



Build Your Engagement Engine: Part 2

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THE RUNDOWN

Once it was a straight line, but now the consumer decision journey is an evolving, circular path. It's made up of an ever-growing number of touchpoints between brand and consumer. In part two of a three-part series, David Mogensen, Head of Brand Engagement for YouTube and a former marketer for a Global Fortune 500 company, highlights some of the ways brands are engaging customers at every point by ensuring their brand is always there, reimagining owned media and giving the audience reasons to respond.

At any time of day, hundreds of customers can be found logging onto cosmetics retailer Sephora's Beauty Talk community site, browsing more than a quarter of a million conversations. These Sephora fans come not only to interact with the brand, but with each other. They come to get advice, share tips, and compare products in a category they're passionate about.

Sephora has been a digital pioneer since it launched its first e-commerce site in 1999. It has adapted to the fact that digital is part of every stage of consumers' decision journey. Whether it's on desktop, mobile or in-store, morning, noon or night, Sephora is always asking: "How do we make sure we're there for our customer wherever she wants to be?" Sephora Chief Marketing and Digital Officer Julie Bornstein told one of the Engagement Project's contributors, social media analyst Brian Solis in a YouTube interview.

To capture more of the conversations its fans were having across the web, Sephora gave itself a digital makeover last year. It invested in creating the Beauty Talk community on its website as a place to capture all those conversations and help newcomers and superusers find each other.

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To keep conversations flowing and fans coming back, Sephora's moderators not only answer questions but also ask the community about their everyday lives to keep them engaged, making it one of the most popular sites in the US, with nearly 2 million visitors a month.

What makes the Sephora community work is the combination of three crucial elements that smart marketers are increasingly enlisting to build quality engagement: "being always there", reimaging owned media and giving the audience a reason to respond.

1. BE "ALWAYS THERE"

The shift toward digital has accelerated the traditional purchase decision journey for many consumers. Today, when people decide to buy something, it may be only a matter of moments between that decision and the purchase online. Always-on content means your brand is ready to help and bridge the gap between business hours and customer behavior. No brand can afford to miss those moments. Consumers need information and they expect brands to supply it. If a brand doesn't, their competitors almost certainly will.

The web lets you be always-on and always there, but truly serving your customers means more than just having your brand show up when someone searches for it. It's about meeting people's needs. It's about being there when your brand is relevant, even if consumers don't know it.

Like this search result from I Can't Believe It's Not Butter, which answers the search for “healthy breakfast” with a recipe that’s sure to appeal to their target audience. Or this clever campaign from Snickers, which appeared when people misspelled words.

Home Depot is an expert at being always there. Whether you’re trying to figure out how to program your thermostat, repair a toilet, or tile a bathroom floor, Home Depot’s how-to videos are easy to find when people are looking. Expedia does something similar for those seeking travel inspiration; its travel guides help you choose between Los Angeles, London or Lombok.

Things to consider:

- Make a list of the always-on media channels relevant for your brand. Where do your customers go to look for information, reviews, photos, video, or talk to others about what you do? How many do you use? How do people use these channels differently on different devices?
- When consumers search, what comes up for your brand on those channels? Type your brand, category and related searches (like “dry-hair” for shampoos) into the top search engines. What do you see? Are you there in each case?

2. REIMAGINE “OWNED MEDIA”

For most brands, the first place to start when thinking about always being there is your owned media. Outside of a physical location, owned properties are usually the greatest opportunity to immerse people in your full brand experience.

Now, for most marketers, this isn’t an especially new concept. But in order to be everywhere your consumer goes, you need to think about about it more broadly. Whereas once owned media was [www.your-brand.com](#) on the desktop, today it stretches across multiple screens and platforms.

Some of the most engaging brands are thinking about the interplay across their different owned channels and how each helps the customer at different stages in their journey. Coming from the auto industry, I love Nissan’s “silent salesman” window stickers with QR codes that call up all kinds of content about the car on your mobile phone — even when it’s the dealer’s day off. That’s technology improving the shopping experience. So is GoPro’s immensely popular YouTube channel, which showcases the amazing videos customers produce with its cameras.

Things to consider:

- How do consumers use your owned media channels to learn about the brand? How does that change at different points in their decision journey? How can your owned media channels enhance that journey before, during and after purchase?
- What does this experience look like on a phone, on a tablet, on a connected TV?

3. GIVE YOUR AUDIENCE A REASON TO RESPOND

Being always there across screens and platforms is of little value if you don't give people a reason to respond. Remember when you were a kid and your parents asked you to do something? The typical response was: "Why?" If your experience was like mine, your parents would say, "Because we asked you to." That's how a lot of brands seem to think about getting people to their owned properties. "Follow us." "Subscribe." "Like us." Why? Because we asked you to.

It wasn't compelling as a child and it certainly isn't now as an adult. Consumers are eager to take part, but only if you offer them something that interests or benefits them: a moment of entertainment, helpful information, something shareable that makes them look cool, interesting or smart.

It could be a more tangible reward or just an opportunity to be heard. In the case of Starbucks, it's both. They regularly engage customers by offering them a free coffee or giving them a chance to invent entirely new drinks through owned sites like My Starbucks Idea. Marriott's Travel Brilliantly site similarly mixes the brand's ideas with innovations suggested by customers. Sometimes, it's just great content that drives brand recall and favorability. There are too many great examples to list here. Check out the YouTube Ads Leaderboard for each month's fan favorites.

Things to consider:

- What value do you offer consumers who visit your owned channels? Are you offering entertainment, education, peer recommendations and feedback?
- Who can you partner with to create content that's authentic and interesting to your audience?

At a time when marketing is rapidly changing, focusing on the touchpoints in the new consumer journey is one of the keys to a strategy that won't be disrupted by next month's

new platform or device upgrade. If you can always be there for your customers at the moments that matter, they will reward you. Looking at those touchpoints, like Sephora did, could also inspire you to reimagine your owned media so you can capitalize on change and offer customers new reasons to keep coming back.



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