

MEET GENERATION

YOUR NEW CONNECTED CUSTOMERS



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insightpool



Meet Generation C: The Connected Community

Born digital, Generation C isn't about age; it's about a connected generation where C stands for connected. This group is spanning generations and have been brought together through technology to consume and distribute content across every screen in every scenario.

It represents a significant share of consumerism. Simply said, this category of connected consumers is different from the traditional customers and employees around which many organizations are modeled.

To reach them requires a different approach. To see them and the value they represent to an organization takes vision and a different philosophy. Instead, most executives or decision-makers employ an "us vs. them" mentality. They see the world as they know it rather than seeing the world for what it is or what it's becoming. In this Brian Solis ebook, you will get to meet Gen C and see how being social and human will help you connect smarter with the right people you are looking to build relationships with using social media.

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“I LOVE HARD SELLS FROM SALES PEOPLE.” - NO ONE EVER



Social media is one of the most profound technological and societal advancements of our time. It is this generation’s telephone, television, and in many ways, its printing press, democratizing information while elevating and uniting the people who create and share it. The socialization of media has connected billions of people around the globe, thrust humankind into a real-time world, and forever changed how we communicate, discover, share and work.

This human network has evolved into one of the most efficient, expeditious, expansive, and approachable media networks to date. But we still have a lot to learn as users learning to balance these newfound platforms between accidental narcissism and individual empowerment. We also have much to learn as professionals seeking new ways to connect, learn and grow in a transparent and much more human era.

Social Media was Just the Beginning.

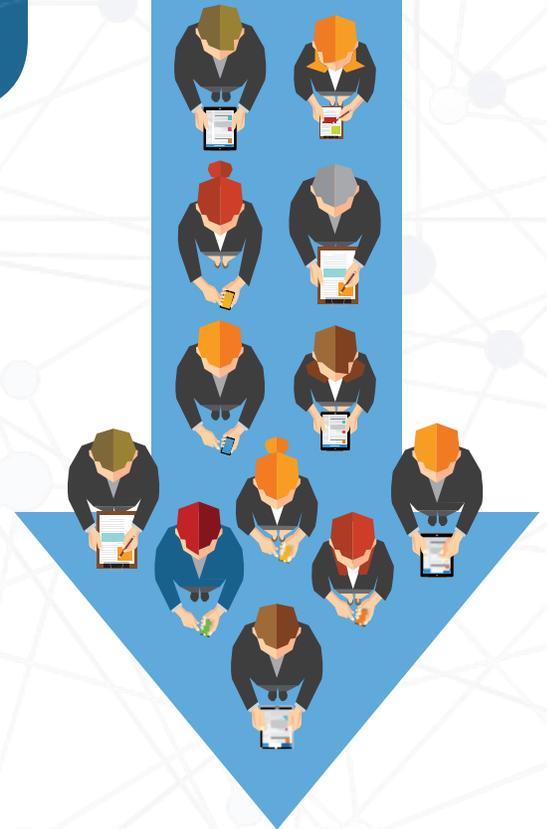
Technology is changing everything. Smartphones, smart watches, The Internet of Things, wearables, drones, self-driving cars: it's pretty easy to get caught up in and confused by tech these days. It's part of our day-to-day life now and in many ways, it is our life.

The thing about all of this new tech and everything that still lies ahead is that it's not only inevitable, it's also incredibly disruptive...or at least it could be. Social, mobile, cloud, real-time, and everything around it is not only affecting and shaping our way of life, but also changing how we work and do business. And it's really just the beginning.

Innovation and disruptive tech does just that, it disrupts markets and introduces new direction and/or changes behavior. And thus, we enter an era of "Digital Darwinism," a time when society and technology evolve, challenging how businesses adapt (or don't).

Businesses today are met with unique challenges and opportunities that we can best appreciate if we take a step back and look at everything that's changing, why it's changing, and what's different. Look beyond technology and appreciate how innovation is affecting people's lives, how they work, learn, play, and also how they make decisions and impact the decisions of others.

Taking a few steps back creates an opportunity to get perspective, to see what's different out there, and to help inspire new strategies that make a real impact and genuine impression in customer engagement. This is how businesses will learn how to truly build relationships with a new generation of connected customers.



They're different. They're more informed and demanding. They're a tad narcissistic (okay, maybe more than a tad). They're also expecting businesses to know who they are, what they stand for, and what's important to them today as well as their aspirations.

But there's more...

Because of technology, your customers are changing. They don't follow brands the way previous generations did. Relationships are defined differently. They are influenced by peers rather than marketing.

92% *of people trust recommendations from people they know, whereas only 36% of people actually trust branded content, according to Nielsen.*



**People are the new influencers in aggregate.
Customers want businesses to be more human.**

This is the end of business as usual and the beginning of a more human, a more personal era of business. The irony, or the beauty of it, is that social and disruptive technology are (finally) giving businesses the opportunity to use tech to be more human more personal.

It takes a new perspective and a new approach to leverage technology in a way that allows you to engage your customers and to also engage the customers who influence them. That's true engagement. And, that's the future of sales, marketing, and service.

Tackling Antisocial Social Marketing and Selling Strategies



You know that social media is important. You also get that other people in your organization are starting to understand the power of social media. You're just not all doing it together in a way that people see as unified or collaborative. Some are selling. Some are marketing. Some are serving customers. Many aren't doing anything. The point is that there are real people on the other side of every status update and every screen. If the future of business is supposed to be about relationships, that means that you have to work together *inside* to better engage *outside*.

CUSTOMERS DON'T SEE DEPARTMENTS, THEY SEE ONE

BRAND

Customers don't see departments, they see one brand. You have to act like it.



Still, many use social media to market at audiences or to sell to faceless prospects. That's anti-social in my book, and it should be in yours, too. That's the thing about social media. It's social. Every network that defines the social media universe is comprised of real people, not audiences or prospects, using technology to connect, communicate, share, and discover with one another. We're talking about human beings who are intentionally building meaningful relationships and looking to add and get value in one way or another in all they do online.

Then brands came along.

They jumped on every network looking to reach social customers where their attention was focused. But rather than getting to know people - why they were there, what was important to them, and where value could be added, many brands simply used these new social networks for creative selling and marketing. We still saw people as audiences, and we still believed audiences were prospects.



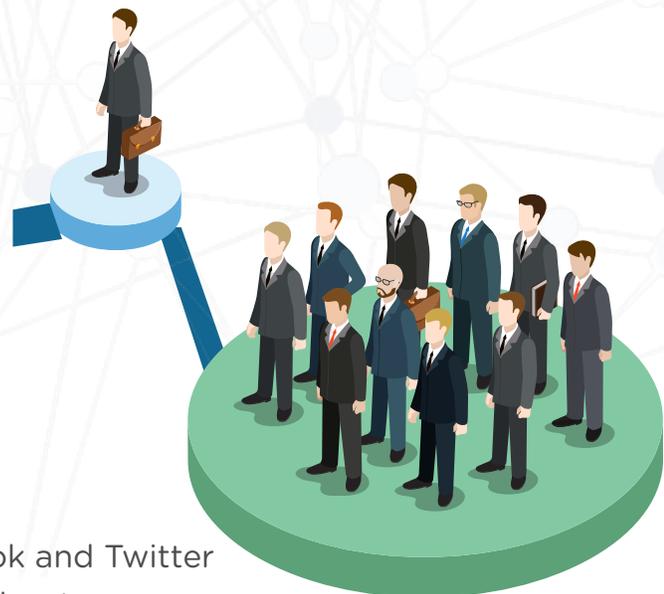
We missed that these social platforms actually changed customer behaviors and expectations. Over time, with every new network and the relationships people forged through following and being followed by others, they become more informed, empowered and, more importantly, influential. In many ways, connected customers built communities around themselves that were larger than any audience traditional media or marketing budget could buy. Everyday people became brands while brands were using social technologies to try to act like people.

That's right.

“People are now brands and brands are now people. Or at the very least, it's what or who brands must strive to be...”

I ask with sincerity, given all this, is your business antisocial today?

I understand you may have Facebook and Twitter presences. Your business may broadcast on YouTube. Perhaps your executives are blogging or someone is blogging on their behalf.



If you're among the more sophisticated organizations, the team is probably subscribing to elaborate monitoring services to listen more effectively. And, with all of the social objects produced inside the organization, it's come to the point where a content management system or social media management system is necessary to scale.

Social networks usher in an era of transparency and authenticity, and these two elements represent the hallmark of your corporate social media program. You are walking the two-way street, and you're already successfully building a community rich with the 3F's (friends, fans, and followers).

How can your business possibly be antisocial?

I had to look it up.

Antisocial is defined as anything that goes against the laws and customs of society. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and social networks of all shapes, sizes, and focuses are thriving societies in their own right. Each produces a unique culture, one that you're more than familiar with. You are, after all, a citizen of one or more social networks before you're a corporate citizen. At a minimum, you as an individual contribute to the culture of each of the societies to which you belong.



ALL This Technology Is Making US AntiSocial



As a consumer, these are your networks and as a result, you create a personal ecosystem. You are at the center of your experiences and as such, the information that finds you, the information you share, and the people with whom you connect are yours to define. These actions contribute to the lifestyle and value of the network and you take pride in the relationships, community and stature you earn.

But when you take a step back to examine many of the leading business examples in social media, it's clear that many are in actuality, illustrations of traditional marketing masquerading as genuine engagement. Are brands acting as good citizens? Are they contributing to the customs of society or are they taking away from the experience?

If you were to run a quick study of your social activities or those of your favorite brands, you may find that marketing at communities rather than investing in their usefulness. Contests, polls, promotions, news releases, and events are balanced by impassive updates or questions. The activities that fill the space between marketing updates are questionable or unconvincing reinforcements of why people are compelled to connect in the first place. The missing value of why people should stay connected creates a void that only expands with every day that passes.

We think in campaigns.

Content is programmatic.

Narrative or imagery is written for lawyers and executives who approve them, not the people we are trying to engage.

While brands engage with customers on social networks, customers walk away with an experience that is the ultimate judgment of value. Here, we are presented with an incredible opportunity to strengthen customer ties. We're given a well of insight to put into action. We're presented with a stage to show brand empathy and earn relevance through our actions and words. Are we embracing the opportunities before us, or in the end, does our investment equate to traditional marketing in a new interactive design?

The question is, do you know what your customers want from you?

- ▶ It's an important question to ask. If you're not contributing to the value of these digital societies, you may unintentionally take away from it.
- ▶ With all of the excitement around creating a social business, we can only benefit from knowing how to improve the experiences of existing and prospective customers. Otherwise we may be talking more than we are really listening.
- ▶ It starts with knowing the "why."
- ▶ Why would a customer Like or Follow your brand today and tomorrow?
- ▶ This "why" should be front-and-center of all that you do, taking into account that customers may expect different approaches from you.
- ▶ Some are looking for engagement or entertainment.
- ▶ Others are seeking information to make a decision or to learn more.
- ▶ Some may need customer service.
- ▶ Many are looking for promotions and deals.
- ▶ Plenty are looking for insight, inspiration or leadership.
- ▶ Whatever the reasons are, it's time to know what your customers want and to design social programming around a meaningful engagement.

“New media channels represent a new highway for driving messages and brand stories to desired audiences.”

Relationships represent channels and connections that bring people, information, and things together. But what many fail to realize is that the social consumer represents an intelligent audience with an audience of audiences of their own. They are in control of their experiences and while they may connect with their favorite brands in their network of choice today, without providing value or a constructive engagement, attention spans will wander.

Much like banner blindness in digital advertising, individuals will eventually tune out the brands that fail to demonstrate relevance in their social stream. What's worse is that eventually they may take the unfortunate action of an unfollow or unlike as they realize that they are in control of curating the quality of their stream. With one click, they will bid farewell to the brands, even those they love, if they don't introduce value. This is a harsh reality that my friend Andrew Blakeley, a digital marketer, once attempted to spotlight. He followed 40 brands over the span of a week who, in one way or another, caught his attention. Of the 40 brands, only one gave him a stated reason and consistent reminder about why he should stay connected.

“Give people something to talk about—something to think about. Give people purpose, sustenance, and direction.”





While each network boasts a unique culture, your organization too is home to a distinct culture that defines the brand. The corporate culture should adapt to coalesce with the way of life in each network. Business units should work together under a common goal of earning customer satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. This is about earning relevance, which is the opposite of anti-social behavior. This is about demonstrating why someone should connect with you not just today, but every day. Give people a reason. Give people something to talk about—something to think about. Give people purpose, sustenance, and direction.

Remember, it's about engagement and about being engaging! In the process, you'll find that becoming a social business is a function of design, collaboration, and reinforcement, but ultimately it's a measure of how customers view your brand within these digital societies.

Without purpose and collaboration, social will always be just another thing that businesses use to defer the inevitable: change.



Social Business is the Sum of Social Media Marketing, Social Customer Service, Social Selling and More

There's a real need for businesses to become social...to become human. Our work is just beginning. Perhaps observing the gap between the expertise we have and the insight we need to make a difference is where we need to begin.

The vision was to use these new forums to share, communicate, solve problems, inspire, and build relationships that spanned digital and physical spaces and extended across the social networks of like-minded peers. Customer service, marketing, HR, sales, and product development would all become social and would, in the process, become human.

For over 10 years now, social media champions have pushed forward against rigid business models, skepticism, politics, and anything that didn't appreciate change or new perspectives that differed from traditional processes or conventions.



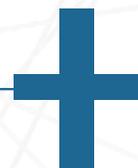
Progress is underway, albeit slow. And while change is gradual and progressive, some would argue that we could be further along. After a decade or longer, many are still having the same conversations.



People are human.



Technology can make us more human.



Engaging in relevant ways in new networks takes a personal approach.



There is indeed ROI here.

If people don't feel or see us in these new ways, then they don't feel or see us in their life.

As a leader, it's your responsibility to lead...not just manage. Your champions are fighting because they are the very people you're trying to reach. They represent the future of your business. Just because you're profitable today does not ensure your viability or relevance unless you compete for it, unless you earn it. If they don't believe you're listening, your champions will leave. And thus marks the beginning of the end.

MORE Questions MORE Answers





Those companies that “get it” and invest more in learning about their digital customers’ behaviors, preferences, expectations, influencers, and who their own influential reach, will carry a significant competitive advantage over those that figure it out later (if at all).

Instead of technology becoming the solution, it represents an enabler to do something greater. In the end, change happens to us or because of us. It takes people like you to lead transformation while everyone else reacts to it.

Social networks represent the real world to many people. This, of course, sounds crazy. But think about it. We live life with our phones as the first screen. There are rare moments of solitude in our lives as our devices prevent us from having a moment to ourselves. Social is introducing an unbreakable and productive digital gravity that pulls us toward our trusted networks without question.



It's our epicenter.

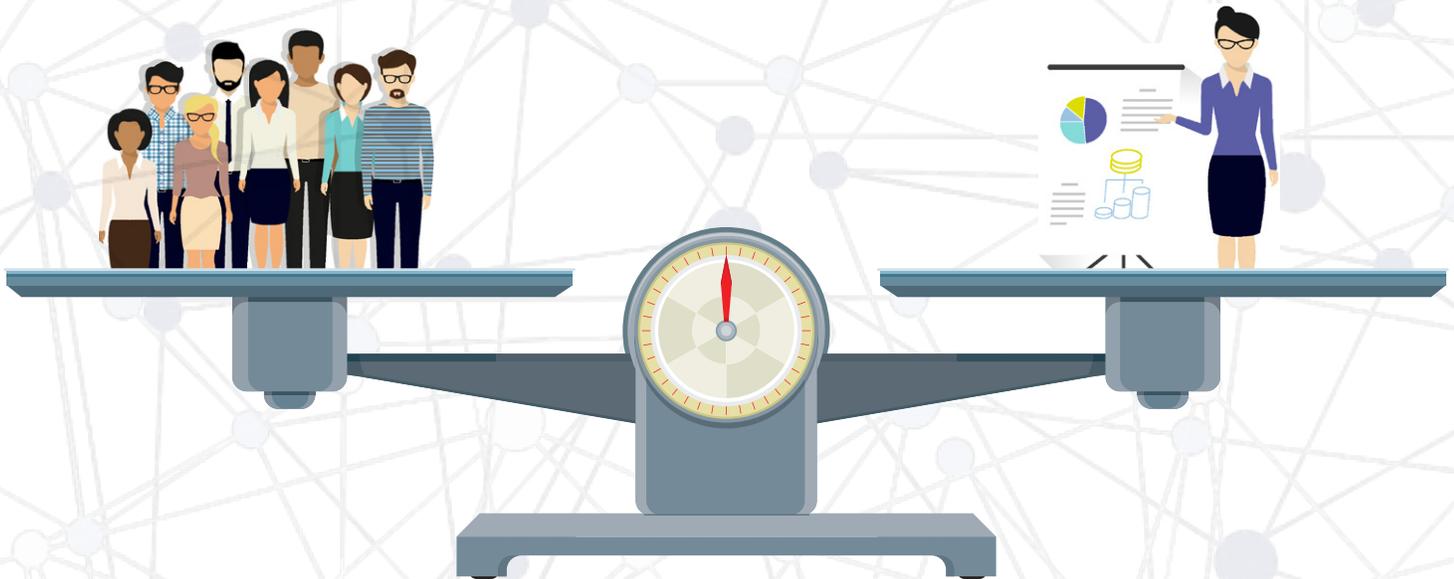
It's us.

As a brand, as a strategist, think of any social network as a physical community. Because that's what it is. They are tribes in which people join one another because of shared interests, passions, challenges, and aspirations.

Before we can say anything, before we can build anything, we must listen. We must feel empathy. We must understand the culture and the dynamics of any community before we attempt to join it. Doing so feeds us humility and empathy.

these very human qualities will in turn inspire engaging strategies that contribute value into the communities we wish to join.

What Do You Stand For?



To change, to make things matter to real people, everything must begin with a new perspective and approach. **#WDYSF**.

What

Do

You

Stand

For

#WDYSF = An important question you must answer before expecting anyone to stand alongside you.

What is the value you wish to add? What is the value you wish to take away? How does engagement make things better or create new possibilities and opportunities for all involved?

No matter how much we say or publish in social networks, it doesn't matter. If we do not see it differently, we cannot approach it differently.

If we cannot show up humble yet poised to offer value, we are just another person in this digital room talking, maybe even yelling, to get people to pay attention. That's not what this is about.

This is about community. This is about standing for something. This is about seeing something that others are missing. This is about doing what others cannot or will not. This is about inspiring a movement and building a community to bring your vision to life. And, this is true for anything and everything—not just social media.

This is your community. This is our community.

Remember: Community is much more than belonging to something; it's about doing something together that makes belonging matter.

Community is much more than belonging to something; it's about doing something together that makes belonging matter.



The New Customer Experience



As marketers or sales professionals, it's easy to forget that when you share an experience you have with a product or company— whether it's through a tweet, an online post, review, video, image, rant, praise, etc.— it helps a stranger make a decision about what to do next. These shared experiences provide someone else with the honest, real-world information they're looking for to make a decision about what to do, buy, try, etc. With a smartphone in hand, today's customer has access to in-the-moment information.

In many ways, we are the people we are trying to reach. However, our perspective changes when we crossover and become marketers, salespersons, service representatives, and day-to-day business strategists.



Customers aren't following the customer journey you designed because they're too busy hacking it. No matter how much journey work you do, no matter how creative your marketing, no matter how responsive your website, no matter how much technology you invest in, customers trust the experiences of others over your words (in other words, branding) and the path you've laid out for them.

Businesses today must invest in experiences because that's what people want. Customers aren't only looking only for funny or creative campaigns, product announcements, transactions, apps, retargeted ads, or anything that resembles a traditional funnel.

This is a time for innovation in how we market and sell.

Speaking at WWDC in 1997, Steve Jobs replied to a heckler in the audience who questioned his "human" approach to innovation. He replied in a heartfelt, almost vulnerable way, "You've got to start with the customer experience and work backwards..."

“ You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work backwards... ”
-Steve Jobs



TECHNOLOGY

FUTURE

MEDIA

INNOVATION

MULTI-TASKING

INTER-RACIAL

Born Digital: Meet Generation C, A New Generation of Connected Customers

Let's spend some time better understanding how technology affected your markets and society at large. As you'll see, it's created a different "type" of customer and at the same time, it helps us see people for who they are and really want to be.

Indeed, technology permeated society to the point where the vast separation between professional and personal access was obliterated. The line between online and offline has been forever obscured, creating an always-on society with an insatiable appetite for consumption and connectedness.

This divide reveals a stunningly under- appreciated challenge facing any organization that hopes to survive in an era of connectedness. With foresight, it's clear that the situation before us is dire.



It is how decision makers react now that either defines their destiny or seals their fate. In a world where Digital Darwinism rewards those who adapt as technology and society evolve, I believe many models governing organizations not only are outdated, but also reflect management's vision in how it competes for the future.

Social media, mobile, real-time, et al, has already shaped the digital lifestyle that everyday people, your consumers AND your employees, embrace as second nature or simply as life itself. It's not just a Millennial or a Generation Z thing...it's everyone who uses a smartphone, a tablet, or any smart device and the social and mobile apps that power them. It's someone who takes selfies and takes pictures and videos at every live event. It's also that person who checks Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook each morning before email for mentions of their name and to see what they might have missed.

It is, for all intents and purposes, you and me.

This isn't about age; this is about a connected generation that I call **Generation-C**, where C stands for connected. It represents a significant share of consumerism. Simply said, this category of connected consumers is different from the traditional customers and employees around which many organizations are modeled.

To reach them requires a different approach. To see them and the value they represent to an organization takes vision and a different philosophy. Instead, most executives or decision-makers employ an "us vs. them" mentality. They see the world as they know it rather than seeing the world for what it is or what it's becoming.

#AdaptorDie

Connected customers are growing. Traditional customers are fading away.

To compete for the future takes an investment in new philosophies and models where relevance and resilience become part of the corporate DNA.

Traditional management practices and the structures that support them are not only aging, but are also liabilities and competitive disadvantages.

It's not just today's competitors who will realize that connected consumers are a different breed. Unforeseen competitors, some that may not even exist today, will see what it is that you do not to change market direction, and as a result, take market share

This is a time that requires great introspection and empathy. This is a time for leadership. The goal now is to open our perspective to explore a world that we do not know in order to lead our organization in a direction of greater relevance.

We must discover what truly is valuable to Generation-C, why, and how to use these insights to inspire more desirable products, services, and even stories and messages. The next step is, of course, to bring them to life through new processes, systems, and directives.

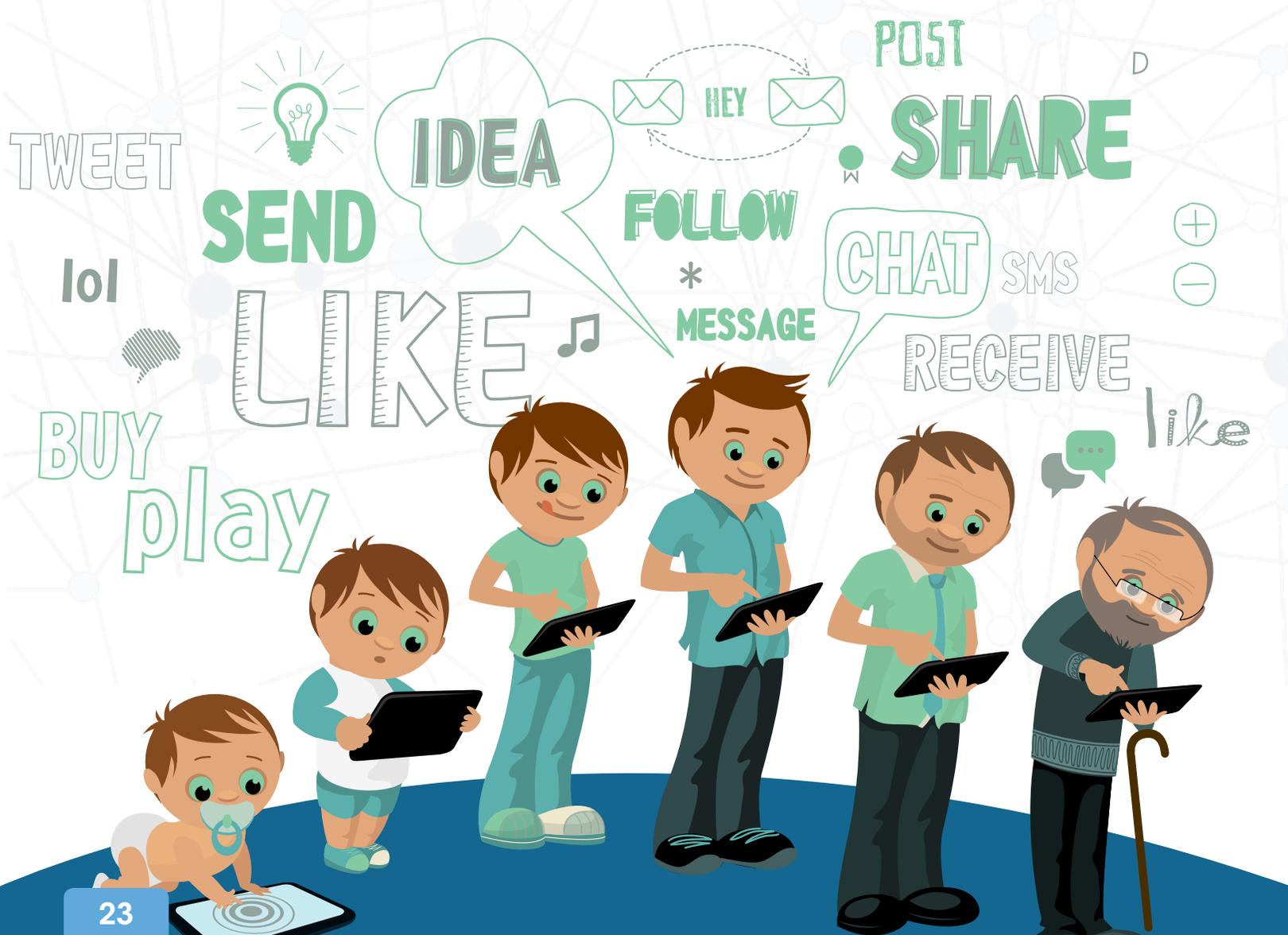
This is why I believe that the future of business takes leadership, not management. Executives, employees, and other stakeholders or shareholders who do not share in the desire to earn relevance with a different customer are standing in the way of progress.



Born Digital: We are the Champions

Well-meaning decision makers don't know what they don't know. As such, they will need a little help, and this is an opportunity for champions who believe in the need for organizational transformation.

The case for change won't be won by new technology alone. It's not social, mobile, or real-time that presents the answer in and of itself. It is the affect they have on consumer behavior that matters.



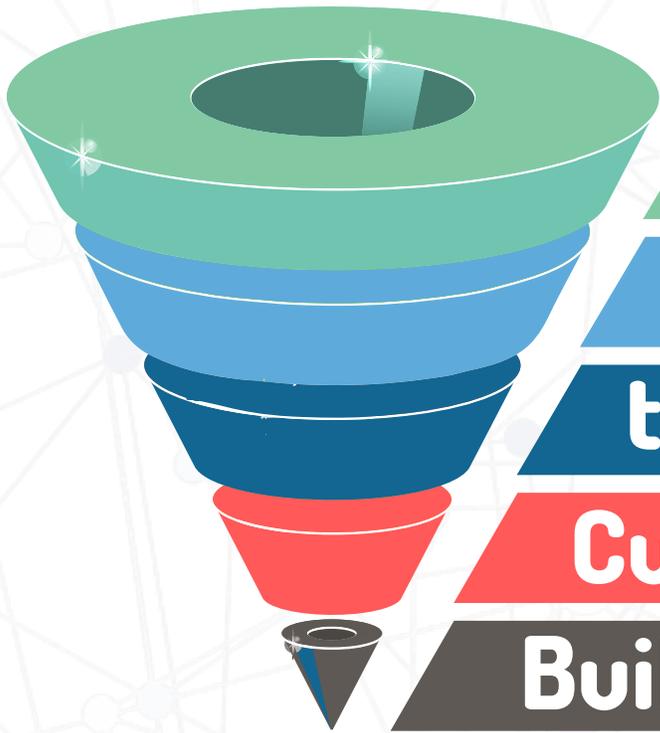
Attempting to convince anyone of the need for change should never include mentions of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, iPhones, iPads, et al. These are means but not a means to an end. What's required is an understanding of market trends and impact, missed opportunities vs. actual short and long term losses, the balance of connected vs. traditional consumerism, and a better understanding of how innovation in the product roadmap will prevent disruption while disrupting others through innovation.

Technology is merely an enabler for relationships...and a powerful one at that. But without vision, purpose, direction, or meaning, new channels are the conduits for old reasoning and convictions. Without understanding technology and its relationship with behavior, without aligning a bigger mission or vision with what we are trying to do we are just managing businesses the way we always have. We are not moving in any new direction.

This is a time to lead the next era where ideas and relationships are "born digital" because they're inspired by people and their intentions and aspirations. Rather than discount how, when, and where people connect...innovate! Born digital is a mantra and a philosophy that invests in products, services, and supporting systems that align with the expectations and behaviors of Generation-C consistently, across every screen, in the context of every scenario.

Born digital doesn't take what already exists and attempt to repackage it as something new. Born digital isn't conceived by groups of strategists or executives who question the logic of a selfie. Seriously. Born digital is the result of empathy and inspiration to do something extraordinary in the truest meaning of the word...something that is designed for a new generation...purpose built to deliver unique and exceptional experiences.

Born digital is deliberate and it is inspired. But to conceive it takes vision to see what others do not and courage to do what others will not or cannot.



**Unbundling the
Cluster Funnel
to Engage
Customers and
Build Relationships**

For decades, businesses have developed sales, marketing and service strategies around the funnel as we know it. Awareness, interest, desire, and action, describe the likely steps a customer may take in making a decision. Over the years, it was assumed that the linear path would also continue through a transaction to a state of loyalty and ultimately advocacy. To this day, the process of customer engagement is designed to shepherd people along this delicate path. But what if this isn't the path Generation-C follows?

Here's a hint: it's not.

I call this linear perspective to traditional sales and marketing the "Cluster Funnel," and it's meant to demonstrate how a customer lifecycle when viewed in aggregate is broken.

Without awareness there can be no consideration. The question is, where does awareness begin for a connected customer versus one that's traditional?



Businesses today invest to varying degrees and effectiveness in marketing, advertising, and communications strategies. To earn customer attention it isn't a switch that toggles on and off, it is a state of perpetual engagement. The blaring noise that customers continually experience has forced them to adapt. Second nature acts as a defense mechanism to tune out the constant barrage of marketing messages and clever campaigns. Awareness at the top of the funnel is elusive but never more important.

In reality, the funnel is less about Awareness, Interest, Decision, and Action (A.I.D.A.)—we'll also add Loyalty to give businesses the benefit of the doubt). Instead, it is a superficially designed production with 6 distinct acts:

- The Persuasion
- The Distance
- The Hook
- The Re-Enchantment
- The Exchange
- The Governance



The Persuasion: Convince the prospects that they need your product without considering the need, experience, or the reward. This is done through clever marketing and advertising. Contests and campaigns also raise awareness to create need or the perception of it.



The Hook: Emphasize the reasons to buy in the moment rather than the long-term outcome. Packaging, price, rebate, gifts, and promotions are often the lure necessary to convert browsing into action.



The Exchange: Convert the prospect into a customer. This is the moment someone officially becomes a customer. There is an exchange beyond the payment for a product. Value must now be delivered on both sides of the relationship.



The Distance: Complete the transaction. The distance, the space between the brand promise and the customer experience, begins to spread. Should a customer encounter anything negative, the distance is then measured by the steps it takes for a customer and business to connect and bring about resolution.



The Re-Enchantment: Realizing that the customer experience is not completely understood, this stage is dedicated to finding ways to keep customers interested and coming back. Strategies include discounts, promotions, exclusive offers, loyalty programs, and beta tests, among others.



The Governance: Once customers are enticed, or in some cases ensnared, the relationship moves into a state of customer relationship management. You're now forever known as a number with a record on file. Conversations are now managed as tickets and placed within a queue for engagement and resolution. Your service level and attention level can be tied to your position within the customer hierarchy.

For the sake of this discussion, let's assume that everyone understands the value of the funnel (or at least the idea of it) to attract customers and invest in long-term relationships. But what if businesses were investing their time and resources in the wrong places? What if where we think we can impress upon customers or get them to notice us is not at all where their attention is actually focused?

These are important and timely questions to answer as they will reveal a new journey to embark upon. The truth is that what we know and what we need to know are in fact separated by an unfolding reality that requires immediate intervention.

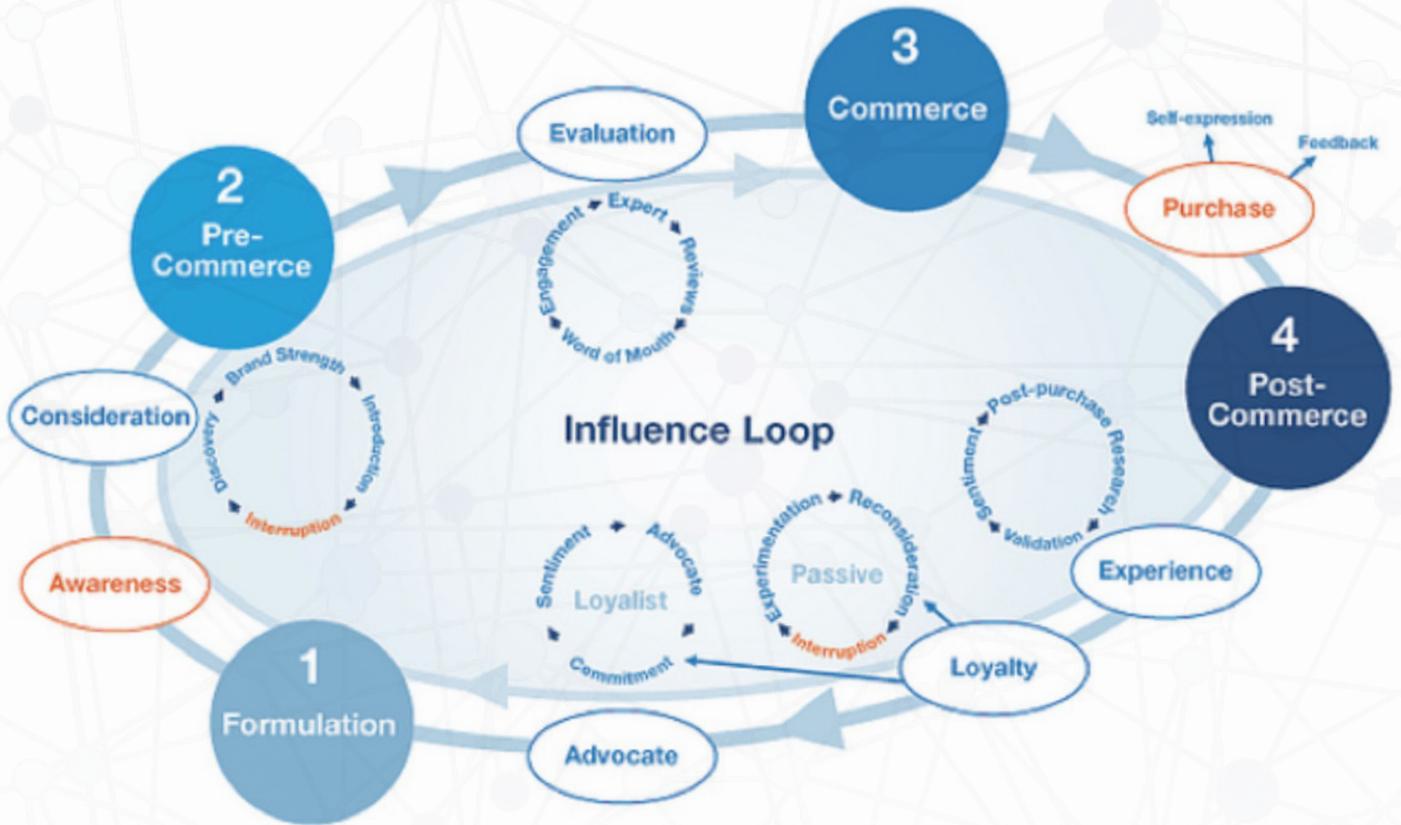
Your market has already been disrupted. The “C” change in consumerism has ushered in a genre of connected consumers. As a result, your customers are learning about you or your competitors differently. How they make decisions does not at all follow a linear path. How they are influenced and in turn influence others is profound in its reach and effect. What was once a simplistic, representation of a fluted customer journey is in fact much more dynamic and connected.

Engagement is as much art as it is science. But a better understanding of the behavior of your connected customers, or “Generation- C,” takes practice of the social sciences such as digital anthropology and psychology, sociology, and ethnography. Understanding behavior exposes patterns in consumer activity that in and of itself reveals new touch points. Appreciating how customers form and make decisions and why they make those decisions inspires empathy and creativity.

This is the key to influence.

What you’ll learn following your research is everything. Most notably, your business will now earn clarity in how and where to focus efforts on shaping decisions and experiences pre-, during, and post commerce. Additionally, you’ll learn the specific factors, people, technology, communities, and resources that affect every stage of your customer’s journey. The results will contribute to a far more accurate point of view that tailors marketing, sales, service, and loyalty strategies to be more effective and engaging. But it won’t stop there.





Inspired by McKinsey’s work and my own research that inspired my book, *The End of Business as Usual*, I re-imagined the traditional “cluster” funnel into a constant and very public elliptical path that often repeats itself.

The image above represents a detailed customer journey map, which outlines the important steps your connected customers take during and following decision making. The map also introduces the diverse elements that factor into each step. Perhaps more importantly are the channels and screens individuals use to make their way along the journey. Mobile, social, web, IRL: they each contribute to a customer experience that either helps or prevents them from moving along in your favor.

- | | |
|----|----------------------|
| 1. | Awareness |
| 2. | Consideration |
| 3. | Evaluation |
| 4. | Purchase |
| 5. | Experience |
| 6. | Loyalty |
| 7. | Advocacy |

The stages of the Dynamic Customer Journey are familiar as they reflect similar methodologies in the traditional funnel. However, each step is unique in the contributing factors for how consumers discover, analyze, choose, and share. The screens they use to search and purchase, the people who influence them, the content that informs them, the social networks they rely upon, the collective experiences of others, and the real-time conversations that shape impressions each introduce guidance, doubt, and validation that works for or against you right now.

The most important revelation in the DCJ is how every stage feeds into a discoverable online repository of shared experiences that influence all those who embark upon a similar journey. Without positive influence there is no hope for preference. And, without positive experiences there can be no chance for loyalty or advocacy.

In my research I've found that more often than not each stage of the customer journey, along with the mixed channels that they use, are defined or programmed by different groups within the organization. The social experience is developed independently of the mobile experience, which is disconnected from the web experience. The point is that customers only see one brand or business, and therefore, each channel should complement one another to deliver a desired experience and journey optimized for the moments of truth and for the context of each screen.

It is only by traveling in the digital footsteps of your customers that uncovers a new landscape for engagement and a new reality for your business. Embracing your connected customers will help them embrace you in return. At a minimum, the gifts you receive by embarking on this journey and investing in engagement, education, and meaningful experiences are empathy, relevance, and ultimately reciprocity—all of which are measurable by traditional business metrics.

The New Customer Journey is Social

Embarking on the dynamic customer journey, you'll see that search is a natural step in the discovery process. In a web world, search engines offer a lens into a qualified and structured view to help online consumers focus and make informed decisions. With Google dominating search, marketers concentrate on improving search ranking through tried- and-true techniques to ensure that what they are marketing earns a coveted position in the likely search results a customer might consider clicking.

Search is only part of the story now.

The experiences that people have and in turn share, have created a powerful collective repository that is mostly indexed and tapped every minute of every day outside of Google.





The importance of search engine marketing is fundamental to the discovery process. This is a world that still thrives today even though popular conversations among businesses and marketers center on social and mobile media as the “next big thing.”

Your work in engagement and influence must focus on behavior and the importance of discovery among an increasingly connected customer and the need to optimize and unite their journeys, whether it’s on the traditional web, in social networks, or via mobile.

Let’s take a walk...

The ZMOT Zero Moment of Truth

In 2011, Google released an ebook written by Jim Lecinski, *Winning in the Zero Moment of Truth*. The premise of the book introduces us to instances when shopping decisions break down into a series of Moments of Truths where each require special understanding to help nudge customers along their journey. For example, when a customer is considering a purchase, whether driven by a stimulus or need, in the Zero Moment of Truth, or ZMOT, customers are essentially going to “Google it.” Anyone involved in the art and science of search wins in this moment by ensuring that web pages are optimized to outperform competitive pages as people search.

Remember, without awareness, there can be no consideration.



“
Google
it.”



What happens though when your customers naturally start their discovery process in other communities other than Google or traditional search?

This is an important question as the pervasiveness of social and mobile media is conditioning a new generation of connected consumers to rely on their *networks of relevance*, not just search engines, as an alternative and efficient means of guiding decision-making.

Think about it for a moment. Study after study shows that everyday consumers trust others like them. They don't trust executives. They don't trust ads. But they do trust peers. Global marketing agency Edelman also revealed in its annual Trust Barometer that customers trust employees of companies. Why is that a significant finding? When people are searching for information in a social ecosystem, they wish to find qualified information that informs and guides them quickly and efficiently. Landing pages are just the beginning. Employee-as-experts are also part of the content and discovery equation allowing customers to find answers that help rather than sell.

This is just the beginning. The future of search is tied to the experiences shared by your employees and your customers across the web, social networks, communities, and mobile apps.



@SteveSchuitt
Steve Schuitt

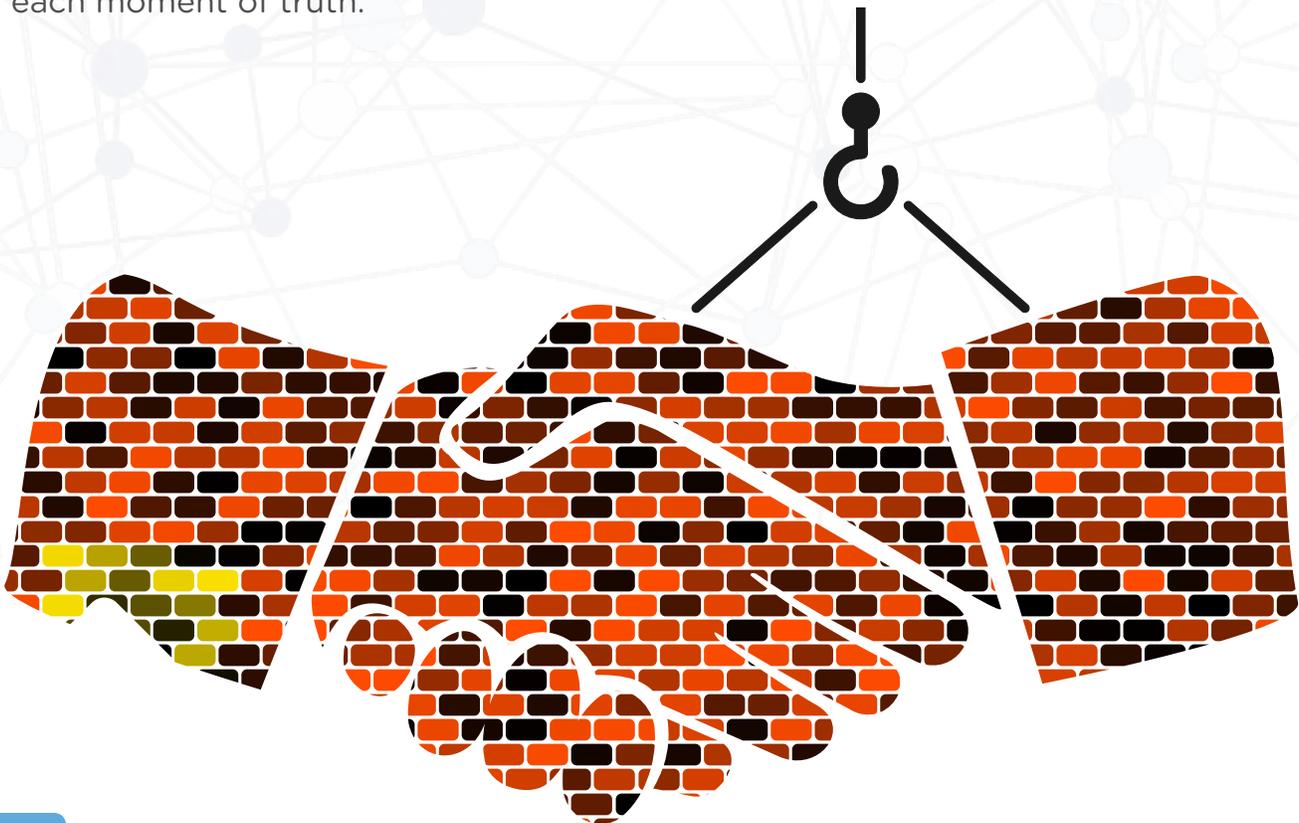
Does Anyone Know the Best Juicer to Get?
I'm pretty sold on the Omega 8005, but if you know a better one let me know!



@alexklevine
Alex Levine

Ditto RT @warrenwhitlock: @briansolis i don't make major purchases without the help of my tweeps

If you think about traditional search for a moment, what comes back as someone types in a keyword or question into the search bar? That's right, websites. And websites are often the last thing a connected customer is looking for in a moment when trusted impressions and experiences outweigh pages ranked by inbound links and keywords. After all, many of these connected customers are mobile, and as a result, looking for content that's organic to the context of their state of mind and the device they're using in each moment of truth.





The Ultimate Moment of Truth

You've all heard the stat shared by search and social media experts that YouTube is the second largest search engine. Many skeptics will of course argue that YouTube is merely a network for funny cat videos, wannabe celebrities, movie trailers, and music videos. But you and I know that YouTube is indeed a notable alternative to Google for processing more search queries than any other search engine.

Connected customers don't just seek information, they're searching for input, validation, and direction in a way that they can appreciate and use. This isn't a surprise. As consumers, we've searched on YouTube for content to help us accomplish tasks, learn, or conduct research. We're not alone in the hunt for product-related videos to see them in action and also gauge the impressions of others.

95%

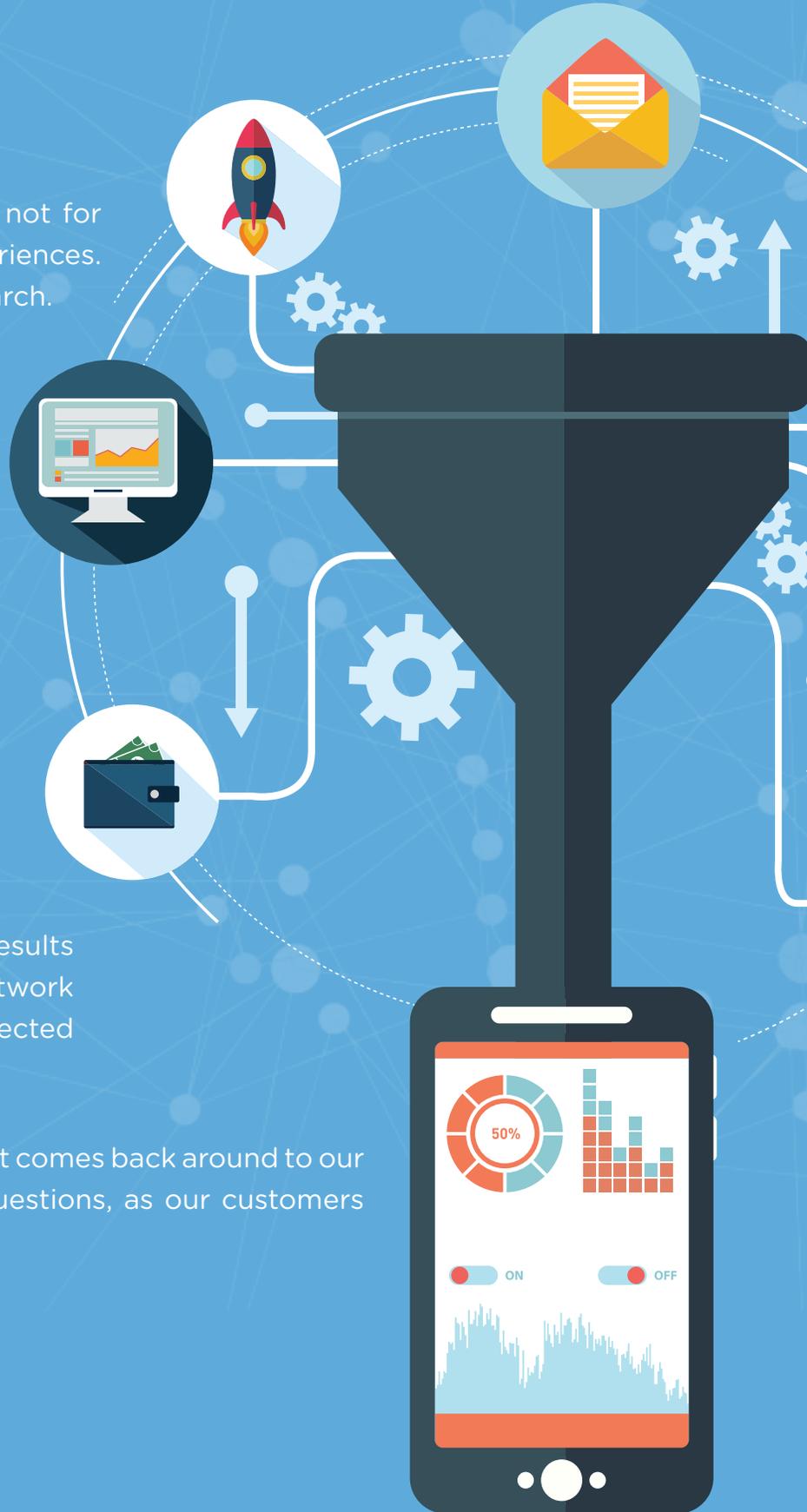
**of consumers
use both YouTube
and Google when
searching for
relevant content.**

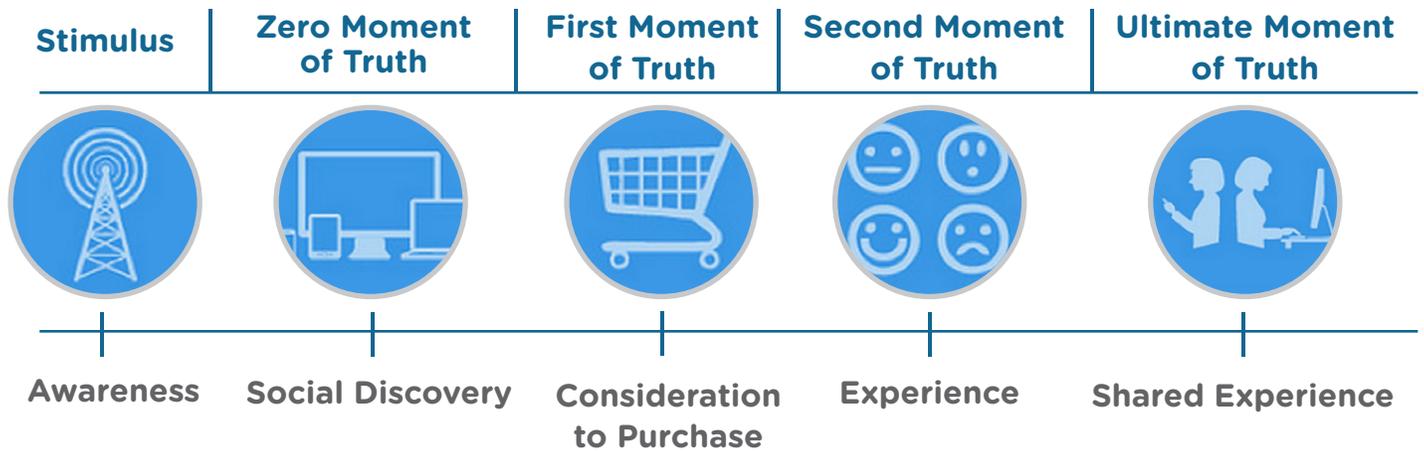
YouTube becomes a search engine not for web pages, but for shared experiences. Apps too are becoming the new search.

It's a good thing Google also owns YouTube. According to a research study, 95% of consumers use both YouTube and Google when searching for relevant content. And it's not just YouTube either; connected customers are fragmenting search through every social network, community, forum, and app where shared experiences become a currency in decision-making. Google doesn't own the app economy though.

We now need to optimize search results for shared experiences in every network that's significant to our connected customers.

Our work starts with uncovering what comes back around to our brand when we use keywords or questions, as our customers do, to search each network.





Shared experience affect every moment of truth

UMOT > ZMOT: Shared expressions form trusted impressions



The Zero Moment of Truth is matched in significance by the Ultimate Moment of Truth (UMOT), a critical bookend to search introduced in my recent book, What's the Future of business (WTF). The UMOT represents the future of discoverability, branding, and influence, and it is directly tied to the Zero Moment of Truth.



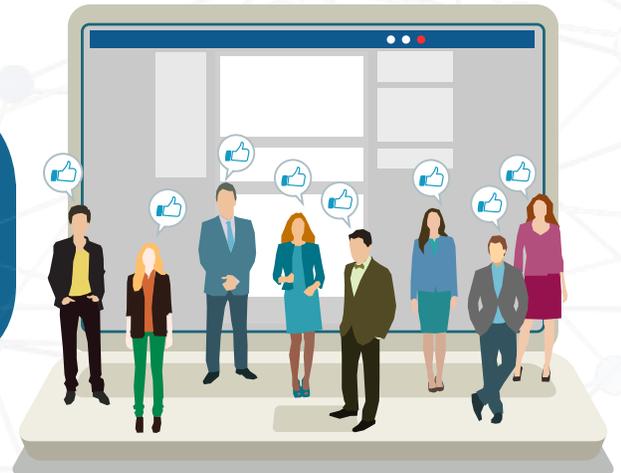
UMOT signifies the instant when a customer creates content based on an experience with your product or service and publishes it in their community or network of preference for others to find. The intention of doing so is a combination of self-expression and the desire to inform others. This experience then becomes discoverable for anyone who searches each network. And in many cases, these experiences also populate Google's search results. Said another way, The Ultimate Moment of Truth becomes the next person's Zero Moment of Truth.

Every day, customers are sharing experiences in the form of videos, blog posts, reviews, Tweets, status updates, et al. This content doesn't "self-destruct" like SnapChat images. Shared experiences build upon one another forming a collective repository in the cloud that's indexable, searchable, and influential. SEO, branding, and sales compete with this content, and at some point, without address and optimization, shared experiences can eclipse traditional marketing no matter how creative or aggressive.

Without defining and promoting desired shared experiences, businesses will become victim to whatever people create and share.



Optimizing Shared Experiences



Social and mobile bring to light the importance of shared experiences and why organizations must first design them rather than just react. Certainly great experiences start with vision and purpose enlivened by the product or service design and its intentions. For marketers who may have little or no control over business affairs, the ability to shape and steer experiences is made possible by promoting every nuance tied to your value proposition and the unique advantage customers discover on their own. I refer to this as the experience gap.

In the experience gap, there is the experience we want people to have, which is reinforced by our marketing messages and strategies. Then, there's the experience people actually have and share, which usually demonstrates how what "they" say about us is frequently different than what we say.

A key question for you to answer is, "are you facing an experience gap?"

Driving shared experiences is a form of customer journey optimization that closes the gap. This is where search works for us beyond traditional SEO. With a little keyword anthropology, we can better understand the questions, not just key words, that customers are asking and answering.

This research also reveals the following key attributes to develop a UMOT optimization strategy:



Searching beyond keywords: The questions that people ask over and over again.



What comes back in the Zero Moment of Truth: Patterns and context of questions, what customers find that helps them make decisions, and why customers fail to locate or value traditional content.



The communities and people of value: Where people are finding and sharing experiences outside of Google or other traditional search engines (*this introduces new touch points in the customer journey*).



Helpful content that actually answers customer questions: Discover valuable content, additional links, reactions, and a rabbit hole of ambient experiences that further guide customers to or away from you.



Real world impressions as told through expressions: Product opinions, tips and tricks, cautionary tales and how these shared experiences influence the impressions of others.



New marketing opportunities: Hidden gems and new product usage scenarios not originally considered.

Once you've identified the state of shared experiences, it's time to develop a strategy to close the experience gap. Start by defining...

- What is it that you want people to experience?
- What is it that you want them to feel and share?
- What where (networks/apps), and how (content) are people sharing today?

The relationship between keyword anthropology and content creation will guide your strategy development so that you can understand how to influence the relationship between what's shared in the Ultimate Moment of Truth as customers begin the discovery process in the Zero Moment of Truth.

Truth can often be a painful surprise. And we all know that perception is reality. There's no need to be placed on the defensive in reacting to shared experiences. It's our job to optimize positive experiences and promote beneficial content and stories to enhance the Zero Moment of Truth wherever customers go to learn and explore.

The future of sales and marketing lies in the mixing of experience design, content marketing, UGC, and SEO. This is the heart and soul of engagement and influence. It's how you build relationships with Generation-C in a digital era.

Positive conditioning promotes a collaborative effort to solve the experience gap. By activating and rewarding customers and influencers, marketers can rally content that promotes desired experiences at every touch point that customers uncover in their journey or life cycle. By coordinating these efforts, what appears in new channels in each Zero Moment of Truth is no longer a surprise; it's strategically optimized to walk people through each moment of truth. It also loops together to create a value cycle that keeps on giving to the next person who enters the journey.

User and employee-generated content must then become part of an integrated SEO program to optimize the right content in the right context for each moment of truth.

Optimized shared experiences will complement the customer journey wherever your customers search and share. What we soon realize is that Moments of Truth aren't just moments in time, they become an experience fueled continuum.

The future of shared experiences and your brand isn't just created, it's co-created.



Google's Micro-Moments Introduce Opportunities To Connect the Dots



In addition to ZMOT, Google recently introduced what it calls micro-moments, a critical moment that defines the new dynamic customer journey.

What makes this new moment interesting and equally challenging is that it's not really one moment, it's a series of micro-moments that amount to the new reality of consumer behavior. Building upon the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) and the consumer steps that followed, these new micro-moments unbundle activities and break them down into smaller, more manageable (and winnable) scenarios.

Through social media, people share thoughts, insights, answers, feedback and other forms of shared experiences that become discoverable (and sought after by other consumers) as people go through their digital journey. For instance, when someone searches on Google to learn more in the Zero Moment of Truth, my research found that shared consumer experiences such as YouTube videos, online reviews, blog posts, social conversations etc. resulted in either pushing people forward or changing the direction of their next steps. This is key because what people experienced, and in turn published in their favorite channels, connected this Ultimate Moment of Truth with the Zero Moment of Truth. It's what appeared in various searches that informed consumers about their impressions and actions.

Think about it. When you're in the moment and need to find or learn about how to do something, you reach for your phone. Chances are, you'll find a video to help you visualize it. Personally, I do this instead of reading "how to" instructions every time. Who has time to read something like that anymore right?

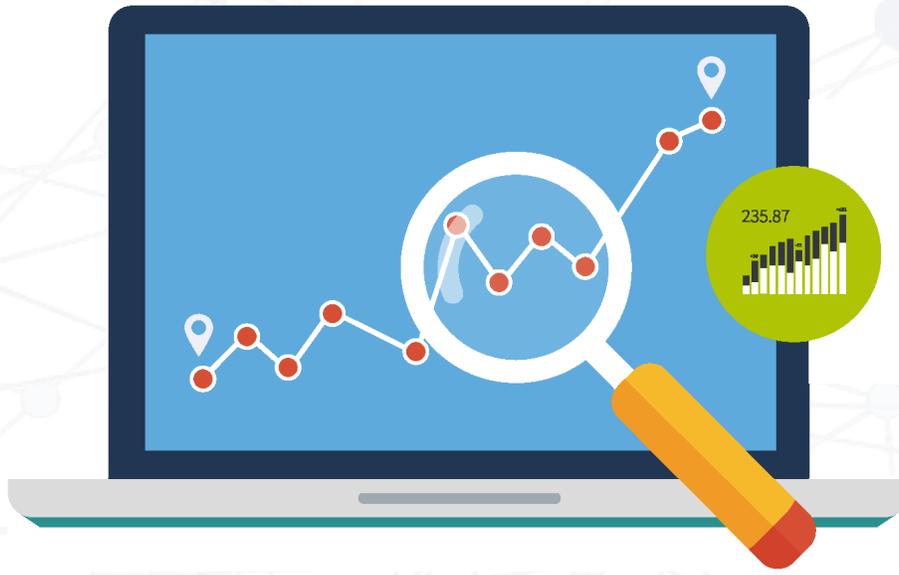
Recently, I also reached for my phone when shopping for a high-end blender. I needed to narrow the list of options, learn about the value proposition of each and understand what people thought after comparing competing blenders. I didn't have time to do research traditionally, nor did it cross my mind. This is just the beginning, however, as we live in a multi-screen world.

According to mobify, **90% of consumers will use multiple screens to accomplish their goal.** More so, Google is already seeing nearly endless micro-moments each month: across billions of monthly searches, hours of video watched, and interactions with prominent networks, sites and apps.



Here's the thing, in these micro-moments you are either present or hidden, engaging or disingenuous, helpful or inconvenient. Customers expect answers and direction their way-in the right time and on the device and in the channel they are using.

It's like that old saying, "if a tree falls in the woods and no one is there to hear it, did it make a sound?" The same can apply to micro-moments. If a micro-moment happens, and you're not there to engage a consumer, then that consumer can only act on what they know.



Traditional ad buys and content strategies have given way to numerous short bursts of digital activity as they occur throughout the day. They may be unpredictable or constantly evolving, but they're not elusive. As Google notes, micro-moments are moments of high intent and engagement; many of which happen in spare moments such as waiting in line, commuting, or generally when not preoccupied with something else. The journey then continues later either on mobile or through an entirely different channel such as a laptop or tablet. You can design for these new opportunities. And make no mistake they are opportunities for engagement, not distractions.

Now that Google has introduced micro-moments, everything changes and, at the same time, makes more sense. The customer journey is rarely linear in a world of constant digital distraction, aka "short-attention-span theater." Google's concept of micro-moments represents the new frontier (and reality) of digital marketing. It's all real-time, and everything is on demand.

Remember, without discovery or engagement, there can be no consideration. Nowadays there is no one customer journey map to design against. No matter how your funnel is designed or supported, your customers are hacking it to suit their needs. Instead, marketers must outline and invest in a series of contextual micro journeys that meet customers in their domain when, where, and how they unfold. More so, each micro-moment must connect consumer intent with the desired outcome. This means that the future of marketing starts with identifying these new moments to learn how to make each one matter.

The Rise of Digital Influence



Shared experiences are both the pulse of and the doorway into the dynamic customer journey. People and relevant information influence behavior. It's time for brands to engage in meaningful ways that inspire marketing and sales without marketing and selling.

The potential for social influence is enormous on both sides of the equation. Services that rank and identify "influence" open the door to new opportunities for businesses to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with digital tastemakers and authorities. Brands extend their reach into new networks, and consumers earn recognition and reward for their online status.

This is about reaching people not just because they're connected, but because they serve a role within their online community. It's up to brand managers, marketers, and sales and service professionals to use influence tools to learn more about the social landscapes and the people who affect their markets. As the findings here point out, brands cannot think episodically about influence or influencers. This is not a campaign-based discipline.

While tools are helpful, the practice of Influencer Relationship Management is about ongoing engagement and community building. Today, that can happen at scale.

Traditional influence is defined as the act, power, or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways. For the purpose of this report, we will use the following as the definition for Digital Influence: *The ability to cause effect, change behavior, and drive measurable outcomes online.*

Influencers, as they're often labeled, form strong unions with like-minded individuals within social networks and fortify those connections with value and meaningful interaction. These influencers are individuals who may possess the capacity to influence based on a variety of factors, such as a substantial or concentrated following in social networks, notable stature, or authority within a community, and the size or loyalty of an audience.

The strength of these networks and the corresponding popularity or expertise individuals earn within them is the direct result of significant investments of intellectual capital, goodwill, and good ole fashioned networking.

Dr. Bernardo A. Huberman, Director of HP Labs' Social Computing Lab, has extensively researched digital influence over the years. Huberman believes that the new era of consumer influence represents a new horizon for marketers, saying:

“Businesses have a finite amount of money and time; therefore, they must identify the most connected people they can to help expand their reach. In social networks, brands can connect with everyday people who are the celebrities of their networks. The value to businesses is that they can have access to the respective Rolodex of consumers and reward them as a result.”



Social Capital is the Key that Unlocks Digital Influence and New Customer Touchpoints.

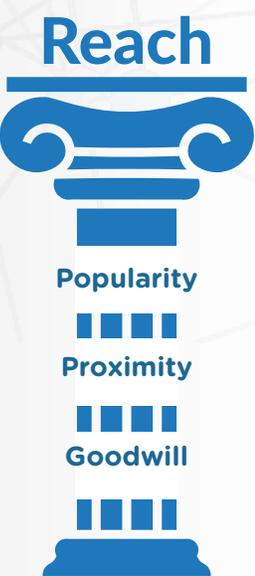
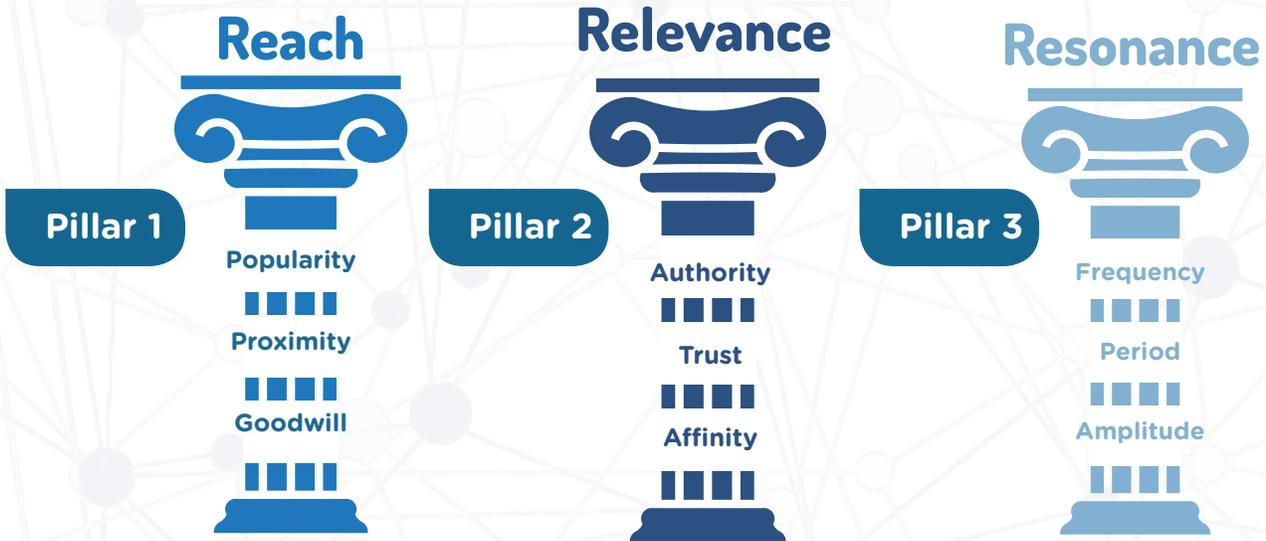
Like loyalty programs where customers are rewarded for their repeat businesses, brands can now reach connected customers to build relationships, introduce them to new products and services in relevant and useful ways, recruit into ambassador programs, involve them in important events, or reward them with exclusive content, access, or products and promotions as recognition for their social stature and support.

As influence is a measure of social capital, social capital is then a culmination of several pillars that can contribute to the capacity to influence. While not absolute, these pillars form a framework for assessing social capital and, in turn, serve as indicators for influence. They are the result of studying the metrics systems of the vendors included in this report; as well as studying cause and effect in social networks. Some attributes are measurable, others are extrapolated, and not all are required to influence behavior or action.

A framework for influence is built upon three pillars to clarify the role they play in assessing the capacity to cause change or effect. These pillars contribute to an action plan for influence programs for any approach whether it's sales, marketing, service, HR, etc.

The Pillars of Influence, or The 3Rs of Reach, Relevance, and Resonance, serve as a baseline model for which to think about influencer engagement at any level. Let's go through it:

FOUNDATION FOR INFLUENCE



Pillar 1 – Reach: Relationships form the union of the social graph and define how far information can travel across the social graph and communities at large. Reach is a measure of popularity, affinity, and potential impact.

Popularity: The state of being liked, admired, or supported by many people.

Proximity: The location of an individual is taken into consideration where effect is necessary within a particular setting or environment.

Goodwill: Investing goodwill into one's community increases appreciation and the probability for collaboration and action.

Relevance



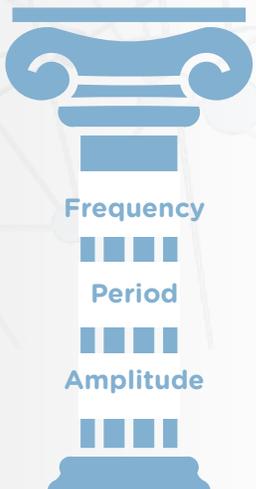
Pillar 2 – Relevance: Topical relevance is the glue of the interest graph and the communities of focus. Individuals aligned through subject matter create a series of linked relationships that send information along communities of focus.

Authority: As an individual invests in the subject of topical relevance, they naturally earn a level of authority on the subject matter. Authority levels also prompt respect, which is a reward for expertise or specialty.

Trust: Difficult to measure, trust is the source of most meaningful relationships. It’s also a word that’s difficult to describe, but we all know what it is. Here, trust is the firm belief in the reliability, truthfulness, ability, or strength of someone.

Affinity: A natural liking or sympathy for someone or something. Connected consumers establish affinity within their communities, and it buoys their position.

Resonance



Pillar 3 – Resonance: The culmination of reach and relevance serves as the foundation for “the score.” Here, resonance is the measurement of the duration, rate, and level of interactivity around content, a topic, or conversations. High resonance ensures that more people will see each post or update. In theory, this number determines the reach of activity and how long it can stay alive in the social streams of online consumers.

Frequency: The rate a social object, topic, or person materializes in social streams. Typically, frequency is tethered to a given theme, conversational thread, or media related to a particular campaign.

Period: The length or portion of time it remains visible after the initial appearance.

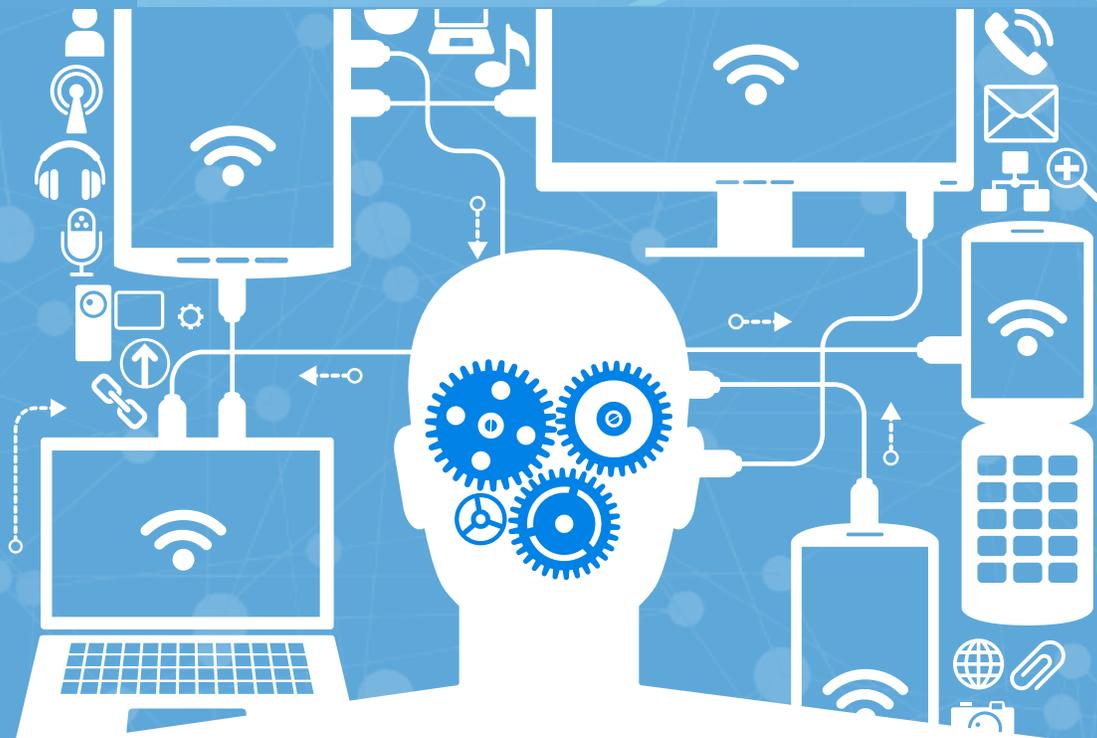
Amplitude: The level of engagement within a network.

As connected consumers “live in public,” their activities are captured and measured. These actions, reactions, and the relationships that expand and contract as a result, contribute to the state of an individual’s social capital in each social network. You have to see for yourself what makes someone valuable to his or her community.

Relationships in social media are evaluated based on the nature of interaction. Typically, connections are classified as either a social graph—ties made up as friends, family, colleagues, or strangers and peers—or that of an interest graph—connections based on common interests. The social graph forms a community at large, while an interest graph creates a community of focus. It’s quality versus quantity. And both can be important to your mission.

Actions and words in social networks represent a form of social currency. Essentially, you earn the stature and relationships you deserve in social media. What connects consumers online, their relationships, and the ensuing activity accumulates into an implied value that either adds or subtracts from their “social bank accounts.” The resulting balance is then reflective of their stature within the social economy and, as such, impacts the results from your engagement program regardless of its focus, whether it’s sales, marketing, service, et al.

Starting with the end goals in mind will lead to more effective digital influence programs. Aligning your brand with people who have notable scores is one thing. Aligning with connected consumers to accomplish something specific delivers measurable results. While there are many potential results to factor into a digital influence campaign, let’s focus on some of the most common outcomes. Doing so sets the bar for which to measure success and also assess whether or not “scores” translated into actual influence. Rather than ask connected consumers to share random, or purely promotional, updates related to your business, provide them with ideas, content, links, or editorial suggestions to perform against key performance indicators.



An Outline for an Influence Action Plan

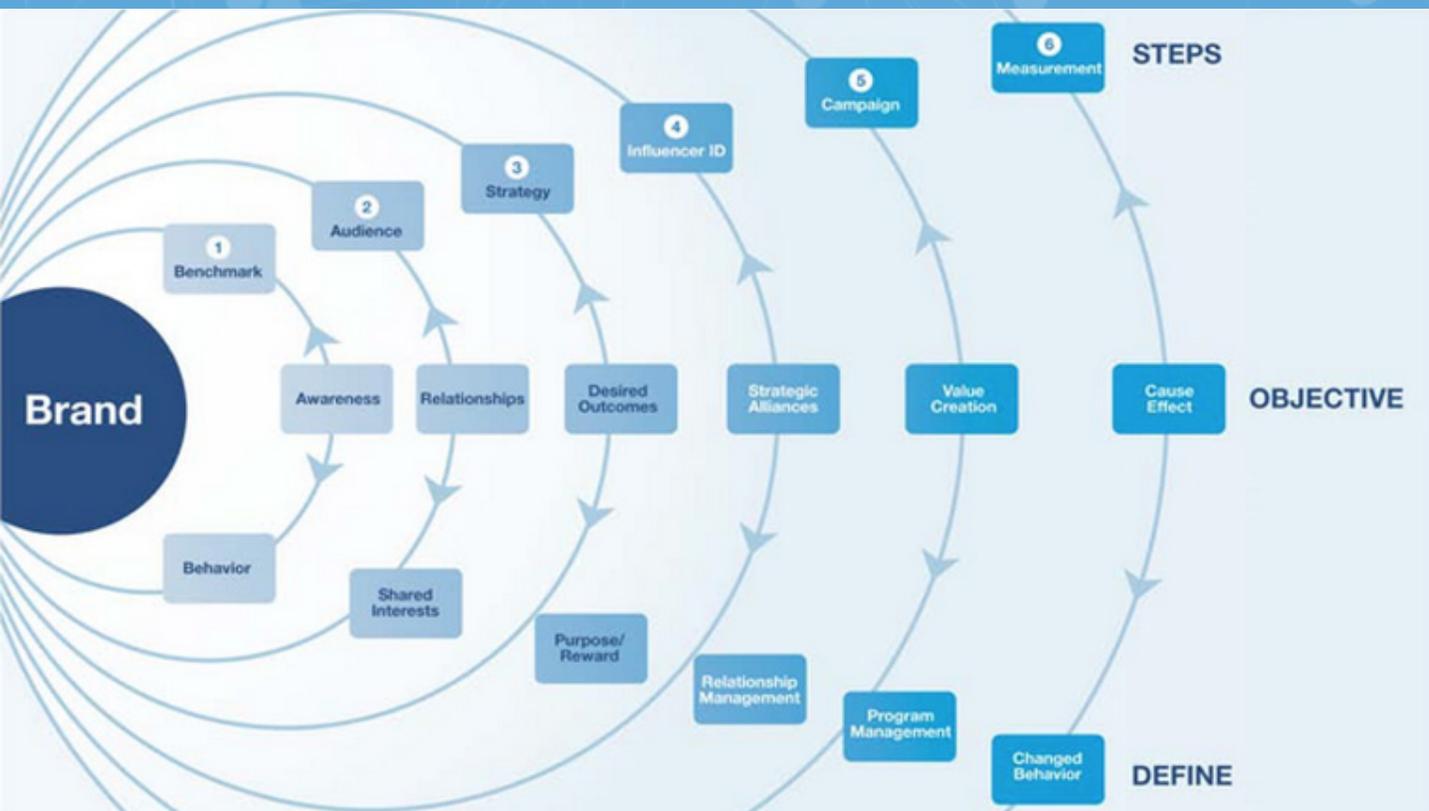
When defining a strategy, a good place to start is by going back to basics. Some of the most often asked questions that deserve consideration are:

- What is influence, and what makes someone influential?
- Who is influential in social networks and why?
- How can I recognize influence or the capacity to influence?
- What effect does digital word of mouth have on my business?
- How can I measure successful engagement with influential consumers?

Successful programs start with the end goal in mind and pick the appropriate influencers based on the outcome they seek to achieve. It is the responsibility of the business to examine results against intentions and assess if the borrowed social capital of connected consumers actually caused the desired effect, changed behavior, and to what extent. If not, the next step is to evaluate how to improve the program and the right individuals to deliver value across the board and improve results.

To help, I developed an Influence Action Plan based on the best practices of top businesses using social to build relationships.

The Action Plan is designed to walk you through the steps necessary to assess where you are and where you need to be. Then assess who can help you get there, why, and what's in it for them and those who follow them.



This Influence Action Plan is divided into three key components:

1. Objectives

2. Steps

3. Elements That Require Definition

Each contributes to the foundation of your Influence Action Plan to develop an all-inclusive strategy, complete with coveted milestones, and produce meaningful results. Each step becomes a key ingredient in the overall development of a successful influence program:



Benchmark: Understand where you are today to track performance against current benchmarks that capture existing sentiment, behavior, and awareness.



Audience: Define who you're ultimately trying to reach, where they get information, who they're connected to, and what it is they value. Remember to review individuals based on their social graph relationships (community at large) and interest graph relationships (community of focus).



Strategy: Develop a sales, marketing, and/or sales strategy that connects the dots between you, connected consumers, and their communities. And, most importantly, integrate the outcomes you wish to realize. Document the designed outcomes, and work backward from there. Also, establish your purpose and how you will invest in the relationships to provide value to them and their followers. These ingredients will contribute to first-round assessment of the vendors that can best help you realize your goals.



Influencer ID: As reviewed in the Framework for Influence, determine the pillars that are important to your program, and identify those that possess the scores and the combination of the 3Rs (reach, relevance, resonance) that are important to your initiative. These individuals form the strategic alliances necessary to achieve your goals. Neither identifying them nor reaching out to them is enough. A relationship management system is necessary to manage contacts, editorial assignments, and activity. Select the vendor/s that can help you at this specific juncture.



Campaign: The campaigns that you execute must be enhanced in real time. Rarely do any digital influence programs perform as designed. Campaigns rarely run their course as designed and require real-time tracking to optimize programs as they unfold. In addition to a relationship management system, digital influence campaigns require a program manager and a supporting system to track performance. This function is designed to measure campaign activity and observe what's working and not working as tied to intended results. When campaigns fail to perform or deliver lackluster results, value creation is reviewed to ensure that the right message, person, timing, and relevant value are optimized throughout the program.



Measurement: Integrate milestones and mechanisms to measure KPIs and also outcomes. It is here that you document the impact of scores against your intended effects. Measurement doesn't just track activity or results; you must also track behavior based on the benchmark at the beginning of the strategy development and its state post- campaign. Did you cause desirable effects or intentionally change behavior? If so, track what worked. If not, analyze what prevented ultimate success. It is in this final stage of the Influence Action Plan where businesses can become the true measure of influence as they are able to measure the extent of how social capital converted into actions and outcomes.

Finalize the plans for engagement programs based on the insights that stem from step two. Before reaching out to anyone, develop a list of pros and cons for each authority based on their work or activity to date to qualify a core set of individuals who are likely to become part of a pilot campaign.

The individuals you choose should offer a notable balance of reach, reputation, relevance, and resonance. Remember, customers align with respected people for personal reasons. Include a mix of popularity and authority to evaluate how your customers respond and to what extent. Modify the program as necessary.

Last but not least, don't just walk away. Continue to experiment and find new and engaging ways to recognize and reward customers and the people who just may influence their actions and behavior.

By studying the people who matter to your business, and the people who matter to your customers, your business strategies will benefit from a new level of customer awareness and sensitivity that speaks volumes in new media.

This is your time.

With every step, your community is a reflection of your intentions, the value that you introduce, and ultimately your customer's steps and the experiences they share that define your success.

Social is a gift.

Attention is a gift.

Engagement is a gift.

Therefore, we've much to earn.

Therefore, we've much to learn.

The End



Brian Solis

Digital Marketing Analyst, Speaker, and Author



MEET GENERATION

YOUR NEW CONNECTED CUSTOMERS



WRITTEN BY BRIAN SOLIS



insightpool