

CES Report: As technology advances, assistance is the new battleground for growth

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As attendees checked out the latest in technological advancements at this year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Google President of the Americas Allan Thygesen sat down with top marketing executives to talk about what the latest technology trends mean. Joining him at a C Space Storyteller Event were Dean Evans, CMO of Hyundai Motor America, and Keith Bryan, senior VP of media engagement & personalization for Best Buy.

The focus? How marketers can drive their businesses to better assist the new super-empowered consumer.

"Today's consumer can get whatever she wants, whenever she wants it," said Thygesen during his opening remarks. So marketers should embrace that "and focus on the expanding opportunities to create useful, meaningful connections throughout daily life."

Armed with the latest technology, consumers are more curious, more demanding, and more impatient than ever before.

Assistance is really the new battleground for growth. As expectations of the empowered consumer continue to rise, the most assistive brands will win.

– Allan Thygesen

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“When we want something, we expect our phone to tell us where the product is being sold at a store nearby, and even tell us if it’s in stock this very moment. And when we are ready to transact, we expect it to be frictionless and fast,” Thygesen added. Brands “have to be ready to assist. And assistance is really the new battleground for growth. As expectations of the empowered consumer continue to rise, the most assistive brands will win.”

Evans said that Hyundai’s efforts to assist consumers have focused on pain points, most notably friction. “Frictionless retail is happening all around us,” he said. But the “elephant in the room” is that car-buying “doesn’t pass the frictionless test,” especially for millennials, who want to handle as much of the process online as possible. “Speed is the number one consumer demand today,” he added. To speed things along and better assist its customers, Hyundai recently unveiled its Shopper Assurance program to address other consumer pain points including transparent pricing and flexible test drives.

Both Hyundai and Best Buy have seen technology dramatically alter the consumer journey.

Evans said Hyundai has seen the average car shopper go from visiting five different car lots in the past to fewer than two now. Bryan noted that many in retail were consumed by the “showrooming threat” in recent years, afraid that shoppers would walk in, find something they liked, pull out a device to compare prices, and buy it online.

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demand today.

– Dean Evans

But instead of seeing showrooming as a threat, Best Buy leaned into it. Consumers are looking for solutions, Bryan said, especially in a category as potentially confusing as electronics. “Assistance is probably part of our DNA, because our brand purpose is to help customers pursue their passions and enrich their lives with the help of technology. So unless we succeed in being helpful then we haven’t been achieving our brand purpose.”

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– Keith Bryan

“To do that well you need data. You need the technology to do something with the data. And you need the media ... to make sure you can reach customers for each micro-moment or for each opportunity to assist them,” Bryan said. “We try to make sure we have the best data and have modeled it correctly and pressure tested it.”

Data also comes into play in the marketing and media mix. According to Evans, it’s vital to secure support from the business to invest in media, especially when trying to break away from old ways of thinking. Car dealers, for example, have been trained to keep an eye out for national TV spots, and when they start seeing less of them on the air, they want to know why. Now, he can show them. He has a dashboard that shows him how all of the brand’s digital investments are impacting key business KPIs. Tools like these have become essential to convincing internal stakeholders that the bets marketing is making will drive business growth.

Best Buy is experiencing something similar. “Eight years ago, 80% of our media dollars were spent on traditional media,” said Bryan. “Today we’re spending more than 90% of media dollars on digital.” That’s a big shift. And he’s able to justify it because over that same time period the company has been investing in digital-attribution abilities. Today, it can do sophisticated attribution modeling beyond last click. And it can measure store visits driven by its digital media spend.

Ultimately, though, the data and technology and modeling is much more than simply marketing. It makes assisting customers easier. “We have to make sure that the data and the touchpoints and all the assets—whether its an offer, a feature, or price—has to flow fluidly through all the channels, and that includes in-store on a mobile device,” said Bryan, who admitted “there’s a lot of room for us to continue to improve and innovate.”

And those improvements will help marketing drive business growth and separate successful enterprises from the rest of the pack.

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