

Three steps to Game-changing Marketing

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In today's highly competitive, commoditized environment, it isn't enough to play the game of marketing well, you have to change the game. In order to be a game-changer, your business needs to have some customers that are so happy with your company that they become brand advocates for you.

A small number of brand advocates or "super fans" can generate a significant amount of sales by telling others about your business by word of mouth, especially through social media. Therefore, it is important to have a plan to create brand advocates and keep them engaged and interested in your business.

Simply, there are two steps to creating brand advocates among your customers:

1. Create a consistently superior experience for your customers, at each point of contact with them.
2. Keep your customers engaged and motivated to tell others about your business through social media.

We will focus on the second step in this article, having discussed the first step in a previous article.

Today's consumers are inundated with many more sources of messaging and advertising vying for their attention - mobile devices, the Internet, television, etc. In order to connect with potential and current customers, you now have to have to engage your audience in a way that:

- a. Breaks their usual routine
- b. Captures and holds their attention
- c. Causes a positive emotional reaction towards your company

Social media is becoming more and more important, as it is increasingly the main way that companies interact with their customers and the public. Brand consultant Simon Mainwaring has said that "the online presence of a brand will increasingly become the sum of its social exchanges across the web, and not the website that many currently call home."

He also defines a massive change in the role of the brand manager to become one of a “social officer, facilitating as many moments of authentic interaction with consumers each day as possible.

“We see brands shifting their media weight from traditional to social media, sharing stories across multiple channels and responding in real time, and training their employees to become social media brand advocates. So while the corporate website persists, it has now been reframed as a point of departure for customer engagement, rather than a destination.”

A game-changing social media strategy, therefore, includes these components:

1. Emotional branding
2. Storytelling
3. Effective messaging through social media

Emotional Branding

The perceptions that your potential and current customers have of your company is largely unconscious and emotional. It may be based on actual experiences with your business, or perceptions from the media, your branding, and the opinions of others. In addition, new research has shown that most buying decisions are based on emotions, with conscious rationalizations put in place to justify the emotional buying decisions. In fact, it is estimated that as much as 85 percent of buying decisions are emotionally-based.

Therefore, your company’s branding strategy needs to have a strong emotional component. It is often insightful to re-evaluate your branding strategy, even if you have been in business for quite some time.

Reconsider the basics: what are the most pressing needs and desires of your customers? What emotions, or even pain or discomfort do they feel when these needs/desires are not met? How does or can your company meet those needs?

Often, a simple survey of your current and potential customers to determine their most pressing needs and how they feel about your business, can yield insights that can be used to craft branding and marketing strategies. I often see business owners become aware of needs and attitudes that are held by their customers, and the market in general, that they were not previously aware of through survey data.

After you have devised a strategy to meet the needs of your customers, it is now time to consider the emotional component. What emotion(s) would you like your customers, and your potential customers to feel during and after a purchase or interaction with your business? What emotion(s) would you like them to feel overall, about your company and brand? How can you bring these emotions into the experience that your potential customers and current customers have with your business?

Storytelling

There is an expression in the marketing world: “a great story always sells.” Storytelling is one effective method to help create positive emotions about your brand.

It is definitely worth the time to decide what the story of your business is, and articulate it in a way that is meaningful, relevant, and authentic to your audiences (your current customers, potential customers, and the public in general). It is most effective to tell your story without looking for anything, such as a sale in return.

Storytelling Part #1:

1. The first component of storytelling is to tell the story of your company as a whole.

Who are the people that started the company? Why was it founded? What is the vision it is based upon? How is the passion of the founders and employees expressed every day?

What are the values that the company holds as important? How are these values reflected in what you do every day? How does what your company do make the world a better place for your customers, and for the community?

One example of storytelling is a television and social media campaign that Dell recently launched after becoming a private corporation again. The campaign celebrates the small, inspired beginnings of companies, the entrepreneurial spirit, and how Dell helps innovative companies succeed. The television ad also positions Dell as a innovative, entrepreneurial company, and shows the locations of the “inspired moments” that grew into Whole Foods Market, Overstock.com, Salesforce, com. and other businesses (that Dell had a role in helping become successful). The video of the TV ad can be found here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja61fxmY77Q>

Your company’s story should be told: on your website; in social media posts; video posts; and traditional media.

2. Continue to periodically tell the story of your business as a whole in social media.

This is not a time to make a sales pitch. Instead, tell more detail about the company's history. You might also choose to tell about the people in your company - from the secretaries, to the people on the factory floor, to the top executives - they each have their own story. Who are these employees or team members? How did they come to work for your business? What contributions do they make to the products or services that your customers find valuable? Why are they passionate about what they do?

You could also tell stories about your customers. Go beyond a simple endorsement or testimonial, and tell a story about your customers and their businesses - who they are, why they are passionate about what they do, and how they make the world a better place. Again, you are not selling anything at this point, just telling the story.

Storytelling Part #2:

1. Tell a story about what your company is doing now.

How are you helping your customers? How are you helping the community? How are you making a positive difference in the world?

A great example of this is how Canadian airline West Jet told the story of what they did for some lucky customers this past December. In a masterpiece of marketing and public relations, the company had "Santa" on a live video feed in an airport, on a large screen that was housed in a holiday gift box.

"Santa" asked the passengers, as they were waiting for a particular flight, what they wanted for Christmas. He was able to identify them by name, as the first part of the process had the passengers scan their boarding pass in the same "gift box" that housed the large screen television. A team of shoppers in the destination city then set about buying the exact gifts the passengers had asked for - from new underwear and socks, to a big screen television and Android tablet.

When the customers arrived at their destination, they were greeted with the exact gifts that they had asked "Santa" for, coming down the carousel, instead of their luggage. (I assume their luggage came later!) Each gift had their name on the wrapping. A video captured the whole process, including the reactions of elation, including tears of joy, from West Jet's customers.

The video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIElvi2MuEk#t=300>

The company motivated social media followers to promote the video through a promotion on Twitter. If followers tweeted about the video, the company would give free round trip airfare to a family in need, when the video's views reached 200,000. (It presently has over 35,000,000.) In addition, West Jet worked with Ronald McDonald Charities to select the family that would receive the airfare.

2. Continue to periodically tell the story of what your company is doing now.

Telling the story about what your company is doing now can be made more interesting by using humor, and an off-beat scenario. Hillary Caston, a Realtor in California, stages "break-ins" into homes (which are really her listings) that she wants to feature, and has an assistant video the escapades. Acting as if the homes are just ones she thinks are interesting, the videos are a fun way to do a walk-through of the homes, while avoiding being "caught" by the owners.

One example can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn3Du5tRcSs&list=PLABC185C8AADE4C5D>

Social Media Process:

In marketing, you must be constantly changing and adjusting your strategy to: 1) not only reach your market, but 2) reach them in a way that will be meaningful to them and capture their attention. While traditional media still has its place (such as causing interest in social media campaigns), social media, especially social media accessed on mobile devices, is valuable to almost every business now, and will only become increasingly more valuable in the future. Social media accessed through mobile devices is where younger customers are now, and where the market is going in general. So, your game-changing strategy must be deliverable easily to mobile. This means also making sure that your landing pages and web site are also optimized for mobile.

The reasons that many businesses don't see a return out of the time and effort they invest in social media is that the content they post is of little value or meaning to their audiences, or they are constantly just asking for a sale. Instead use this social media process:

1. Provide content that your customers and potential customers will find valuable, engaging and inspiring. Repeat this 3 - 4 times in posts before asking for a sale or a customer response.
2. Implement storytelling parts 1 and 2. Storytelling can be some of the posts in Step #1.

3. After implementing Steps #1 and #2, give a clear, concise call to action in your 4th to 5th post. Ask for the sale, or ask your audience's participation in helping to tell your story, and in promoting your social media campaigns.

Following these steps will set your business apart, and engage and inspire your customers, as well as the public in general.