

Boston Hospitality Review

www.bu.edu/bhr

Published by the Boston University School of Hospitality Administration

Digital Marketing: Enabling Brands to Connect With Consumers Through Emotion

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Consumer Behavior - October 2022

About the Author



As a partner at Acom Healthcare, **Jonathan Katz** has worked closely with a broad range of clients in the biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and medical device markets to bring their corporate, product, and service brands to life in a compelling manner. With more than 30 years of industry experience, he has extensive experience in leading brand workshops, strategic development sessions, and advisory boards that are dynamic and highly interactive. Mr. Katz has been committed to helping clients cultivate, actualize, and evolve positive brand experiences that are meaningfully differentiated and customer-focused. His pragmatic approach puts strategy first and is guided by understanding the market and

prioritizing needs of key constituents. Whether launching a game-changing innovation or helping an existing product capture additional share, he is focused on creating persuasive branding that resonates with audiences, shifts behavior, and builds enduring loyalty. He has a keen interest in the intersection of healthcare and hospitality and firmly believes that there is an opportunity to develop optimal brand experiences based on shared objectives.

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Digital Marketing: Enabling Brands to Connect With Consumers Through Emotion



The dominance of digital marketing is a natural outgrowth of the continual rapid advancement of technology and how society has embraced digital platforms as a fundamental way of communicating. With each jump forward, two critical things have happened: technology has become more accessible, and the barriers to sharing information have all but disappeared. The pandemic served as an adoption accelerant as people turned to technology for business, entertainment, information, personal connectivity, and escape (Moneta, Sinclair 2020). In fact, digital communication has never been more entrenched in society, and with emerging technology including AI, is poised to further shape human interaction.

From the marketing perspective, this represents toolsets that are continually refined and reinvented. Frequently there are expectations of not only minding trends but also serving as pioneers and engaging people in the most innovative ways. Despite the whirlwind of constant change, there is one factor to consider when strategizing and engaging in digital marketing that is not apt to alter regardless of technology development. Remember that consumers are people who thrive on relationships. These relationships can be with other people but, importantly, they can also be with brands.

Like relationships with people, those with brands cannot simply be imposed; they must be built on common interest, genuine empathy, meaningful value, trust, and complete authenticity.

Relationships Can Be Rewarding

A 2019 study completed by Forrester Research reported that “customers expect a lot from brands, but they’ll reward these good experiences with loyalty and sales. Above all else, customers want to feel as if they are forming a human connection when they interact with a brand. Customers want their brand interactions to be as easy and convenient as a conversation with a friend” (Linthwaite, 2019).

Although the means of communication have evolved, ironically, the fundamental aspects of assessing audiences have remained stalwart. Investing in the basics of understanding who you are trying to form relationships with, will empower not only digital marketing efforts but also help support meaningful human interaction – the bedrock of relationships and brand loyalty.

Tony Zambito, the self-defined buyer insight evangelist, is known for saying “instead of using technology to automate processes, think about using technology to enhance human interaction” (Zambito, 2019). Zambito coined the term “Intelligent Engagement” and uses it to define an audience’s real-time and social experience with what a brand has to offer. “By the term ‘offer,’ I do not mean just a service or product they are marketing and selling. The buyer experience has wrapped up in it all the components of what constitutes a rewarding, intelligent, social, and engaging experience” (Zambito, 2011).

Much attention gets paid to the rational side of digital marketing. Data and demographics are indeed informative. But relationships, buying decisions, and human behavior are strongly influenced by emotion. This requires an equally deep examination of psychographics and behavioral analysis (Samuel 2016).

Antonio Damasio, Professor of Neurology at the University of Southern California, states that “emotion is a necessary ingredient to almost all decisions. When we are confronted with a decision, emotions from previous, related experiences affix values to the options we are considering. These emotions create preferences which lead to our decisions” (Murray 2013).

Know Your Audiences and How They Feel

Perhaps American Poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou said it most simply, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” (Saitarli, 2019). The opportunity with digital marketing is to harness emotion and create experiences that people identify with, value, and, moreover, want.

To do this effectively, digital marketers must first develop a deep and accurate understanding of their existing and potential target audiences. Although these personas may likely have different backgrounds, interests, and motivations, the overlap they share with the brand bonds them together.

This intersection is often rooted in what marketing guru and best-selling author Seth Godin refers to as “worldviews.” He defines worldviews as “a set of rules, values, beliefs, and biases people bring to a situation” and contends that marketing’s goal should not be to change an individual’s worldview, but instead to identify audiences with similar worldviews and frame your brand story in a consistent manner (Godin, 2012).

The brand and the worldview need to fit together. Clearly, the role of emotion in the formation of and adherence to a worldview is powerful. Emotion can also influence rational thinking and support constructs to bolster decisions. This is even more of a reason to understand the emotions that drive your audience and the commonalities that your brand incites. Once this is done, marketers can imbue their brand communication with content that will resonate in a tone that speaks personally and authentically with its audiences.

Author and Chief Customer Solutions Officer at IPG Health, Jim Joseph, suggests “start by thinking about what your customers want in their lives, and how that can match up with what you can uniquely deliver. Think through what you can give your customers that will help them live their lives, help them get things done, and possibly help them with their work, family, or social life. Start by putting your customers’ needs first and determine the kind of content you can create that could satisfy those needs. [...] Of course, any content you create has to make sense coming from you. If you really know your customers, then you can figure out how to give them what they need to keep them happy and engaged – and how to keep them coming back to you in the process” (Joseph, 2014).

It's also essential to remember that the online brand experience is part of the overall brand experience and can contribute to, or detract from, establishing relationships. Is the user experience intuitive? Is the brand easy to find? Are you communicating with audiences in a manner that they prefer? At the right frequency? With the right content? Is the content helpful, informative, or entertaining? Does the tone fit the brand and

audience? Is your content optimized for different channels yet always consistent with the brand? And ultimately, do your audiences believe that your brand values them and that they are getting value from your brand?

Tempering Technology with Humanity

Traditionally, marketing was solely focused on driving sales and building an ever-expanding base of customers. Technology has changed and with it, so has our society. The goal of generating revenue remains, as it should. How revenue is catalyzed and sustained, however, has evolved.

Marketing and Customer Experience Author Andrew Davis said “content builds relationships. Relationships are built on trust. Trust drives revenue” (Davis, 2022). When the goal is to build meaningful and durable relationships with audiences (who are also customers), it becomes immediately understood that this is not a short-term initiative. It requires a steady commitment to establishing and maintaining brand relevance.

Another element brands must appreciate in the digital environment is audience sentiment about online privacy. Although audiences crave personalized communication, there is a strong movement toward zero-party data. Forrester Research defines this as customers who “intentionally and proactively share with a brand which can include preference center data, purchase intentions, personal context, and how the individuals want the brand to recognize them” (Vas, 2021).

This, along with increasingly stringent data privacy and protection laws in the European Union and heightened tech giant scrutiny throughout the world will again shift how we market in the digital landscape. What will remain fundamental is the need to motivate audiences to want to opt in to communication.

Technology is a tool and must be used to support human interaction. Jacki Arena, a visionary interior designer who has been influencing hospitality design for almost 30 years, understands the importance of maintaining the human element. “The future of hospitality is sure to include a combination of technology and humanity to provide choice guest experiences. If the industry leans too far toward technology, it runs the risk of losing empathy. [...] Technology can never fully replace human connection” (Arena, 2020).

The relevance marketers establish, the emotions and experiences created, and the value that is perceived will all help build and maintain relationships. Regardless of the medium, when the message is relevant and content is providing value, loyalty can take root and revenue will result. It’s human nature and driven by emotion.

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