sale. They then guide the customer toward a customized solution or nurture them to achieve a particular goal. These companies connect with customers by being helpful, which leads to loyalty and advocacy for that brand - something far more valuable than a one-time sale.

Brands should determine the role they can play for their audience - and the ideal engagement mode for interaction

Consultative Role-Playing

Of course, there's more than one way to be a helpful resource to an audience. While consultative brands can behave in a variety of ways, three approaches have found success in this dynamic world.

The first is an **advisor** role, which educates and guides a consumer to shape a particular solution but ultimately allows the customer to decide the best option. For example, an insurance agent can walk consumers through the all the complicated decisions needed to mold the right coverage package that fits their needs as opposed to leaving them to read the fine print for themselves. The customers feel confident in their purchase decision because an advisor has given them the knowledge necessary to make an informed choice.

A **concierge**, meanwhile, does most of the decision-making, allowing the customer to choose from a few specific options. Hotel concierges are the prime example of this approach, recommending nearby restaurants for guests based on a specific palate and price range, then making all reservation and travel arrangements on their behalf.

Finally, there's the **coach**, who encourages customers to achieve their goals by creating a plan to address a specific problem, nurturing and encouraging them to achieve a desired end state. Nike is a classic example with its "Just Do It" coaching attitude, which expanded into services. One such service, Nike+, turned running from an individual sport into a social experience, empowering athletes to track runs, set goals, and compete with other runners online. The app also connected customers to coaching tips and training programs.

While all three roles have their place, they have one key trait in common: They place the customer's happiness above monetary gain. And that authenticity makes a difference. Research shows that 91 percent of consumers care about authenticity in what they see from a brand.

Digital Dialog

One way consultative brands are able to interact with customers is through a personalized digital conversation via chatbots and apps like the Nike+ example above.

Newer apps are presenting conversational experiences to connect in a more human way. Another fitness app, Lark, assesses existing Apple HealthKit data to provide personal insights and offer encouragement to users, keeping them moving forward on a healthy path. Likewise, Penny, the banking app, analyzes transaction data to offer insight into spending patterns and offers encouragement around opportunities to save money.

TurboTax is a fully digital example that offers both concierge and advisor roles to customers. The step-by-step wizard walks a user through decisions and offers articles and videos to help him gain understanding about specific points.

These digital components and applications are very conversational in nature. Customers feel like they are engaging with a human, even when they're not. The insight, education, and advice keep customers coming back to these experiences.

Engaging In Micro-Moments

In every customer's purchasing journey, there are micro-moments in which a consultative brand can engage the user in an unexpected way to build a strong connection. These moments differ based on the engagement mode of the company and customer.

> **In every customer's purchasing journey, there are micro-moments in which a consultative brand can engage the user**

Discovery/Browse/Consideration Mode:

At this stage, customers have identified a desired result or product, but they aren't sure how to get there. A consultative brand can offer education, curate options, and provide direction to help the customer feel empowered in the decision-making process.

Decide/Buy Mode:

Customers in this mode know what they want. They are now at a step of trying to provision a product, finalize a contract, or explore a service experience. Here, the consultative brand can offer a micro-moment that identifies the best offers, accessible locations, or perhaps the highest-rated community to partner with.

Loyalty Mode:

Once they reach loyalty mode, customers have already bought into the brand. Here, a company can offer encouragement to ensure they continue using a product or service, even suggesting new options or proactively solving an unmet need. Another option is to provide a rewarding experience or social proof that further deepens loyalty.

Advocacy Mode:

This is the point where brands turn loyal customers into enthusiastic spokespeople. A consultative brand can offer platforms, content, and communities that simplify the ability for these invested people to advocate for the brand.

Brands seeking to become consultative should first work to understand and define their behavioral approach - one that represents their brand values.

Becoming the Consultative Brand

Brands should determine the role they can play for their audience - and the ideal engagement mode for interaction. The role should align to the expectations of the brand and the category while staying within the boundaries of brand believability. For example, banks are still seeking to build back consumer trust that was lost during the 2008 financial crisis. Many have shifted to an advisory role, nurturing customers and helping them set life goals and subsequent financial goals while engaging them through accessible brand personalities.

Brands should then work to implement consultative selling behavior, whether through a sales department or digital strategy. This approach will emphasize the values and benefits of the product or service instead of the features and price point. The result is one of loyalty and customer retention.

Once established, the consultative brand supports the entire customer journey and experience at every point in time. By providing incremental value in a trusted way, the successful consultative brand breaks through the noise to develop a deeper connection with customers than ever before.

Gabe Weiss

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Rapid iteration gives agile teams many opportunities to put minimum viable content in front of their audience

How Agile Content Marketing Can Save Us From The Content Flood

Andrea Fryrear

My grandfather is a retired cotton farmer, so growing up I heard a lot about rain.

I was familiar with what happened to our grass when the Texas skies withheld moisture, but it turned out, crops are equally imperiled by oversaturation.

For my grandfather's cotton plants, flooding was just as dangerous as drought. And now, in a world where anyone with a laptop and internet access can become a content creator overnight, content marketing faces similar dangers.

The waters are rising as more and more content pours in, and the common reaction is to open our own faucet wider, increasing content production to compete. But our audiences are just as fragile as my grandfather's cotton plants. They'll abandon brands whose content efforts hit a drought, but they can also be wiped out by a flood of mediocre content.

Content marketing's newest challenge is to regulate the flow of content by focusing our efforts only on content that will make an impact on our audience. That may sound like a daunting prospect, but taking an agile approach to content marketing makes it possible.

The Content Creation Paradox: More Content, Less Impact

As the benefits of content marketing have become increasingly well documented, adoption has accelerated exponentially. Now, the volume of work being produced is staggering.

According to eMarketer, 60 percent of marketers create at least one piece of content per day. Recent research from the Content Marketing Institute found that 93 percent of B2B marketers currently use content marketing, and 70 percent of them plan to produce more content in 2017 than they did in 2016.

It's clear that we're delivering a deluge of content, yet huge portions of it are ineffective. Depending on your source, somewhere between 60 and 80 percent of content created by B2B teams goes unused by sales.

And even if some content gets attention from sales, much more of it disappears beneath the surface of the content ocean without creating so much as a ripple. A study conducted by TrackMaven found that while the output of content per brand increased 35 percent per channel over the course of

a year, content engagement decreased by 17 percent. A similar study from Moz and Buzzsumo revealed that half the millions of blog posts they analyzed had two or fewer Facebook interactions. Three-quarters of them had no external links.

Whether it's ignored by sales, our external audience, or both, this ineffective content represents a huge amount of wasted budget and hours.

Optimizing For Outcome, Not Output

Clearly, content marketers need to figure out how to make impactful content and avoid this wasted effort. First and foremost, we have to start optimizing content for outcomes, not output.

We have to start optimizing content for outcomes, not output

Outcomes, specific behavior changes for specific people engaged in specific activities, are how we change our audience for the better. (They're also, conveniently, how we deliver on business objectives that prove the value of our content marketing initiatives.)

Output, on the other hand, is exclusively measured in volume. It centers on hitting a particular publication cadence - how many blog posts, videos, podcasts, and infographics did we release in a given period of time? The current content flood stems largely from an output-focused approach to content marketing. We've been so worried about producing more content that we've forgotten to produce content that matters.

Optimizing for outcomes requires us to first understand our audience's behavior, including who is exhibiting that behavior under what

circumstances. Interviews, surveys, and online research are usually necessary to establish a connection to our audience.

Where, you might be asking, does research fit in with agile content marketing?

For those who imagine agile teams flitting from one project to the next like hyperactive butterflies, the suggestion of up-front research may seem out of place. Contrary to popular misconceptions, agile is not about charging in without a plan and then capriciously changing direction every other day. Like any good marketing effort, agile content marketing requires some strategy and deliberation before work begins.

But, because agile teams can use a flexible, iterative approach to content, they need less of this labor-intensive research to get started. Agile content marketers have the luxury of using minimum viable content to rapidly learn and adapt.

Minimum Viable Content

If we want to make waves in the content flood and change our audience's behaviors, we're going to need to throw boulders, not pebbles. But throwing boulders is hard work, so we need to make sure we're throwing the right ones before we invest time and energy to toss them into the content ocean.

Testing the waters with regular releases of minimum viable content helps agile content teams get in sync with their audience. Then, when the time comes to build a boulder by producing a massive, resource-intensive piece of content, the team is confident it will deliver expected outcomes.

Based on the idea of a minimum viable product, minimum viable content is the smallest content release that does one of two things:

1. Successfully achieves its desired outcomes
2. Proves or disproves a hypothesis

As an example, let's say that recent feedback has led us to believe that our audience consumes a lot of video content. Expanding our content efforts to include video would, therefore, be likely to increase our subscriber base.

Rather than spend months planning the video shoot, writing scripts, investing in expensive video equipment, editing the footage, and promoting the final product with an expensive ad campaign, an agile team would instead create some minimum viable content to test this theory by identifying the smallest piece of content that would prove or disprove our hypothesis. In this case, maybe it's a few informal yet informative recorded video chats in which our content team shares tips and best practices related to a common challenge our audience faces.

We create the minimum viable content in a couple of weeks, distribute it to the audience, and see what happens. If the conversion rate of viewers to subscribers is strong, we have proven that video is a good option for reaching our audience.

Now it's time to start iterating.

Agile Content Marketing Iterations

Once they have zeroed in on the content that will deliver the desired outcome, an agile team begins to expand on it, adding additional details and value. Because they forgo heavy up-front planning in favor of frequent releases, agile teams can easily approach content this way.

Most agile content teams release something every week; others use two- or three-week long iterations. This frequency allows agile content marketers to remain connected to their audience and focused on the behavior change they want their content to produce. They still produce a significant volume of content, but the focus is on outcomes, not output.

Also, rapid iteration gives agile teams many opportunities to put minimum viable content in front of their audience. They learn, adapt, and respond often.

The overall vision and message of their content remains consistent, but they steadily add value for their audience as time goes on. They gather more and more data about what content drives the results they're after, making it ever more likely that their target audience will feel the impact of their content and respond.

By testing the waters with minimum viable content and focusing outcome rather than output, agile content marketers avoid contributing to the content flood. Instead, they create well-planned rivers that carry their audience to a specific destination.

Unlike my grandfather, who constantly lamented his inability to start and stop the rain, content marketers have control over the flow of content. If we adopt an agile approach to content marketing, we can save ourselves (and our overwhelmed audiences) from drowning in a flood of content.

Andrea Fryrear

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Andrea is an agile marketing nerd who spends way too much time thinking about backlogs and WIP limits. As CCO for The Agile Marketer, she trains and educates other marketers on how to apply agile principles to marketing. Her most recent book, Death of a Marketer, chronicles the troubled history of modern marketing and charts a course toward a more agile future. You can find her geeking out on all things agile and content @andreafryrear.

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Utilising Research And Development To Drive Customer-Centric Innovation

Rachit Khare

According to PwC's "2016 Global Innovation 1000" report, between 2010 – 2015, total R&D investment by the world's biggest-spending public companies grew by 35% and reached a record high of $680 billion in 2016. But against a backdrop of shortening product lifecycles, the need to get products to market more quickly, and demand for continuous innovation, where should companies focus their R&D spend to ensure they maintain and grow market share, and develop successful products?

Taking A Customer-Centric Approach To Innovation

Leading brands with sustained growth have one thing in common - a deep understanding of end-users' needs, forming strong connections with customers and innovating around their yet-to-be articulated desires. Jerry Gregoire, the former CIO of Dell Computers, captured this transformation when he said: "Customer experience is the next competitive battleground".

Leading brands with sustained growth have one thing in common - a deep understanding of end-users' needs

Innovation has been a buzz word for quite some time. Now brands are questioning whether their existing value propositions respond appropriately to the dynamic marketplace, and if they truly match their customers' evolving requirements. This is driving a shift towards focusing R&D efforts on customer-centric innovation.

Why Customer-Centric Innovation Is Important To Business Innovation

At the heart of customer-centric innovation is a rigorous R&D process, which must be underpinned by customer feedback. This can be achieved through customer observation and field studies, analysing data to uncover trends, and gathering direct input into the process – for example with Online Customer Product Forums, or User Conferences.

By forging strong customer connection and understanding, brands can develop better ways of communicating their value propositions and delivering a complete and satisfying end-user experience. Many companies using this approach gain a competitive edge in the market, as well as allocating R&D spend more efficiently to drive more effective innovation.

How To Interpret Customer Feedback Through Observation And Communications

Innovation is all about improvement. And since it drives customer satisfaction, continuous and iterative improvement is critical. Customer feedback is one of the most important sources of incremental innovation for brands today. Listening to customers' pain points can provide a plethora of insights that can help organisations improve a product's usability or improve service levels.

For example, US-based financial services firm Merchant Cash & Capital (MCC) gathered customer feedback through online surveys and personal interviews. Loan officers learned that the customer on-boarding process was clunky, with delays impacting end-user satisfaction. In response, MCC engaged technology partners to digitally transform the process, meaning loan applications could be completed with just a few clicks of the mouse, therefore improving the overall customer experience.

Hotel chain Marriott used an 'open innovation lab' format, inviting customers to contribute to the design and testing process for bedrooms, public spaces, meeting rooms, and even catering concepts. With various opportunities for customer participation, this quick prototyping method gave Marriot unparalleled instant feedback, which was used to implement innovations quickly in its properties around the world.

The dazzle of digital can often overshadow the benefits of old-fashioned, offline customer observation. Samsonite capitalised on this classic approach when it released the innovative 'Marshmallow' suitcase range. Launched in June 2014, the ingenious idea was to add the utility of a travel seat to a suitcase, inspired by observing travellers at airports and train stations getting tired while waiting in queues.

Feedback from social media channels is also a good source of honest and timely customer opinion. With careful monitoring and response mechanisms in place, companies and consumers can benefit from an open form of discourse, which can be looped back directly into brand communication initiatives. A web-connected app for smartphones and tablets, which in itself can be regarded as an additional value proposition for a brand, also has the capacity to gather incredibly detailed usage data and trends.

Why Crowdsourcing Or Open Innovation Can Benefit Brands

There has been a big surge in efforts to co-innovate with various stakeholders, including customers and suppliers. According to a 2016 report by eYeka, big brands have increased crowdsourcing significantly in the past decade; in 2015 alone, usage increased by over 30%.

Many companies now regularly release product photos on social media platforms, like Twitter, WordPress, and Pinterest, before the official launch. But a crowdsourcing campaign is as much about obtaining quality, geo-specific content for a brand's future marketing and insight for communication strategies, as it is about seeking consumer input to inform product design.

Major brands across many industries, including FMCG, are adopting a crowdsourcing strategy to drive innovation. Coca-Cola recently launched an initiative in China, inviting consumers to create short videos that would inspire more people to drink Coke. The company learnt how Chinese consumers associate with the Coca-Cola brand, gathering insights about their preferences and collecting innovative marketing content attuned perfectly to the audience.

Air France KLM decided the road to innovation lay in fostering a team of exclusive customer observers, with a unique Quality Observer programme built around a dedicated website and mobile application. Air France KLM's Elite members were asked to provide feedback about in-flight service quality, and in exchange for this insight, participants received tangible rewards such as air miles.

A Learning Cycle And Never-Ending Source Of Competitive Advantage

Taking a customer-led approach to innovation allows brands to achieve more with less, move R&D spend towards incremental innovation, and develop improved value propositions.

> **Taking a customer-led approach to innovation allows brands to achieve more with less**

This virtuous circle can ultimately lead to radical innovations, which break the market mould and bring huge competitive advantage. Keeping the customer at the heart of innovation keeps innovation at the heart of the business.

Rachit Khare

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Rachit Khare is VP, Client Solutions for the Data Analytics Practice at The Smart Cube. Rachit designs data solutions for complex client engagements and develops analytics strategies for retail business leaders. Rachit has been with The Smart Cube for seven years and has a data science background, with experience across multiple industries, including retail and consumer goods.

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Defining Your Next Generation Customer Experience Strategy

Charlene Li

Customer experience is a top priority for executives - 89% of companies expect to compete mostly on the basis of customer experience, and by the year 2020 customer experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator.

And yet, many organizations don't have a clear strategy for how to create a cohesive, robust customer experience strategy, one that looks beyond touchpoints and even customer journeys to think strategically about where to make investments of scarce time and resources that pay off in business results.

One of the biggest problems is that customer touchpoints live in many different siloed parts of the organization. The call center, physical store, product design, advertising - each department interacts with the customer in a different part of the lifecycle and has tools, data, and touchpoints optimized for that particular touchpoint. What suffers is the seamless customer experience, something that all too often lives only as a glimmer of a dream.

My belief is that we can, and should, do better on behalf of our customers. There are three major components to creating a customer experience strategy, one that makes strategic trade-offs to drive business results.

Understanding Your Next Generation Customer

The first component of the customer experience strategy is to understand your customers' objectives, continuously and at a granular level. The key here is to understand what those objectives are today - and also how they will change and evolve in the future. Your customers never stand still, and neither should your understanding of their objectives and journeys.

Your customers never stand still, and neither should your understanding of their objectives and journeys

This means that customer research is done on a continuous, rather than episodic, basis. Traditionally, customer journey mapping has been difficult and tedious, so we tended to do it sporadically and only for a few personas that represented different types of customers. But with plentiful data available, we can take a different approach, one that not only taps real-time data to understand the context of a customer experience but also understands it at far greater granularity, down even to the individual level.

Take for example the task of customer journey mapping. Surveys, interviews, ethnographic studies, etc. all play an important part in understanding the decision making process. But observing behavior, especially online, provides even more insights. For example, Jumpshot, an audience analytics company, tracks what people do not only on a particular site, but also the 99% of the time they spend elsewhere on the Internet. With panel data going back years, they can also analyze how journeys have changed over time, and what influences played a role in that change.

Another powerful approach is to understand the underlying beliefs - the narrative - that drives behavior and decisions. Protagonist uses machine learning to help digest huge amounts of user-generated content (blogs, posts, comments, tweets, etc.) to distill common relationships and identify the underlying narratives. While the actual narrative analysis is done by humans, machine learning takes that analysis and helps identify when similar narratives are being used. Understanding the narratives of your customers allows you to identify gaps, creating the opportunity to better align with those beliefs. It also helps identify how narratives are changing and in transition.

For example, patients used to be incredibly loyal to their physicians. But there is an emerging narrative with some patient groups where convenience and availability of care are more important than seeing the same doctor. Understanding how the narrative around doctor-patient relationship is changing is crucial if you want to build a robust strategy for your next generation customer.

Relationships, Not Journeys Or Touchpoints, Define The Strategy

The second element of the strategy is to look at customer experience through the lens of relationships, rather than individual touchpoints or even journeys. In my research, I've found that this is the only way to link customer experience strategy to brand strategy, and ultimately to business strategy. You are what you measure, so when you measure customer experience on how it adds or detracts to the overall relationship, it provides a connection (albeit, sometimes indirect) to business results.

Look at customer experience through the lens of relationships, rather than individual touchpoints or even journeys

Here's an example:
Optimizing a call center interaction to 1) minimize wait time, 2) minimize total time on the call, or 3) maximize customer satisfaction will create three different sets of outcomes and decisions on investments, respectively 1) hire more people to reduce wait times, 2) invest in training or technology to reduce call time, or 3) empower call center staff to do whatever it takes to make customers happy. You can go broke creating a customer experience if you optimize on any of these three experiences!

If instead you optimize based on the lifetime value of the customer, customer satisfaction, or Net Promotor Score (NPS) - which all reflect the value of the relationship - you get a different perspective that considers how experiences add up over time to impact the customer relationship. It puts a premium on consistency and forces you to look at the entire customer experience, across journeys, and over time.

Focusing on relationships also has the added benefit of aligning goals, metrics and measurement against business objectives. A key part of the strategy is a set of guiding principles that can serve as a guide for making strategic trade-offs. Do we invest in the call center training or develop a mobile app? Without those guiding principles, decisions are made based on which department advocates the most for their particular touchpoint. Good customer experience objectives clearly align with brand and business objectives, and clarify how day-to-day activities and decisions roll up into the overall strategy.

Prioritizing Easy

The third part of the strategy is identifying and prioritizing the initiatives that you will do to accomplish your customer experience objectives. And just as importantly, clarifying what you WON'T do. The most difficult part about this is that there are SO many bright shiny technologies we could use to create unique, compelling experiences - virtual reality, chatbots, hologram kiosks, robots… the list's ever-growing and seemingly endless.

The reality is that customers simply want things to be easy. The Economist Intelligence Unit found that the two most important elements of the ideal customer experience were 1) fast response to enquiries or complaints; and 2) simple purchasing processes. These are basic table stakes - if you don't do these two things well, then nothing else you do matters.

But what about 'delighting' customers? In my research, I looked for examples of strategies that create experiences that bring joy, happiness, and delight to customers. What I found was that customers experienced joy, happiness, and delight from things being easy. There was a sense that the organization had mindreading skills and could anticipate the next action that would make things easy for them.

For example, a friend recently described an experience with United Airlines. He is an elite frequent flyer and was signed into United.com, trying to book a trip. Unable to figure something out, he called United on his mobile phone. The agent answered, "Hello, thank you for being a Mileage Plus 1K member. I see that you were recently on our site searching for a trip. Are you calling about that trip?"

My friend was floored and I was too. What United did was to prioritize this particular audience (high value frequent fliers) with a particular scenario (moving from Web to phone) that required linking two data centers and systems, as well as the call center scripts and procedures. This isn't an overwhelming difficult integration to make, but it is hard to execute because it requires cross-department and cross-channel coordination. They knew they couldn't break down the silos so instead, they created little windows just big enough for the right data "light" to move back and forth.

Silos and their competing agendas are what makes prioritizing easy seem simple, but is extremely difficult to do. Which "easy" do you do first to maximize the relationship? With which audiences? For this reason, customer experience strategy must sit with the most senior executive who can pull together the departments and groups needed to execute the strategy. In one organization I interviewed, the CEO created a new position and had all customer-facing departments (Marketing, Sales, Service, Product) report into the Chief Customer Officer. Absent that role, the logical

> ## Silos and their competing agendas are what makes prioritizing easy seem simple, but is extremely difficult to do

owner of the customer experience strategy is the CEO, who can ensure that it supports the overall business strategy.

This is not as far-fetched as it seems. CEOs already recognize that their fortunes could rise or fall from a single customer experience. United Airlines may have delighted my friend, but much of that goodwill was erased when Dr David Dao was dragged off of his United flight. Guiding principles, created with the customer relationship at the center of the strategy, may have helped prevent that incident from ever happening.

A next generation customer experience strategy must understand and address the objectives of a dynamic customer who is ever changing. Traditional organizations hoping to keep up with these fast-moving customers will need to define and align the strategy and governance around the customer relationship. Technologies will come and go. Experiences will fade into the background. And all that will remain is a customer relationship, a feeling and belief that the organization will be there for you when you need it.

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Empathy, Distillation, Clarity: The Principles Of Brand Simplicity

Alan Siegel

Research shows that consumers are willing to pay a 'simplicity premium' for products and services, like cars, cell phones, and travel and fitness offerings that make life easier while delivering premium performance.

Yet, the majority of products, services, and messages consumers get from business, health and financial services, and the government tend to have the opposite effect - evidenced by the fact that half of consumer electronics products are returned, in working order, because people cannot figure out how to use them.

Simplifying a brand mission presents challenges as well as opportunities. The first step in the three-part journey requires an empathetic approach to one's business. Today, all companies and organizations can be considered to be in the 'experience' business. But too many customer experiences come up short of expectations for many reasons, from underperformance, to miscommunication, to confusion, etc., but with each failure, the distance between customer and company grows.

Simplicity is about removing barriers and shortening that distance.

Today, all companies and organizations can be considered to be in the 'experience' business

Empathy: The Missing Ingredient

Every day corporate task forces examine processes, streamline interfaces and redesign documents to simplify them, yet it's usually a case of retrofitting - and complexity still thrives. Why is it so rare to find a new product or service launched with simplicity baked in? I believe the missing ingredient is Empathy.

By empathy, I mean imagining the context in which someone will buy, read, or use a product/service, then designing it to reflect those needs first and foremost. In other words, the creator of the experience must 'get inside the head' of the recipient to anticipate how the interaction will be perceived.

Sure, talking about empathy in a business context sounds *soft*, evoking a sentiment not usually associated with corporate America. But it's important to understand that *empathy* is not *sympathy*. I don't suggest that organizations sympathize with a customer's plight, but that they empathize with their circumstances to gain insight into

the customer perspective. To be specific, I propose the emphasis be placed on understanding another person's thought processes, decision-making strategies and attention span.

Account For The Rational And Emotional

For simplification to be effective, one must account for everything that may affect the user's rational processing. In circumstances where emotion overwhelms rational decision-making (think medical emergencies, home purchase, divorce and estate planning), it is critical to empathize with a person's emotional state. Physical distress, the enormity of impact, and urgency are filters through which essential information must be filtered.

Beyond one's real *needs*, simplification must also cater to one's *wants*. For example, pointing out on my phone bill that I might benefit from another plan, or allowing me to decide the monthly due date of my mortgage payment. Purely by customizing content, one unleashes a powerful way to establish an enduring bond with customers, donors or supporters.

By incorporating these practices, empathetic design can boost sales and increase customer loyalty by making products and services designed specifically for individuals. The result is a closing of the gap between customer expectations and what a company actually delivers. Unfortunately, current research shows the gap between customer expectations and brand's ability to meet them is expanding at an accelerating rate.

Make Customers Happy

On some level, companies do understand that they need to make customers happy. But the tendency is to think that the customer-brand relationship revolves entirely around a

'good product.' But people are unpredictable creatures, and often the product itself becomes incidental while seemingly trivial, and usually negative, interactions become the most memorable aspects of the customer/company relationship.

Companies often claim to understand their customers - by conducting research and building databases - but cold hard data will not improve the customer experience unless acted upon with imagination and empathy. In the end, a commitment to empathy matters more than the tools per se.

Cold hard data will not improve the customer experience unless acted upon with imagination and empathy

Ideally, everything that a company puts out - from its products, to its website, to every letter and invoice - should reflect its commitment to considering the customer's point of view. We're all looking for that in our interactions with organizations, a sense that someone is aware of us as human beings. In practice, this can be expressed in the most minor exchanges and mundane forms of communications, from clear instruction manuals and easy-to-read invoices.

Some of what I've said here may fly in the face of the prevalent view that business must cut costs to the bone to succeed. But simplification can also be a way to reduce costs, but not by scaling back customer care. Trying to save money on out-sourced customer service, phone trees, FAQs, or form letters, only destroys any chance of developing meaningful relationships with customers.

In the business world, the notion that it might be important to 'put oneself in the place of another' has only lately begun to gain

credence. For brand stewards who think of customers as 'targets,' it is a leap to embrace empathy as a business practice. Yet this is the critical first step toward achieving the simplicity that makes it possible to move on to other steps.

Distill: Curate And Edit, Lessen Overwhelming Choices

When Google introduced its search engine, the simplicity of its home page played a key role in its immediate success. But Google didn't just stumble into its home page design; the company developed a rigorous system with tight restrictions as to what could and could not be added to the page. To do so, its leaders had to stand firm against its own creative and engineers and, in some case, to defy the wishes of customers.

For Google, the ongoing task of holding the line against complexity is managed by an 'audition' process in which each new proposed feature is tried out on the advanced search page and run through a tough scoring system. While keeping its home page as clean as possible, Google understood the importance of including something to convey the brand personality, as reflected in its daily changing, whimsical animated logo treatments.

Simplification is often about narrowing the scope of one's offerings; distilling them down to their essence. It's one of the most challenging aspects of simplification, and requires focus and discipline in the face of the constant temptation to add, expand and complicate. The challenge lies in knowing what to kill and what to keep, what is essential and what can de dispensed with. Google holds the line here by allowing no more than ten search results per page.

The Quest For Simplicity

The quest for simplicity often comes down to short-term impulses versus long-term interests. When a consumer makes a purchasing decision, the product with more features may seem appealing, but at the point of daily use, people much prefer a streamlined offering. Research shows consumers will invest only 20 minutes trying to figure out how to use a new gadget, at which point they give up and return it - at a cost of some $100 billion a year in lost sales.

And that is not counting the cost to companies in terms of reputation and loyalty as once burned consumers are often reluctant to try that brand again. This situation creates a conundrum for product engineers and marketers who strive to simplify the user experience and make their products enjoyable, which is key to consumer satisfaction and a brand's long-term success.

But creating a 'simple' product is no easy task as it involves constant trade-offs, and the right balance between quality, functionality, ease of use and cosmetic design. Apple, for example, attributes much of its success to its ability to combine these features with a simple, elegant appearance.

The notion that it's often better to have fewer options shouldn't be a radical idea, yet somehow in the current culture, it is. The bromide that freedom of choice is always a good thing in a 'free society' often results in difficult decision-making for folks who find themselves overwhelmed and confused.

In fact, providing endless choice can be a convenient means of passing the buck, allowing business to avoid the hard job of figuring out what people really need by offering everything. The dirty secret is that trying to give people everything is actually a lousy business model. For instance, the secret to Trader Joe's success lies in its ability to winnow choices for shoppers, while offering value and quality in the bargain.

The decisions made in distilling shouldn't be based on what the competition is doing or on marketing's wish list. Every choice should be based on trying to produce the most rewarding customer experience. But this is no easy task. Here, tools, like Apps, are having some positive impact, especially as small screens demand simplicity and specificity of purpose. As companies recognize that Apps with few purposes can be more inviting and user-friendly, their design clarity provides a model for other communications.

It makes sense to think of simplicity as a shortening of the distance between sender (seller) and receiver (buyer). Here sellers have two options: communicate clearly to improve decision-making or create a 'decision filter' to deliver the perfect choice, in effect, do the work for the consumer. Pandora, an excellent case, offers up music channels based on one's favorite song or artist.

The bottom line: Do not assume that by giving customers 'more' (information, options, features, songs), you're doing them a favor. By distilling an offering to its essence, while it may appear you are providing less choice, you are more apt to provide a purer, simpler and more satisfying experience.

> **Do not assume that by giving customers 'more' (information, options, features, songs), you're doing them a favor**

Clarify: Too Much Information Causes Complexity

Whether it's confusing street parking signs or drug labels, the fundamental problem in clarifying communications has to do with providing too much information that doesn't actually inform. Everyone, from the airline pilot to the grandmother reaching for

her pill bottle, wants clear, comprehensible instructions to help navigate a complex world. Instead, we too often fall victim to data, untamed, unfiltered, without order or shape and, ultimately, without meaning.

While language itself is part of the problem, we must also apply design to information in order to organize, emphasize, and visualize. When dealing with complex information, one of the first orders or business is to sort and prioritize the data to establish a hierarchy of information. This process requires digging into the pile to extract the most meaningful information and the order in which it matters, if one hopes to communicate through a label, instruction manual, website, billing statement, etc.

A key to determining structure is anticipating needs in order to create a real-world perspective that's too often missing when communications are designed. This lack of perspective can be seen in all kinds of documents flowing from business and government, from the official Medicare handbook to typical insurance policies. Arranging structured information in buckets or clearly marked sections helps people navigate to the appropriate chapters.

When information is not organized in this manner, people experience cognitive overload. It's key to separate information into discrete ideas or steps; think sequentially, summarize longer material, de-emphasize less important content, get rid of what's unnecessary. The last step is usually the hardest due to the tendency to over-explain.

Disciplined Focus Required

To achieve clarity in communications with customers, marketing instincts to oversell must be restrained. Packaging design, where clarity is achieved through a disciplined focus on what's important to the customer, provides one of the best examples.

In packaging, as often in ads, white space can be one of the most critical design elements to help people focus.

Packaging that employs a simple design aesthetic with generous white space stands out on crowded shelves. Instead of making a laundry list of features and benefits, such packaging allows the consumer to project their own interpretation onto this blank canvas.

Clarity can make or break a sale at the point of purchase. A package has about four seconds to communicate meaning or the consumer is on to the next offering. Therefore, simpler packaging is more inviting and helps people locate specific information they need to decide. Cluttered design creates confusion, whereas simplicity equals clarity equals a satisfied shopper.

> **A package has about four seconds to communicate meaning or the consumer is on to the next offering**

The Power Of Visualization

The power of visualize is rooted in human biology; the brain simply processes visuals easily than words. The human eye has evolved to seek out and focus on stimuli that are easy to recognize and separate from the visual clutter - including color, shapes, and patterns.

Recent advances in data visualization make it possible to take even the most complex concepts and distill them to dynamic images - a 50-page manual can be adequately summarized on a single web page. Moreover, visualization invites the view to interpret the images, to fill in gaps and draw conclusions that are necessarily spelled out.

At the same time, visualization makes abstract concepts more understandable and grounded in real-world images. For example, to bring clarity to the concept of "paying your credit car bill over time costs you more than paying in full," we can use the power of information design. A series of dinner plates show how one purchase made with a credit card grows in cost depending upon when you pay for it.

Visualization is an extremely important simplification tool, because it can provide context, show cause-and-effect relationships, reveal anomalies and trends - the kind of complex information that otherwise might require mountains of explicatory data. But as promising as visualization is, it can't save marketers from the plague of gobbledygook. Design can only do so much; the rest depends on clarity of language. And, to be clear, words should be plain.

As promising as visualization is, it can't save marketers from the plague of gobbledygook

The Human Touch

Today, we are drowning in a sea of corporate-speak and technical jargon that few comprehend. It comes at us in tidal waves of fine print that we can't, or won't, read. Yet, we have pressing business to conduct, busy lives to lead, songs to hear, so we simply agree to everything in the fine print. And, the more we accept this situation, the worse it gets. For example credit card agreements are now 20 times as long as they were in 1980. Why the need for all those pages? That's where the tricks and traps are hidden. The simple fact is that business and government are using language purposely to conceal, muddle, confuse and obfuscate.

One might think that learning to speak and write plainly would be easy for business to master. But the tough part is breaking the old habit of talking like a company rather than as a person. One of the most important things that companies can do to bring more clarity to their communications is to abandon this impersonal, formal style and adopt a more "human" approach. Warren Buffet takes this approach in writing the Berkshire Hathaway annual reports, which he writes to be understandable to his sisters, who are highly intelligent, but are not accountants.

Key to learning to speak clearly as a company is finding its own distinctive and authentic voice, abandoning the officious voice of a generic corporation, and expressing the brand personality and all of the humans who stand behind it. That voice should come clearly through all communications at all points of contact along the customer journey. And when they do, such empathetic companies will find its customers will rally round then in good time and even in times of crisis.

Alan Siegel

CEO, Founder | Siegelvision

As a pioneer in brand identity and the creator of the concept of "brand voice," Alan Siegel has spent a lifetime helping organizations achieve greater recognition and relevance. Over five decades, Alan has gained the stature of both pillar of the establishment and provocative iconoclast. In 2011, he founded Siegelvision, a company focused on solving tough branding and communications problems for purpose-driven organizations in education, healthcare, and philanthropy. Supported by a team of handpicked talent, Alan starts and delights organizations by untangling complexity and creating robust brand identities.

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The Secret To Award-Winning Company Culture

Jenny McKenna

#AgencyLife attracts dedicated, type A, work-hard-play-hard people, so it's not uncommon for advertising agencies to suffer from the challenges that go along with hiring people who want to go into advertising.

The things that make working at an agency great, and that make those who chose to work there great at their jobs, can also create a culture that is not great: ladder-climbing, back-stabbing, silo-working, and, of course, employee burnout and staff turnover.

When Ed Mitzen started Fingerpaint on April Fools' Day 2008, he wanted to build a better agency, one that had its priorities straight and took care of its people. Fingerpaint is hard-charging and attracts determined and dedicated people who want to be a part of something special, cultivating a culture that isn't fueled by egos or corner offices.

Being 100% independently owned, not part of some big holding company a thousand miles away that demands growth each quarter (wanting to see growth each quarter is so 2015!), the focus is on our people, not profits. Our employees are committed to a common goal, enjoy working together and see the workplace as a place they want to be.

We make employees our number one priority, and our policies are built on that core value. Ed's philosophy was that a happy staff translates into a great customer experience that will ultimately help growth.

This is evidenced through office perks, like all staff having automatic days off on their birthdays and four-week paid sabbaticals for every five years of service to de-stress and reconnect with loved ones and their individual goals. Additionally, the company covers 100% of every employee's healthcare, has a kid and pet friendly culture, and employees are encouraged to take personal time or work from home whenever family needs necessitate. Finally, we are a charitable force in our communities, donating our time, talents, and money to help those less fortunate.

A happy staff translates into a great customer experience that will ultimately help growth

We've seen the positive effects of this strategy. For one thing, our employees stay with us. Employee turnover rates in our industry are notoriously high, but Fingerpaint enjoys low turnover year after year. When you maintain a consistent team, your clients are well-served and continue to remain loyal. Want further proof this approach is working? Employees who have made it to the five-year mark come back from their sabbaticals refreshed and looking for a challenge (and already planning the next one - only five years away!).

Teams are also better connected to - and invested in - each other. Employees are more likely to help each other be present for life events, step in to allow team members to work from home to take care of family and pitch in when the workload becomes heavy. There is true celebration when someone takes that sabbatical, even though it means those other team members will need to cover.

This employee-centric approach drives our processes and operations, as well. We are a no-titles organization, which means that everyone at the table is expected to participate and offer their best ideas and solutions. There's no VP at the head of the table, which empowers individuals to progress and encourages leaders to emerge.

A flat, non-hierarchical structure also means we work in an open environment, where C-Suite level employees sit with general team members. Ed sits in a cube on the second floor of our Saratoga Springs office right next to Bill, who helms the office. Their cubes are no different from everyone in view. And while there has been debate over the benefits of an open office environment, we believe it works. Our seating keeps teams together and underscores the commitment everyone plays in producing great work. The result is real collaboration and efficient workflow. Teams work together, respectfully and with purpose.

We are also committed to not laying people off. In marketing, layoffs are an expected part of the deal. As brands come on and off the market, and clients come and go, there is an understanding at most agencies that jobs will

come and go with them. For example, when we lost a big piece of business, we hustled, we sold, we took work that might not have considered the year before, and understood it might not be profitable. But we didn't lay off a single person. Even though that was a tough year, we continued to grow in the years following, and we ended 2016 with more than $30 million in revenue and a fantastic staff nearing 200 strong.

In an era and an industry where growth is key and profits are everything, it might seem antithetical to put your employees' well-being in front of the company's bottom line, but when you treat your employees like family, they act like family. Except they don't borrow money or call you from a Canadian prison needing to be picked up. Well, maybe sometimes they do.

When you treat your employees like family, they act like family

Jenny McKenna

Head of Operations - Saratoga | Fingerpaint

Jenny's background in the restaurant business serves her well in her operations role at Fingerpaint. She's used to making sure a large menu of products are properly delivered to a diverse range of customers - and all while appearing cool, calm and collected. With over a decade of project management experience, Jenny knows how to juggle the budgetary, time and creative demands of even the most complex of projects. Whether it's converting Fingerpaint's operations to a more efficient online process or negotiating vendor rates for our clients, she keeps the company running smoothly. When she's not serving as den leader or office matriarch, Jenny relaxes by indulging in her love of music.

www.fingerpaintmarketing.com
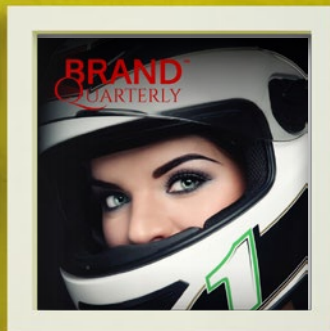
Branding For Scale: Future-Proofing Your Brand Growth

Andrew Vesey

Launching a new brand; rebranding to turn around a failing one; consolidating for a concerted market push; merging multiple entities together. What do these all have in common? Their end goals are all about success and growth.

With this in mind, it should be obvious you need to focus on more than just building (or strengthening) a brand that will garner you that success and growth; your brand must survive the journey of growth, and thrive on reaching your current business goals. But, unfortunately, this is regularly overlooked.

All too often an organisation - be it a startup or a well-seasoned brand - will build and implement a new brand strategy looking solely through their growth goggles. Being concerned with what's right in front of them and where they need to get to, all the while ignoring what their brand will look like at the other end. The result? Brand success transforming into an ill-fitting identity squeezed onto a cliché of a brand promise, delivered by a vehicle that is no longer fit for purpose.

That's not really the best way to work, is it?

Growth is good - growth is great. Growth hacking? Awesome. Falling back down because your brand couldn't handle the transition? Not so good. To avoid this, there are a number of different aspects to consider before signing off on your new brand strategy.

Brand Positioning: Every Journey Involves Moving Somewhere

Are you a 'David' in your industry, taking on the Goliaths? What happens when you're successful? Do you become one of the Goliaths, a champion defending against more rising, or a crusader in search of the next way to improve the industry? Choose wisely, as each avenue offers its own trials and rewards. But choose early. How your brand will be positioned once it's successful, should directly influence its positioning on day one.

Get this wrong, and you risk alienating your customer base by becoming that which you encouraged them to rail against, or through outright confusion...

...we thought we knew you.

Take the long view; then find your starting position.

Your Brand Promise: Is It Ready To Evolve?

While 'your brand is what others say about you when you're not in the room,' those people need a measuring stick to judge your organisation or product by. Enter the brand promise. It may be your intended brand promise or one that is 'user-generated' through miscommunication or not understanding your audience properly (perhaps it would be good to fix that). Either way, judgments will be made regarding the quality of your promise, how it compares to the competition, how relevant it is, and whether you deliver on it.

When you're starting out, you need to impress to drive brand loyalty and advocacy. And impress you will. For a while. But as you grow, so too does the height of the measuring stick.

You still deliver on your brand promise? Great! But how relevant is it now? It may have seemed impressive when you first revealed it, and was most likely a major keystone for your brand, but that was then. Now, it's stale, doesn't compare to your competitors', or viewed as just 'too easy' for a 'massive' brand like yours.

You still deliver on your brand promise? Great! But how relevant is it now?

Think about your brand promise at launch as a 'base promise' you can expand on over time. Business changes, innovations, regulatory changes, random customer insights, and many other factors will have an impact on your evolving brand promise. Be prepared with a basic plan highlighting possible avenues of change, and those business changes become opportunities rather than challenges.

The Customer Experience: Will It Withstand Your Growth?

Closely connected with your brand promise, the customer experience will evolve along with it. So keep your brand promise fresh, deliver on it, and you're well on your way to a successfully evolving customer experience. The big question here is focused on implementation - can you keep up?

Even an experience powered by the latest innovations in technology and consumer psychology will be outdated soon after release. And if your budget was a bit tighter, then the hamster wheel power source will wear out much sooner.

You're delivering the perfect experience right now. What happens when you have 10 times the customers? 100 times? 1,000? It may seem a little 'pie in the sky' to think about big customer numbers, but a failed experience at scale can easily transform into a failed brand. So take the time to future gaze and discover

the breaking points in your experience plan. You may not be able to fix them yet, but at least you'll know when you need to get onto it - before problems happen.

A failed experience at scale can easily transform into a failed brand

Company Culture And Employee Experience: They'll Be Affected Too

Employees are the lifeblood of a company, and a growing brand will most likely mean a growing organisation. How can you maintain the current culture and continue to deliver what your employees need? Is your current situation even plausible once you scale?

In the same way a growing business would map out a larger organisational chart and assign multiple roles to current business units (or individuals), now is the time to map out your current culture and employee experience in 'big business' style - with one difference.

Rather than starting with the big picture and fitting it into your current situation, you want to look at your culture and experience right now, and expand on it. When will you need to add more support, improve tech, or tweak a few guidelines to keep that winning formula going?

Brand Management: Consistency, Consistency, Consistency

Your brand presence won't just grow figuratively. It literally expands - over new channels, technologies, products, services, stationery, and in the pure number of impressions of your visual identity. Be prepared for it.

Brand guidelines with enough flex to be easily ported over to a new channel or tech are a must. So too is a QA (or Brand Guardian, as I like to call it) system. One that can grow as your brand and its identity requirements do.

Do you need a full-blown marketing resource management (MRM) system? At a certain point, it will definitely help - even become vital. But, for those just starting out or with a very compact team, there are more pressing needs. This shouldn't stop you from preparing to implement an MRM system, however. Even if you never shift to an 'official' MRM product, your organisation will be in the right mindset and have your own 'system' in place that will grow with you.

What Next?

Big question. If not THE question.

Invest time in future-proofing your brand for growth, and you'll be able to answer that question much easier. You'll even have a fair idea of what's after that - allowing you to be more agile, proactive and growth ready.

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

Are You Experienced?

How Engagement And Participation Can Supercharge Your Content Marketing Outcomes

Ken Rutsky

Content Marketing is here to stay. There is a broad and compelling consensus that content is the key to unlocking thought leadership, brand leadership, market leadership, and effective demand generation programs. In most B2B marketing approaches, this means blogs, e-books, white papers, case studies and compelling email and demand generation programs built around these.

However in today's buyer-driven markets, content has become a commodity, and it is increasingly more difficult to have content break through and be noticed. In addition, buyers are more time-crunched than ever, and have very little time to engage in long format content, especially at the top of the buying funnel. Yet marketers continue to churn out more and more written content to feed their demand gen engines, most often than not to dramatically diminishing returns. Stopping at the message fails to take on two critical variables in the equation: Engagement and Experience.

*"Are You Experienced?
Ah! Have you ever been experienced?
Well, I have "*

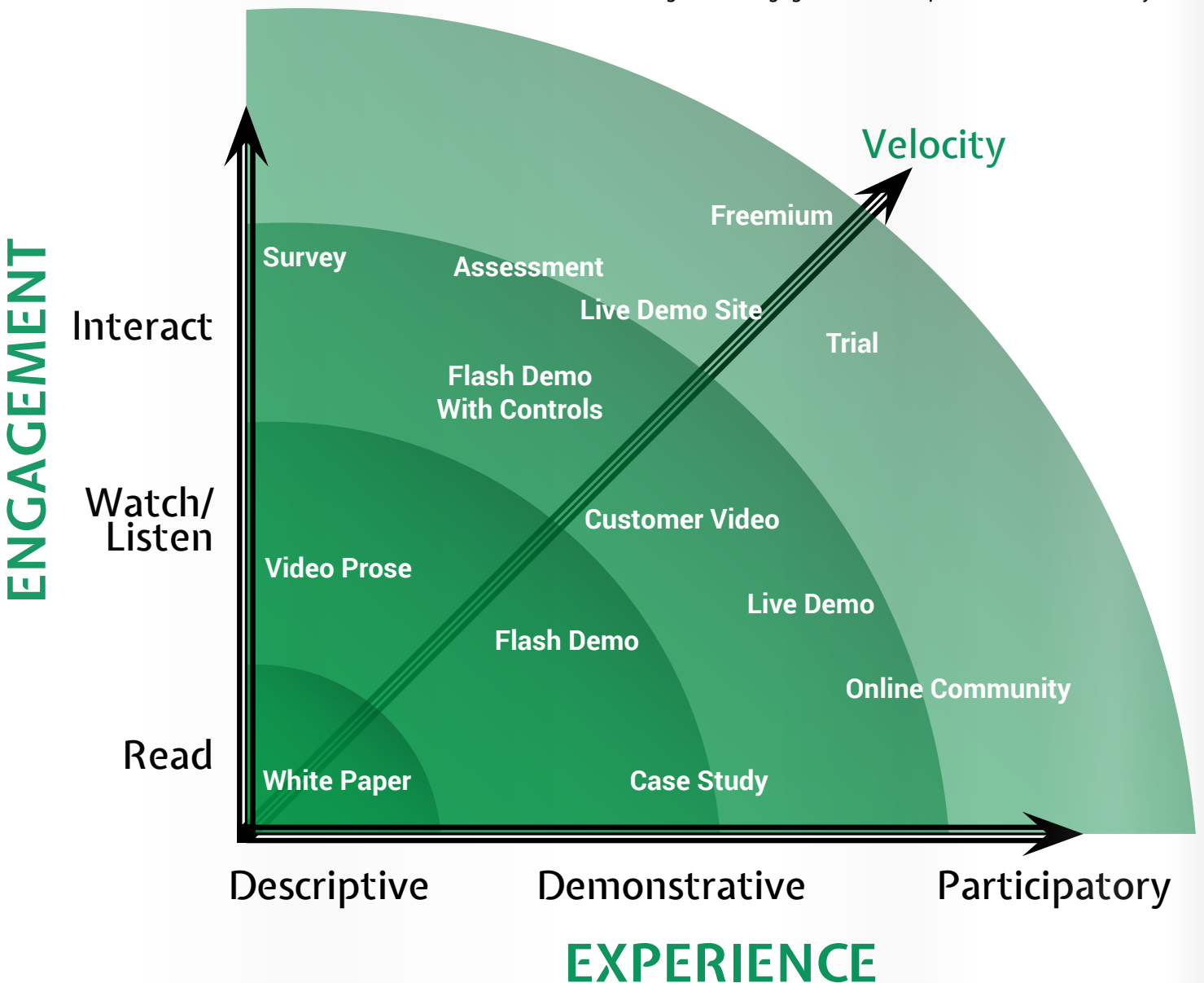Jimi Hendrix,
Are Your Experienced, 1969

No matter how compelling and well crafted our message is, to break through and lead, we must then increase the level of engagement and experience we deliver in our marketing programs and communications.

We can look at both engagement and experience as continuums. Engagement measures the level of interaction that the customer has with our content; we are most engaged when we are interacting, least when we are reading. Engagement, through multiple senses and interaction, creates memorable content-marketing engagements.

Engagement, through multiple senses and interaction, creates memorable content-marketing

From an experience perspective, the communication of our value can be descriptive, demonstrative or participatory. Communication of value via experience is vastly more effective at winning customers' preference.

Figure 1 : Engagement and Experience Create Velocity

Velocity

ENGAGEMENT

Interact

Survey

Assessment

Live Demo Site

Freemium

Trial

Flash Demo With Controls

Watch/ Listen

Customer Video

Video Prose

Live Demo

Flash Demo

Online Community

Read

White Paper

Case Study

Descriptive   Demonstrative   Participatory

EXPERIENCE

Velocity, as shown in Figure 1, is the combination of high-engagement, high-participation programs. Clearly, we should strive for a mix of high- and low-velocity deliverables. There are times, especially in highly technical markets, where the whitepaper is a key component of the marketing deliverables mix. But even then, most whitepapers are so bad they put the audience to sleep.

But here, we focus on the upper-right reaches of the Velocity Execution Model. For example, well executed and managed trial programs, where we engage directly in the customer's buying journey, are far more effective in converting prospects than a whitepaper describing the benefits of that journey.

Conventional wisdom in B2B sales argues against standard demonstrations of value early in the buying cycle. The first objection is rooted in the solution/diagnostic-selling mindset that says until we can specifically describe the value of our solution and customize the demo, we should not show the product. Contrast this approach to the alternative, where the brand has established a compelling, customer-centric context for discussing the value of their product, then proudly points the customer to an online demo.

In the meantime, the solution-selling competitor is still establishing need with the customer, who will now view everything in the context of the first brand's viewpoint. Our competitor now faces a tough uphill battle. The brand that demonstrates value and meaning to a prospect early in the buying cycle tilts the playing field in their direction.

The brand that demonstrates value and meaning to a prospect early in the buying cycle tilts the playing field

The second objection to showing interactive demos is commonly that "our product is just too hard to demo without someone from our team showing it." Let's take a quick look at several case studies that strongly refute both of these claims.

Nimsoft Accelerates Sales Cycles With Online Demo

Nimsoft, a provider of IT monitoring products and SaaS services was facing a critical juncture in its evolution. Positioned as a "me too" provider, Nimsoft's tagline was "The Big 4 Alternative," alluding to the fact that they were easier and less costly to implement than the four traditional large providers in that market space.

They created a high-impact go-to-market positioning around "Unified Monitoring, from the Data Center to the Cloud." This was backed by a well thought out and articulated set of go-to-market messages around this viewpoint that drove their value home. Most importantly, they created an online marketing demonstration hub, which allowed customers and prospects to see unified monitoring in action. A screenshot is shown in Figure 2.
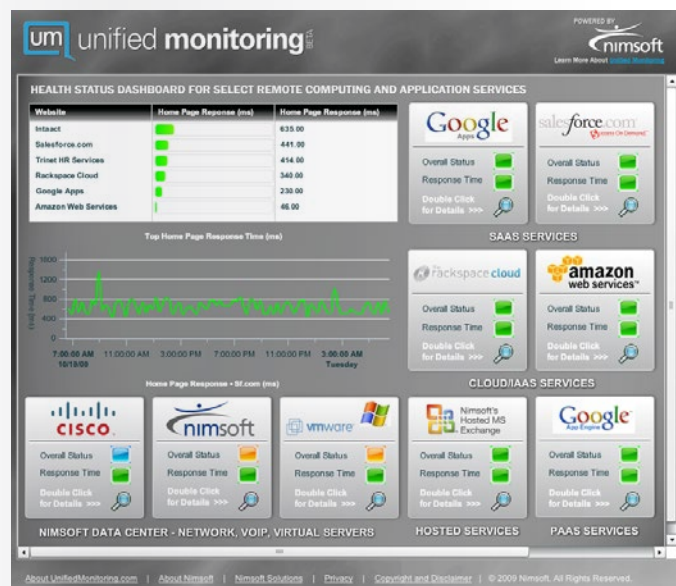

Figure 2: Nimsoft Unified Monitoring

Traditionally in the IT monitoring market, demos were customized and delivered in the third, fourth or fifth sales engagement, and only then when a systems engineer could be scheduled. This process normally took as long as four to six weeks to arrange. Once the Unified Monitoring demo portal was launched, sales reps would demo this as part of the first call. This did three things for Nimsoft. First, it cut up to four weeks out of the sales cycle. Second, it showed the prospect the business value of the Unified Monitoring approach in an experiental way. And lastly, it tilted the playing field strongly in Nimsoft's direction, putting them in the pole position for the sale.

This experiential approach to marketing and sales accelerated revenues and positioned Nimsoft for both growth and an eventual acquisition by CA, Inc.

Game Film: Dog Food And Stone Skipping - Something Quirky

Jim Barksdale, the former CEO of Netscape was an amazing leader, know for his homespun, southern storytelling and sayings, which made him the most quotable CEO in Silicon Valley history. Work for him for a few years, and you leave with a small library of "Barksdalisms." One of Jim's sayings was, "It ain't dog food unless the dog comes off the porch to eat it."

While Jim's point was that you can love your product but if the customer doesn't buy it, it isn't worth much, Jim probably never intended it to be taken literally. German pet-food manufacturer GranataPet did just that. Grenata implemented a mobile-enabled, dog-food-dispensing billboard where they delivered the experience and value of their food directly to their end customer, the canine! When the customer's owner checked in with their mobile device, the billboard would automatically dispense a sample of dog food, and if the product delivered, hopefully, the dog would love it.

Have you ever felt like escaping the doldrums of your computer, sitting down by a mountain lake and skipping stones? That's exactly the experience that San Francisco design firm Eleven Inc. created in their SkipTown promo for Sun Valley, Idaho. They set up a website featuring Skippy, the world's first (and maybe only?) web-controlled, stone-skipping robot. Would be vacationers could experience Sun Valley in the summer - the key objective of the campaign.

Figure 3: Eat The Dog Food

Figure 4: Skip A Stone

When B2B companies hide their product or services experience behind rationalizations and excuses, such as the belief that the customer will not see enough "value" in the trial or demo experience, or that competitors will learn too much and thereby gain an advantage, just fire up and show them these two videos. That's showing value. That's having the customer be part of the experience. If Sun Valley and Granata can do it, so can you!

So whether you are selling dog food, mountain vacations or a B2B product, there's a way to accelerate your pipeline today by adding experience and engagement to your marketing mix. Don't get stuck in the typical bottom left of B2B marketing programs and deliverables. Breaking through requires breaking out of that old mindset, pattern and approach.

If you can just get your mind together
then come across to me
We'll hold hands an' then we'll watch the sun rise
from the bottom of the sea
But first

Are You Experienced?
Ah! Have you ever been experienced?
Well, I have

Jimi Hendrix, Are Your Experienced, 1969

Ken Rutsky

Consultant, Speaker & Mentor, Author of Launching to Leading | KJR Associates, Inc.

Ken Rutsky helps B2B growth executives in sales, marketing, and the C-Suite to breakthrough, achieve, and grow market leadership in new and existing markets.Ken's clients improve key sales and marketing metrics like leads to revenue and opportunities to close. Ken has spent 20+ years in B2B marketing roles, launching the Intel Inside broadcast co-op program in 1991 and the Internet's first affiliate marketing program, Netscape Now, at Netscape from 1995-99; has been CMO at several start-ups; and has run network security marketing at McAfee. In the eight years of his consulting practice, Ken's clients – including FireEye, Nimsoft, and others – have generated over $6B of shareholder value.

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Digital Globalization Goliaths
Need Challenging Davids

Bruno Herrmann

Globalization is under pressure in multiple ways and areas. It is under necessary transformation strategically and tactically speaking, which is unscripted for the most part. So is digital globalization, as the data-driven accelerator and preferred vehicle to expand and grow internationally. It shakes up conventional thinking and resets "Silk Roads" that have been prevailing for decades in global business. Capturing the best from the West is no longer enough, and digital innovation in Asia and Africa impresses more than ever before.

Among all fast-paced changes that you should address to delight customers around the world, calibrating and branding globalization efforts is a must-do, and no organization can pretend to use the silver bullet.

The world of customers remains a world of languages, cultures and ecosystems. As it calls for cross-cultural maturity and cross-functional leadership, established multinationals and enterprise environments may seem to have an immediate advantage to thrive, compared to daring entrepreneurs and booming startup scenes that are geographically dispersed and focused.

The world of customers remains a world of languages, cultures and ecosystems

You may wonder if existing or aspiring globalization Goliaths are really in the best position to lead and be the default worldwide. Or you might assume challenging Davids are doomed to follow globalization and localization trends rather than moving ahead on their own.

These good questions deserve a broader perspective and a deeper exploration. It is worth scratching the marketing surface and leaving so-called comfort zones. First of all, the size of globalization Goliaths and challenging Davids has to be put in perspective with the market(s) that they cover and the clients that they serve. Therefore their difference may lie in the way they embrace digital globalization and profit from it.

Be open, curious, and bold,
whether you are at the
forefront or in the backstage
of digital globalization

Be that as it may, a relentless focus on agility, velocity, and centricity is most important to execute globalization plans effectively and consistently regardless of industry, background, or objective. Success stories and halls of shame show that leading and accelerating digital globalization takes much more than significant budgets and abundant resources. It is rooted in how these assets are leveraged. Digital globalization success starts with a thorough understanding of local customers and is constantly nurtured by the ability to deliver experiences to the right customers at the right time and in the right place. In other words doing the right thing implies engaging audiences linguistically, culturally and functionally.

Rather than standing and moving all alone some globalizing organizations opt to consider what others - challengers or competitors - do and how they perform to excel locally and globally. They sometimes turn them into partners, influencers or catalyzers to enter international markets and to distill their local presence into increased effectiveness, value and revenues.

Here are a few examples of recent cases and places where globalization Goliaths have met, teamed, or struggled with challenging Davids, helping raise the bar and move the needle.

Expanding And Growing Through Win-Win Partnerships Beyond Industries And Across Channels

The deal that the US-based Starbucks and the Sweden-based startup Spotify reached in 2016 is a great example of a mutually beneficial globalizer. Both global players demonstrated once more that the alliance between bricks and clicks works.

By making the line between online and offline thinner it enabled both companies to create more value for their associates and their customers. On the one hand, Starbucks was able to enrich customer experiences in the US, UK and other countries with a next generation music ecosystem. On the other hand, Spotify could know local customers better and gain more ground in these target markets.

This partnership also combined a brick and mortar foundation around the world with the power of a digital platform and online channels available to people whenever and wherever they wanted. As a result, Spotify content could be localized in a more granular and profitable way with Starbucks data, while Starbucks accelerated its pace to enhanced digital experiences thanks to Spotify assets.

Expanding And Growing Through Localization At The Scale Of There And At The Speed Of Now

Speed is critical in the digital age. Yet it has to be set according to local requirements, drivers and competition to be truly effective. Uber could testify to this when it faced the challenge of becoming as successful in China as it was in other international markets. It showed that localizing a product or a service takes more than a normal adaptation because there is no such thing as a normal (or, even worse, normalized) customer experience. It requires a detailed conversion to collective and individual aspirations. The price to pay for making customers feel unique is never too high for a globalization Goliath.

Speed is critical in the digital age. Yet it has to be set according to local requirements.

Didi played the role of local challenging David decisively by immerging itself in the Chinese market to create fluid, natural experiences. It turned localization and hyperlocalization costs into customer experience investments.

A globalization Goliath lost a battle against a challenging David here because it did not fully embrace the whole local reality, including all layers of legal and commercial complexity. Ultimately it was the victim of a syndrome affecting some fierce Western multinationals, pushing them to consider internationalization and localization as linear processes.

Expanding And Growing Through Operational Synergies Between Global Brands And Local Gateways

While global brands bet much on motions and emotions to attract and retain customers, this approach does not cut it in a number of markets. They need to go further and deeper to translate these emotions into fluid journeys, delivering immersive experiences locally. Therefore some globalizing organizations strive to identify the best allies that can tie their robust functional foundation to the highest value of products. If you owned a shoe brand, you would define this sort of meeting place as where global shoe makers meet local shoe shiners.

Ebay in India and top beauty brands in China are two good examples of globalization Goliaths joining iconic challengers on very competitive and fast-growing digital market places, respectively Flipkart and Tmall. Ebay's move in India appeared as an intriguing case of a global company selling its local subsidiary and investing in the local acquirer at the same time. In fact, it marked the converging interest from both companies to offer local customers a wide array of products giving global customers access to local goods. It was more than just another global trade agreement and financial deal though. Ebay provided technology expertise whereas Flipkart brought its invaluable experience on how to best satisfy local customer needs.

In the same vein, the cooperation between cosmetics companies such as L'Oréal and Tmall was more than about driving sales in the Chinese market. Like for other top Western and Eastern brands, Tmall elevated their local presence by converting local shopper interactions into journeys and experiences that local digital consumers expected within their ecosystem. Tmall made it happen thanks to a holistic integration of localized brands assets, local content, exclusive products or services, and even offline business opportunities.

Mistakes are made and lessons are learned when going beyond borders and boundaries. At all times you should be open, curious, and bold, whether you are at the forefront or in the backstage of digital globalization. As we all know, Goliaths don't always win. Bill Gates rightly stated: "Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose." Glittering pitfalls in digital globalization can definitely be avoided when Goliaths get inspired by Davids, or when Davids keep challenging Goliaths. Either way, local customers should always win.

Bruno Herrmann

Director of Globalization | The Nielsen Company

As Director of Globalization, Bruno Herrmann is currently responsible for global content operations across six regions at The Nielsen Company, focusing on global content design and management as well as international customer experience. He joined The Nielsen Company in 2003 to manage international content and digital marketing programs in EMEA prior to leading digital content deployment globally. Previously, he managed online globalization programs at HP and content management initiatives in addition to Web localization at Compaq. Prior to this, he worked in the marketing comms and localization industries, taking part in major international projects for high-profile technology clients.

www.nielsen.com

A Changing Regulatory Environment Calls For A Review Of Extant Brand Strategies

James Maposa

The regulatory environment is changing based on a society that is more health conscious, advocating for the preservation of life. Increasing of taxes on products such as tobacco, alcohol and now sugar-sweetened beverages are a result of increased lobbying from non-profit organisations who are pushing governments to penalise consumers, in order to protect themselves from themselves, by making it relatively unaffordable to purchase these products.

By increasing taxes, it is assumed that the consumers will use less of the good based on a higher pricing point. The fewer units that are consumed, the less strain on your body and ultimately the longer you live.

Raised taxes also benefit the taxman because, from a human nature standpoint, it takes a lot of willpower to kick a habit, let alone reduce your utility threshold. We live in an increasingly stressful world and the products we are told to consume less and less of, sometimes provide the temporary relief we need to get by. A rather controversial but true state of affairs based on our daily trials and tribulations.

In as much as I am all for the preservation of life, I'd like to think about this situation from an executive's standpoint. If I were an executive working at a sugar-sweetened beverages company, a good starting point would be to understand how much the taxes would increase the unit price of my produced commodities. A next step would be to speak to my economics department to inquire whether the increase in taxes can be fully passed on to the customer without impacting our demand targets.

Based on this information, I suppose the next step would be to review how a drop in demand would impact the firm's output, profitability and continuity. An example that comes to mind is an announcement made by British American Tobacco (BAT) who mentioned that they're considering closing down their SA cigarette plant based on impending bans of branded tobacco packaging. The company has already laid of 750 people over the last two years based on increasing pressure from the regulatory environment and growth of the illegal cigarettes market.

So coming back to my executive's dilemma. After determining that an increase in taxes could have an effect on demand, I would turn to my marketing function to ensure whether we're able to plug the demand gap through targeted and effective marketing.

Effective marketing is often a function of a well-thought out and implemented brand strategy. Not only does it contribute to a reduced marketing spend over the longer term, but it also enables you to be aligned from a messaging perspective and build equity in alignment with the company's purpose, vision and values. But a changing regulatory environment could compel you to revisit your extant brand strategy, reviewing your story, proposition and positioning. The review will be aimed at identifying the level of misalignment between what is expected from you from a regulatory standpoint and how you have positioned your brand within the marketplace.

A changing regulatory environment could compel you to revisit your extant brand strategy

So as an example, if our tone and messaging have indirectly communicated that consuming our beverages (replacing this with sugar for emphasis) is good for your wellbeing and spirit; this may need to change based on the new regulations. Now I am not saying that we completely abandon the existing messaging but under my stewardship as an executive, I must also remember the organisation's social operating license and citizenship responsibility. From this perspective, my company needs to come off as proactive, as opposed to reactive, when it comes to the impending regulation changes.

For instance, within the alcohol industry, advice on drinking responsibly and age restrictions are now commonplace from the firms that produce and distribute these beverages. So, as a sweetened beverages supplier, I'd review my branding strategy to develop a refined approach to position our brand and take on the market without having an affect on our vision and values, yet enhancing a responsible approach to serving our existing and potential clients. I'd also ensure that the reviewed strategy enables us to remain authentic as we respond to the changing regulatory narrative within the marketplace.

The reviewed strategy should also be translated into tactics that we can employ from a marketing and advertising standpoint to remain relevant, despite an altered consumer perspective on the merits / demerits of our marketed goods. The new tactics should also be built on us interfacing with our clients more, to find how best to serve them responsibly, sustaining a client-supplier relationship of mutual benefit and one that is able to last the longest of times.

James Maposa

Director Consultant | Intergroup Brand Consulting

James has over a decade of work experience, mostly spent in the research and strategy consulting industry. James's core focus as a Director Consultant is to identify, build and progress client relationships, driven by a strong understanding of industry fundamentals and associated brand development benefits. Before joining Intergroup, James worked for Frost & Sullivan, Ipsos and Ernst & Young where he was responsible for supporting clients to grow and progress their respective businesses within the sub-Saharan African market. James holds an Honours degree in Environmental Science (Cum Laude), a Master's degree in Programme Evaluation and an MBA.

www.intergroupconsulting.com

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Making Money From Content Marketing: The Only 10 Ways

Joe Pulizzi

In September at Content Marketing World, Robert Rose and I will launch our (combined) sixth book called Killing Marketing. The core principle is that we've been misusing the marketing function for years. Marketing, in its truest form, was actually meant to be a profit center.

While Robert and I were doing our research for the book, we looked into both successful new media companies as well as enterprises who have seen benefits from a content marketing approach.

What we found, to our pleasant surprise, is that the revenue model for both media companies and product brands is EXACTLY the same. Now, we may perceive the New York Times and Cisco Systems as completely different companies, but the content-first business models behind them are actually more alike than different.

The fruits of this research produced (among other things) what you see below, tentatively called the Media Marketing Revenue Model. Basically, any organization that builds an audience from their content can generate revenue (and profits) in 10 different ways…

Direct Revenue

There are five different methods by which companies can directly generate revenues from an audience group: advertising/ sponsorship, conferences and events, premium content offerings, donations and subscriptions.

Advertising/Sponsorship

The most popular method of driving direct revenues is through advertising and sponsorship programs: companies willing to pay you for direct access to your audience.

Red Box:
The Popular DVD delivery service (that sits outside physical retail stores) offers an eNewsletter to customers focused on new movie and game releases. Each newsletter includes one or multiple sponsors (generally promoting their own games and movies) that pay Red Box to reach its audience.

Conan O'Brien:
Conan and his Team Coco have been producing sponsored content placements on his late night show for years now. In one situation, Conan and sidekick Andy Richter talk about their "Cyber Monday" issues, which result in a pitch for PayPal.

Content Marketing Institute (CMI):
CMI favors a sponsorship model over an advertising one for the majority of products.

- Podcast - each episode has an individual sponsor
- Research reports - each report has one sponsor
- Webinars - each webinar is sponsored by a single sponsor

ESPN's Mike and Mike:
The popular morning radio and television show (syndicated on radio on televised live on ESPN2) has been sponsored by Progressive Insurance for years. ESPN does this with a number of their live shows, including Pardon the Interruption (PTI), which is generally sponsored by a spirits company.

Conference & Events

According to CMI/MarketingProfs research, approximately seven in 10 enterprises create and manage their own events. Some of these are small client gatherings, while others are full-scale events with exhibition halls and concurrent sessions. Revenues are driven, for the most part, through paid registration to the event or sponsorships, such as parties or exhibition space.

Media Marketing Revenue Model

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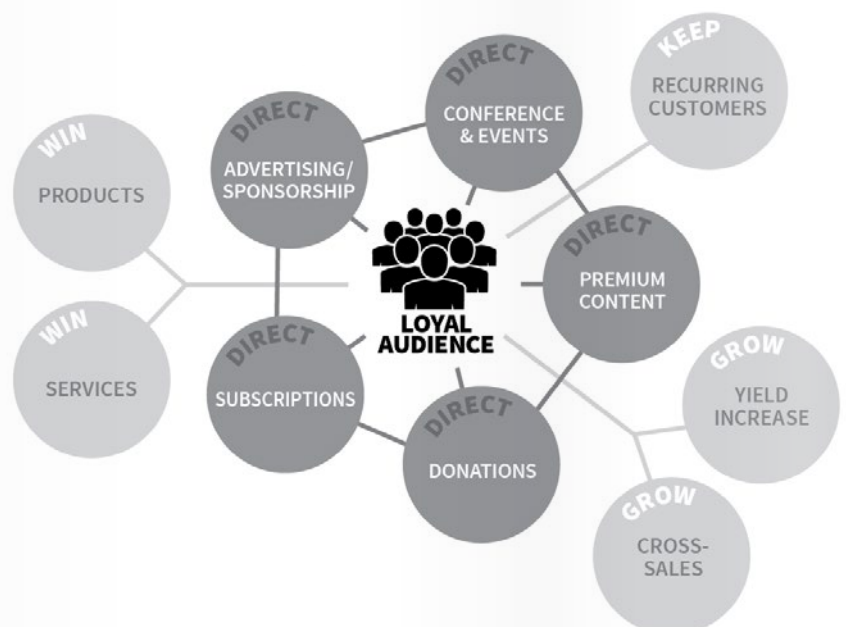
Minecon:

Minecon is the official event of Minecraft, the online multi-player building game owned by Microsoft. In 2016, the annual event attracted a sold out 12,000 attendees (at $160 per ticket, tickets sold out in minutes) as well as an exhibition hall featuring the latest Minecraft technology and merchandising (where Microsoft accepts booth fees from sponsors and partners).

Lennox Live:

Lennox is one of the largest manufacturers of heating and air conditioning equipment in the world. Every year, they attract the leading contractors and distributors from around the United States, offering education around technology, marketing and business practices. Exhibiting partners include companies such as Honeywell, Cintas and Fluke. Lennox generates revenue directly from attendee fees, as well as more than a dozen manufacturing and service partners.

Premium Content

Premium content packages come in a number of forms, including direct-for-sale content products, funded content purchased on demand, and syndicated content opportunities.

Digital Photography School (DPS):

Darren Rowse launched DPS as the leading source for beginning photographers and how they can get the most out of their picture-taking skills. DPS generates millions per year by developing premium eBooks and specialty reports for direct sale. DPS's premium content sales have become core to the company's monetization strategy.

Buzzfeed (Tasty):

Buzzfeed's time-lapsed cooking videos have been viewed by over 40 billion (billion with a b) times in the past two years. One of the ways Buzzfeed monetizes that success is through customized cookbooks. In 2016, Buzzfeed launched *Tasty: The Cookbook*, a hard-copy book that can be customized by the buyer depending on their recipe tastes. In just a few weeks, the Tasty sold over 100,000 copies of the cookbook.

Red Bull:

Red Bull's "Content Pool" contains thousands of videos, photography and music that media companies and content producers can purchase rights to directly from Red Bull.

Donations

Generally, donations to subsidize the publishing of an organization work best for not-for-profit and cause organizations.

America's Test Kitchen:

Both America's Test Kitchen and Cook's County are television programs on public broadcasting, and both shows have sponsor underwriters to *almost* cover the entire cost of production.

Pro Publica:

Pro Publica is a nonprofit organization that uses its funding to develop investigative journalism that it deems is important for the public to hear. Founded by Paul Steiger, former managing editor of the Wall Street Journal, Pro Publica employs over 50 journalists and received its major funding from the Sandler Corporation, which committed funding for multiple years upon Pro Publica's launch in June 2008. Pro Publica also accepts ongoing donations from anyone that believes in the organization's cause.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions differ from premium content in that subscriptions, paid for by the consumer, promise to deliver content ongoing, over a period of time (generally a year).

The New York Times:
A major part of the turnaround at *The New York Times* (from diminishing print advertising) is their growth in digital subscribers to the magazine. According to Quartz, the NY Times has added approximately one million digital subscribers over the past two years, with 276,000 in additions (their biggest growth since launching the subscriber program) after the election of President Donald Trump.

Indirect Revenue

While direct revenue options have been traditionally thought of as part of the media company model, indirect revenues fall under the approach known as content marketing, or creating content and building relationships with audiences to fund organizational business goals.

Win Revenue

Win revenue includes the creation and distribution of content with the goal of selling specific products or services.

Products

Sony's Alpha Universe:
Sony's Alpha Universe is a content platform dedicated to photography professionals, but focuses, not on Sony products, but on educational and helpful information. After starting with a blog, they've diversified into a podcast and training university. The site's purpose is to drive product sales for Sony's Alpha line of cameras.

The Wirecutter:
The Wirecutter, the gadget and deal listing site, was purchased by *The New York Times* in 2016 for $30 million. The site makes a little bit of money every time they sell a product recommended on the site. And these deals add up… in 2015, they generated over $150 million dollars from affiliate revenues.

Services

Game Theory:
Matthew Patrick created the idea of Game Theory while watching an online program on learning through gaming. Game Theory became a weekly YouTube video series that combined Matthew's passion for gaming and video games with his skill set of math and analytics.

After 56 episodes over a one-year time frame, Matthew had an audience of 500,000 YouTube subscribers interested in his take on how math works in gaming. For example, his episode "How PewDiePie [an online video celebrity] Conquered YouTube" generated more than 5 million views. His episode "Why the Official Zelda Timeline Is Wrong" saw more than 4 million downloads.

Today, the Game Theory brand, has well over eight million subscribers. From this success, Matthew launched Theorists Inc., a specialty consulting firm that works with large brands who want to be successful on YouTube. Theorists Inc. has been hired directly by some of the biggest YouTube stars on the planet to help them attract more viewers, as well as a number of Fortune 500 companies. Even the mighty YouTube itself hired Theorists to consult directly to help YouTube retain and grow its audience numbers.

Keep Revenue

Of all the revenue drivers of this approach, Keep revenue, or loyalty, is the oldest of them all, and is still extremely important today. Organizations of all sizes originally launched print magazines to keep the loyalty of their customers over time.

LEGO Club Magazine:
In the 1980s and 1990s, LEGO faced a tremendous threat from competing construction toys, and the company knew it needed to build a powerhouse brand and integrated marketing approach to go up against these building-block imitators.

Among its incredible branding and content marketing initiatives is the LEGO Club Magazine, which is customized for subscribers by local market and age. The magazine allows kids of any age to receive targeted content that's relevant to them in a fun, portable format. As an extension of its LEGO Club offering (one of the biggest and most popular children's member clubs in the world), LEGO worked hard to improve its magazine product in 2011 with more cartoon stories of the LEGO bricks in action, better integration of customer photos and some awesome in-store programs at LEGO store outlets and its new Master Builder Academy.

LEGO Club magazine was originally launched as *Brick Kicks* in 1987 (I was a subscriber).

Grow Revenue

Once a customer is acquired, innovative companies leverage that customer data to deliver targeted, consistent publications to, in essence, create better customers over time.

thinkMoney from TD Ameritrade:
While you may think investing services equals conservative and buttoned-down (especially in complex derivatives markets), thinkMoney follows a different approach. It takes the subject of investing seriously, but it doesn't take itself with the grim seriousness of many Wall Street firms. Instead, thinkMoney embraces a "sophisticated simplicity" approach that's edgy without being flippant, and witty without being irreverent.

thinkMoney reaches more than 200,000 active trade customers, and according to surveys, the average customer engages with the magazine for 45 minutes or more per sitting. More than 80 percent of readers take some meaningful action after reading and those subscribers who engage in the publication trade five times more than those who do not.

Fold Factory:
Trish Witkowski, CEO of Fold Factory, has become a celebrity in the direct mailing industry through her regular video show, The 60-Second Super Cool Fold of the Week, where she details amazing examples of print direct mail. According to author and speaker Andrew Davis, "Her 250-plus videos have yielded over a million views and more than 5,000 subscribers. In addition, Trish has become a spokesperson for a number of brands, tours the world as a speaker, and conducts workshops." The Fold Factory videos have been directly responsible for over $500,000 in additional revenue.

The most successful organizations in the future will leverage not one, but multiple parts of the media marketing model. Just as an investor diversifies their portfolio with multiple stocks and/or mutual funds, so do companies need to diversify the revenue streams generated from their marketing.

Joe Pulizzi

Founder | Content Marketing Institute

Joe Pulizzi is the founder of Content Marketing Institute, the leading education and training organization for content marketing, which includes the largest in-person content marketing event in the world, Content Marketing World. Joe is the winner of the 2014 John Caldwell Lifetime Achievement Award from the Content Council. Joe's fourth book Content Inc. was just released. His third book, Epic Content Marketing was named one of "Five Must Read Business Books of 2013" by Fortune Magazine. You can find Joe on Twitter @JoePulizzi. If you ever see Joe in person, he'll be wearing orange.

www.contentmarketinginstitute.com

Customers are human beings.
They want to know not just what,
who, and how, but also why.

The Four Cornerstones Of A Successful Brand

Dr Randall Bell

You're a grocery store owner, and you have four customers in the checkout line.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that they won't go away.

Thought

The first customer walks in with a purpose and heads straight for the pasta aisle. She just got off work and she's got a flight to catch early the next morning, so she doesn't have time to cook anything fancy. She paid a bill earlier in the day, so she also doesn't want anything too expensive either. Plus, she doesn't want to waste any time in the grocery store thinking about her dinner. She grabs a box of spaghetti and jar of red sauce off the shelf and heads straight to the checkout line.

This first customer is a thinker. When she looks at the box of spaghetti, she sees a product that costs money and takes time to make. She weighs her options, considers the available information about the product and her circumstances, and makes a rational decision based on that information. She considers the costs and the benefits.

Her decision is based on thought.

Connection

The second customer has been in the store for a while. He grabs a cart, and wanders around the aisles, puts a box of cookies in his cart and then puts it back on the shelf. He feels a few avocados, but none are ripe enough, so he moves on. His workday was stressful and it's got him feeling down. He didn't get enough sleep last night and lunch just made him sleepier. After a while, he decides to make pasta because that's what his mother used to make him after school.

This customer feels. When he looks at the pasta, he thinks of home and better days. He's coming face to face with the box of spaghetti after a day that made him upset. He's hoping the meal will make him feel better. Maybe he doesn't necessarily need more carbs, but he wants to feel comfortable, so he goes with the pasta.

His decision is based on emotional connection.

Action

The next customer walks in with confident strides, grabs a hand basket, and goes to the pasta aisle, too. She looks around and reads the nutrition facts and ingredients on the back of the different pasta brands. She's wearing running sweats, and her hair is tied up in a ponytail. It's Friday. She just got done with a run, and she's got a race tomorrow morning. She needs some energy. The night before races, she always loads up on carbs. She puts some spaghetti in her basket and heads to the checkout aisle.

This customer is a doer. When she looks at the pasta, she sees carbohydrates. She sees fuel. Her body is a well-tuned machine, and all it needs is some energy for the next day.

Her decision is based on action.

Context

The fourth customer comes in and strolls to the pasta aisle, looking around but not really tempted by anything else. It's Friday, after all, and Friday means Italian food with the family. Her grandparents immigrated to the United States from Italy, and it's important to him to make his mother's pasta recipe once a week. He's got all the other ingredients at home, so he just grabs a jar of tomato sauce and a box of spaghetti.

When this customer sees the pasta, he sees history. He sees legacy. For him, pasta isn't just a quick meal or carbs or even a comfort food. It's a part of his heritage. He recognizes that he is a person in a particular place at a particular time in history.

His decision was based on context.

The Four Cornerstones

Strong brands must engage all four customers at once. Of course, there are not just four types of customers. But each customer is made up of these four cornerstones.

These four customers are in all of us, all the time. At certain times, we may be more thoughtful or emotional. Or we may be more action-oriented. Or we may have a greater sense of our time and history.

But wherever we are, we are made up of all four cornerstones. Our perceptions and our decisions are rooted in our four cornerstones.

Weak brands appeal to only one, or two, or three of these cornerstones. They may attempt to appeal only to a person's intellect. But people are not machines, and they will look for more. Likewise, a brand that appeals only to emotion cannot survive.

Successful and resilient brands engage all four cornerstones at once, all the time.

Strong Brands Appeal To Reason.

Perhaps the first question a customer asks is "What is it?" The answer to this must be clear. In other words, the message is clear. The first customer had a problem. She had time constraints and limited finances. The pasta provided the solution. Convoluted marketing or contradictory messaging simply reflects an organization's internal confusion. In the world of thought, clarity is king. A clear brand makes its case clearly and concisely.

What is your brand?

Strong Brands Provide An Opportunity For Emotional Connection.

If the first customer asks what it is, the second customer was asking, "Who is it?" People do not engage based solely on cost-benefit calculations. We are not computers. The brand must have a personality. There must be a story behind the brand. Stories are about connection. No matter where or when a movie is set, whether it's an adventure saga on Mars or a romantic comedy during the French Revolution, the audience looks to connect with the characters.

Who is your brand?

People do not engage based solely on cost-benefit calculations. We are not computers.

Strong Brands Make Practical Sense.

Reason and emotion are not enough. The customer also wants to know how to incorporate the product into her life. How does your product help me accomplish my goals - whether they are physical, or financial, or any other kind of goal? How does your product fit into my daily life? Does it even make practical sense?

How is your brand?

Strong Brands Place Themselves In A Larger Context.

Every kid wants to know 'why?'. Likewise, adults suddenly reflect on the passage of time at weddings and funerals. So does every customer. Customers are human beings. They want to know not just what, who, and how, but also why. This is the most often overlooked of the four cornerstones. A brand may appeal to reason and emotion and may simply work, but it can still fail if it does not make sense in the larger context of a person's life. Context is key to a long-lasting brand.

Why is your brand?

Beyond One Dimension

So often we read about the 'customer,' a disembodied being who supposedly buys products and services. Has anybody ever met this customer? This one-dimensional customer comes from the world of analytics, and is a useful concept up to a point. However, this imaginary customer belongs on quarterly reports and slideshows.

We are four-dimensional humans with four basic cornerstones that make us who we are, how we see the world, and how we behave.

The strongest brands recognize the humanity of their customers and speak directly to that humanity.

Dr Randall Bell
Socio-Economist, Keynote Speaker, Author, CEO | Landmark Research Group, LLC

Randall Bell, PhD is a socio-economist, keynote speaker, the expert in Success Research, CEO of Landmark Research Group, LLC, and author of Me We Do Be: The Four Cornerstones of Success. The strategic and problem-solving skills of Dr Bell are well established. He consulted on the World Trade Center, the Flight 93 Crash Site, the BP Oil Spill, Hurricane Katrina, the nuclear testing on the Bikini Atoll, and several other tragedies including the JonBenét Ramsey and O.J. Simpson cases. Dr Bell's research has taken him to fifty states and seven continents, and his work has generated billions of dollars for his clients.

www.drbell.com

Design And Branding:
The Importance Of Strategy

Simon Wright

As Managing Director of a design agency, much of my time is spent convincing clients that we can offer so much more than creating pretty pictures. It goes without saying that clients expect good design teams to be capable of *interpreting* strategy, but they don't necessarily believe they are capable of creating it.

While all design agencies offer what I would call the 'operational' side of brand design, i.e. creating the logo for a brand, very few have the skills to develop a strong brand identity. It requires a delicate balance of strategy and creativity to uncover what's truly unique about a brand.

What many clients don't realise is that before they even think about hitting the drawing board, a good designer will immerse themselves in a client's business and sector to try and define what their point of difference is. The best way to do this, however, is in partnership with the client as part of a strategic workshop, which drills down into the heart of what the brand essence is. Some clients are reluctant at first - they would rather deliver a brief and send the designers off to do their thing - but if you can convince the right people to get their heads together in a room, amazing things start to happen.

A good designer will immerse themselves in a client's business and sector

On a fundamental level, a strategic workshop helps you to hone in on what makes you different from your competitors. If there's an interesting story to tell, you're going to find it through that process, by really digging deep into what the essence of a brand, product or a person is. Of course, you would never go into a meeting and present a new brand identity without having a rationale behind it, but a brand workshop gives you so much more to work with rather than simply investigating the competition.

When you're face to face with somebody getting under the skin of a brand, their reaction to even a word or a sentence can give a depth of insight that takes you to a completely different place strategically. It's so satisfying when you help a client to discover what it is they want to say. They may think they know their story but actually, they may not, and when it comes out, it's amazing; it's almost cathartic.

This is a great benefit, even with clients who are very cynical about the process. As the workshop develops, they will start to understand the value of it. It makes all

the difference to the result - you are able to produce an outstanding piece of work, rather than simply responding to what they thought you should be doing.

At the very least, a strategic workshop should allow you to answer the question: "So why should I come to you rather than anybody else? What makes you unique?" In most cases, it will reveal a whole host of fantastic material that allows you to highlight the client's point of difference. Sure, on a daily basis, it doesn't change the fact that it's a bunch of designers behind a computer creating designs, but you can create the work with a much more strategic understanding and an appreciation of the client that really does change the quality of the output.

Sometimes it even surprises me how well it works! You will know that every design you create for these clients is spot on. You may do three or four options, but you know that strategically, they are ticking all of the boxes. And then it's down to the client to overlay the subjective desire for one solution over another.

There will also be occasions where you start a piece of design work and come to the realisation that a strategic workshop is needed to get it right. In many ways, the workshop can confirm some of the work you are doing, but it also throws out some routes as well, allowing you to focus on work that is 100 percent right.

Once you've uncovered what's unique about the brand, the client has the beginnings of a communication strategy that will drive the graphic design brief. The next step is getting the words absolutely right - crafting that sentence that summarises the brand and its proposition. The client then has the first tangible piece of collateral - something that, if they had just asked for a logo design, they would never have had.

From that, you can develop a very powerful checklist of the values that you're trying to communicate. It could be anything from the tone of voice in the text to the choices of colours, or the boldness of design. The process may have highlighted that the client is thinking one thing and presenting something else, but now the tools are available to pull those pieces together. Rather than just creating a brochure because that's what they thought they needed, the design team can feel confident interrogating the brief to ensure that every piece of collateral is doing the job it should be doing.

As a designer, understanding the true essence of a brand - its ethos, values, and unique selling points - is essential to defining its creative identity. Only then can you create a tangible programme outlining where the client is visually, and where they need to be. Whether you're looking at a brochure, a website, a data sheet, or the full brand identity, executing this strategic process ensures that all visual touch points sit well together and tell the right story for the brand.

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Simon studied Graphic Design at London College of Printing. Having set up a design studio in Saudi Arabia and enjoying roles at various London agencies, he became Managing Director of Greenwich Design in 1994. Simon has worked on a wide range of projects from global branding work for Shell, to concept and development of startup brands. He has advised many clients on brand strategy, design and new product development. His expertise spans a wide range of disciplines across various design and marketing channels.

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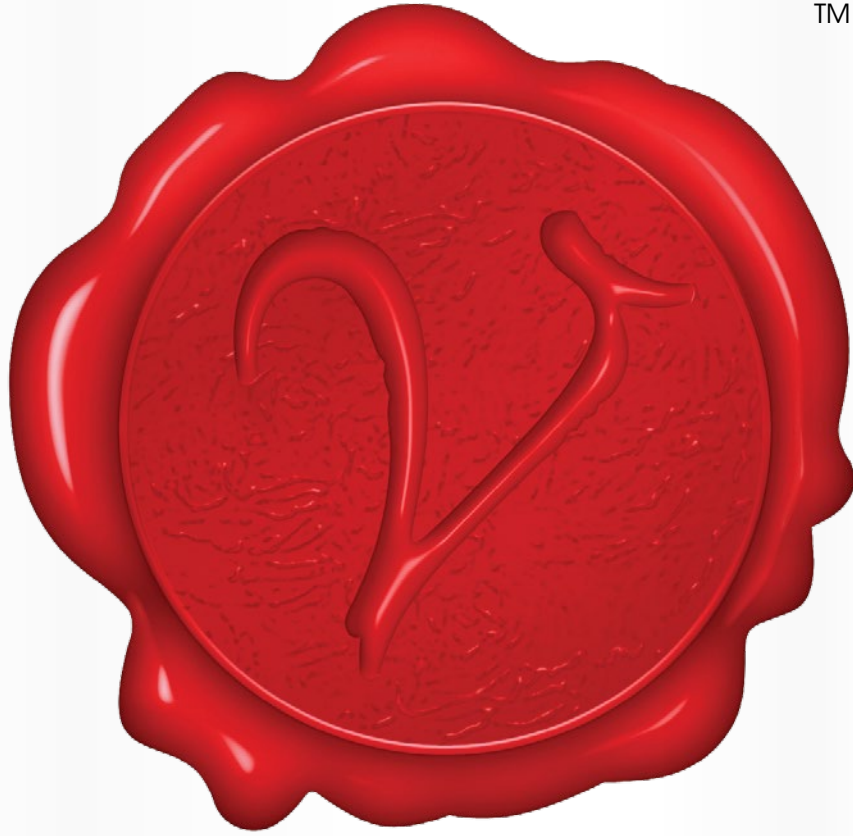
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