

# Listen to the data

Improving engagement with the 24/7 connected consumer requires brands to better analyse data to gain a deeper understanding of how people behave online

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**A**s the route to consumers becomes increasingly complex within a technology-driven, always-on network of communication channels, insightful and live planning is vital for the success of effective targeting and campaign strategy.

Traditional marketing methods to engage audiences are no longer effective in the current consumer landscape. Consumers function in such varied ways, communicating across diverse platforms, that in order for marketers to create real engagement, they must seamlessly tie into their conversations. The best way to tap into these is online, using the immense offering of social media and other online networks.

We are living in a 24/7 connected world which means that push messaging is not the only option when trying to engage an audience. To achieve effective communications, brands have to tap into social communities in a way they were not able to before and use their insight and response to forge stronger consumer engagement with campaigns.

There are two main strands to achieving this improved engagement – understanding and reacting to consumer needs in real time and more efficient data mining to gain better-consumer behaviour insights.

For the past few years, my colleagues

and I have been campaigning for integrated agencies that develop innovative technologies which more efficiently interpret data to gain a deeper understanding of consumer communities and deliver targeted, on-demand messages. The idea of engagement planning emerged in response to the rise of new media and the complexity it offered.

The key is not so much what the brand is, but how the brand should behave and how consumers interact with it.

Joshua G2's model 'Integrated Planning' is based on engagement. We take our creative departments' ideas and provide channel-specific insights to develop executions, taking consumers on a seamless journey from brand consideration to purchase decision. This journey has become increasingly cluttered with multiple touchpoints, making it far more complex for marketers to deliver the consumer at the

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required purchase position. This is where engagement planning becomes so vital.

For marketers to make advertising more engaging, campaigns must be relevant to individual consumers' feelings and desires at the exact moment it reaches them. Successful brands need to ensure they are constantly connected to what consumers are thinking, doing, feeling and needing in their daily lives.

Social media monitoring technology, such as Alterian SM2 and data analysis technology such as Consumer Cloud, are providing marketers with the opportunity to improve their consumer connection, as well as understanding their traits and desires. Ad agencies have consistently taken notice of the significance of emerging platforms such as these; unfortunately, many are guilty of simply paying lip service to them and barely scratching the surface in terms of using them to maximise exposure.

Technology has been a catalyst for altering the way people think, interact and purchase so it is vital for marketers to react to the fast-moving consumer – one who is less brand-loyal and more trusting of their peers. In response, marketing should be flexible. There are four key objectives to follow: making the shift from developing creative executions to nurturing customer communities; moving from delivering push communications to creating pull interactions; switching from managing campaigns to building conversations and, perhaps most crucially, listening.

We advise marketers focus on improving the way they glean information from the consumer. One method is to have a strategy to integrate data in more useful ways. With such large pools of data to analyse, it reduces the spectrum for error. Through interrogating data more carefully and efficiently, marketers will be able to make advertising more engaging and targeted. Real-time data and analytics lie at the heart of valuable engagement – the ability to align numerous data sets at a moment's notice is the crux of becoming a leader in the field.

Developing technologies, applications and strategies that connect with consumer communities in an interactive and fast paced world is highly important. We need to enable brands to become an integral part

of these communities, while constantly listening, innovating and connecting. Ultimately, it will be the agencies that demonstrate flexibility, technological capabilities and a thorough understanding of data that will succeed in enticing today's savvy consumer. Steve Jobs once said: "You've got to start with the customer experience and work backwards to the technology." It is this relationship that marketers must have a sturdy grasp of to reach the desired effect.

It doesn't take a genius to see that the purchasing patterns of real people are unpredictable, affected by many hurdles and influencers along the purchase decision journey. Skilfully capturing the consumer and directing them along this journey is far more complex. Despite much conversation taking place offline, a higher proportion of purchases than ever before take place

online, with the final part of the journey happening in an environment very open to social influence. Often the first thing consumers do when they log-on to their computers or look at their smartphones is check social media, instantly opening themselves up to multiple influencer messages which may sway the decision.

Until the moment the customer actually clicks 'buy', they are on a bumpy and unplanned road. It is the marketer's job to understand this process and steer people in the right direction. This can be done by pooling the data available, analysing it more, testing it and testing it again. It is these consumer insights that are the key to owning the purchase decision journey.

Instigating effective planning to render the consumer more interested is the goal of every marketer. The only way to do this is to build closer links to the consumer and try

to predict their movements, likes and dislikes. This must involve a mixture of real-time data from a number of sources, such as social media outlets, but also longer data runs to extrapolate relevant trends. Engagement planning which analyses both elements will ensure marketing messages and targeting is relevant on an immediate and long-term level.

An example of putting effective engagement planning into practice can be demonstrated by a campaign Joshua G2 launched last year for HIV charity Terrence Higgins Trust (THT). By forging closer relationships with the consumer through social media, we were able to share and communicate vital messages to which we

knew the audience would be receptive. The idea was to position THT as a facilitator of peer-to-peer conversations – encouraging gay men to share their experiences around HIV testing as a means to breaking taboos and addressing barriers. We recognised the need to switch THT's focus from being a broadcast organisation to one of audience engagement. However, achieving this was not going to be easy – the gay and bisexual community is both large and eclectic.

We needed an approach that would generate 'organic' insight – to encourage peer-to-peer debate. The communications campaign centred on social media use and was supported by creative activity to address the issue that a vast number of gay men in the UK are not getting tested for HIV. It directed the target audience to a portal where they could talk about their concerns and where they could interact with others. In effect, we repurposed social platforms to become a social research tool. And in the course of this, we conducted a large scale qualitative research programme – stimulated and moderated 'organically' by the target audience themselves.

The campaign allowed us to build close relationships with the community, using immediate conversations on social media from which we gleaned important information on relevant and targeted messages. The campaign attracted more than 10,000 unique visitors to the portal, 862 active participants with more than 3,256 unique visitors to a Facebook page – far greater than any engagement the charity had received previously.

With ever more data becoming available, marketers are being given increasing opportunity to analyse for improved insights. The frequency of data is enabling real-time analyses and real-time connections, opening up huge possibilities to capture consumers faster and direct them more accurately toward that point of purchase. If marketers are to instigate these seamless consumer connections, then technological innovation coupled with real-time data and social media analysis must be at the core of everything they do.

