



Are You Engaged?

Engagement's the thing wherein I'll catch the attention of the consumer! Faris Yakob comments

So goes the current thinking. Forget all that push stuff we can't break through. There's too much clutter, too many channels, too many brands, and 30-second spots don't work anymore anyway. Everyone either gets up for snacks during commercials or screens them out with TiVo. I'll use the web instead, and then consumers will seek me out and bathe in my brand to their hearts' content.

Well, maybe. But with more than 80 million websites out there and a new blog created every second, the web has become more cluttered and fragmented than any other medium. It's no longer enough for

a brand to use digital communications merely as a platform to deliver a message or create an experience. Now smart brands take it a giant step further: "They strive to make their communication channels provide a service value, too."

Or so I co-wrote for an article in *Media* magazine that was published on September 1, 2006, 25 days before Facebook was opened to people outside of academic institutions and three months before the iPhone was announced. We were hinting at what became known as 'branded utility'. But it could perhaps be put under a bigger concept: earning attention – using pieces of brand-created



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software as the primary examples (we called them 'adverttools' but the term 'branded applications' is much better).

Now, of course, branded apps are commonplace - but earning attention is increasingly difficult. And so we have begun to trade an obsession with awareness for an obsession with engagement. We live in an oft-heralded age of engagement, but we should remind ourselves that brands don't want engagement, or awareness, or relationships, except as a means.

As Clay Shirky says, "Behavior is motivation filtered through opportunity" - and technology has changed the opportunity space dramatically.

But the motivation remains the same: to create markets, to stimulate demand, to maintain price inelasticity of demand so that people will happily pay a premium for products that operate at functional parity.

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Engagement simply indicates, perhaps, that those ever-fickle consumers were in fact paying attention to our efforts. The greatest fear of advertising was that in the face of infinite 'clutter' (the charming term we use for everyone else's advertising), we would just be ignored.

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Engagement covers a lot of different ideas - as evinced by the various facets of the Engager™ methodology - but online engagement is most often measured by looking not at how many people had the opportunity to consume our brand

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in some form, but rather what impact this touchpoint had on their immediate behavior (time spent with a site or story or application, comments and approval, re-Tweets and so on). This is definitely a marked improvement. Looking at behavioral intermediate effects, in a world where everyone can both consume and produce content, seems sensible.

Put it this way: if a piece of branded anything falls in the woods and no one Tweets about it, did it have any effect?

Speaking of Facebook, engagement there is crucial because of EdgeRank – the algorithm that determines what surfaces in your newsfeed, which, in part, is a function of how often you have engaged with the brand page, tabs and content.

Thus, if you want your brand content to accrue socially-generated impressions via Facebook, you have to learn how to engage followers on an on-going basis,

a cadence that is very different to the campaign deployments of old.

Whilst considering how to better engage, remember this. Despite the fact that consumers are inherently participatory online, open letters to advertisers like this one – www.bit.ly/blogopenletter – serve well to remind us that many people do not want to engage with us exclusively in the creation of branded content. Unless we provide them reasons to do so.

As ever, the onus is on us to find compelling ways to earn the attention of the consumer. ☺

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