



Danger: Marketing Inflection Point Ahead

TRADITIONAL MARKETING IS ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE A WRENCHING CHANGE.
SOME HAVE ALREADY SEEN IT BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE.

Until now marketing and advertising have been all about branding, sending a consistent message, designing the right logo, using the right colors, selecting the right jingle, and staying on message. It's been a one-way street: Marketers and advertisers talk; consumers listen.

That's changing and the rate of change is increasing.

In *Socialnomics*, Eric Qualman is perhaps a bit overly enthusiastic about the benefits of social media but he offers a good view of what's on the other side of the inflection point.

Inflection points, by the way, are key concepts in differential calculus. They are the points on a curve where the sign changes from positive to negative or vice versa. Graphic designers have extended the meaning a bit and consider any point at which a bézier curve changes direction to be an inflection point.

Here's an inflection point to consider: You don't own your brand any more.

Fans (sometimes called "evangelists") and foes will take over your brand and spread their message by what Qualman calls "*world* of mouth". Every marketing professional knows that word-of-mouth advertising is the most powerful message they can't buy. "World"-of-mouth is like word-of-mouth the same way that a Formula 1 race car is like a Ford Fiesta.

Because of this, marketing professionals will spend more time identifying what their fans are doing and finding ways to promote these activities. Your brand will always have detractors and you can't stop them but empowering your fans can drown the negative messages in an avalanche of positive buzz.

This requires paying attention to what's going on in social media and responding appropriately. That doesn't mean defensively.

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Your biggest fans will talk about you publicly and, when one of these fans begins to attract a following, it's time to become involved. Too many managers try to quash someone else's success with something developed in house. This is a mistake because it alienates those who are already on board with your fan. Work with those who are already your evangelists.

Companies will find that they need to be more open, to readily admit errors, and to remember a very old maxim: *Perception is reality*. If you garner a reputation as a bad company, your company is bad—even if it's the most honorable, fair-minded, and sensitive company on the planet.

Michael Lowenstein, a vice president at Harris Interactive Loyalty, cites a study that was commissioned by a bank. It validates the title of Janelle Barlow's book, *A Complaint Is a Gift*.

Barlow says that a complaint offers the business an opportunity to cement customer relationships and the bank study that Lowenstein cites clearly shows that a problem, when addressed promptly and well, leads to higher customer retention.

It's almost enough to make you want to screw something up just so you can make amends! But not quite.

More than half (about 55%) of the bank's customers never had a complaint. The research

showed that they had about an 82% probability of continuing to use the bank.

What about the other 45%—the ones who did find something to dislike? About 40% of those won't say anything to the bank's employees. They will just bide their time for a while and then quietly vanish. The bank will never know why.

But 60% of the people who have complaints, according to the study by this "major Midwestern bank" will make the complaints known.

Then what?

IT DEPENDS ON YOUR RESPONSE. IF YOU RESOLVE THE PROBLEM IN A WAY THAT PLEASES THE CLIENT, THERE'S AN 87% PROBABILITY THAT THEY'LL STAY. YES, THAT'S EVEN HIGHER THAN THE EXPECTATION FOR THOSE WHO NEVER HAD A PROBLEM WITH THE BANK!

If the result is "neutral" as far as the client is concerned, there's a 48% probability that they'll leave. If you really make a mess of it and annoy the customer even more, there's about a 79% probability that they'll exit.

Both happy and unhappy customers will talk about their experiences. Qualman says that you have no choice about whether your company will "do" social media. Your only choice is whether you will do it well or do it poorly. This reminds me of what Gandalf said in *Fellowship of the Ring*: "All you have to decide is what to do with the time is given to you."

Ready! Fire! Aim!

MARKETING GURU RAY JUTKINS LIKED THAT SLOGAN EVEN IN THE RELATIVELY LAID BACK DAYS OF THE 1980S AND 1990S BECAUSE HE UNDERSTOOD THAT—PUT ANOTHER WAY—EVEN IF YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK, YOU'LL BE RUN OVER BY A LOCOMOTIVE IF YOU JUST STAND THERE.

Instead of researching and perfecting elaborate strategies that will deliver a product or service too late, tomorrow's winners will deliver "betas" early and plan to *fail better*. Companies such as Google understand this; they constantly put forth new products and label them "beta". Users understand that these product will not be perfect and, because of that, they become highly involved in advising Google what needs to be added, removed, or changed. This is the kind of intelligence that can't be bought at any price.

Moreover, this process lets Google know if a product is worth pursuing. A beta that generates not complaints or recommendations is a product that the market doesn't want.

The time to get started on your corporate approach to social media was about 2009 so you're already behind if you haven't yet started. But being behind is OK. You now have the luxury of seeing what other companies have done, both the successes and the failures.

As I said last month, social media have the reputation of being time wasters. For some, they are. But those who comprehend the opportunities that are inherent in change will understand how powerful these tools are.

The marketing professionals who exploit these tools will be the next generation of winners.

It's a New World

CHANGE IS ALL AROUND US. CONSIDER JUST THIS SMALL SERIES OF INFLECTION POINTS:

How many people have eliminated their home (wired) telephones and use only cell phones? Have you noticed the decline in newspaper readership? CDs have been replaced by paid and free music downloads. Successful bands understand that free downloads can drive higher concert attendance. Over-the-air radio consumption is declining even in the last bastion of terrestrial radio, the automobile. If you're paying for television ads, what percentage of the audience never sees them?

Marketing will never be the same! Ω

Driving Traffic to Your Website (Part 2)

TWO PRIMARY CATEGORIES OF SEARCH RESOURCES EXIST: SEARCH ENGINES SUCH AS GOOGLE, YAHOO, OR BING) AND SEARCH DIRECTORIES (SUCH AS THE YAHOO DIRECTORY AND DMOZ, THE OPEN DIRECTORY PROJECT DIRECTORY.MOZILLA.ORG). HUMANS GENERALLY USE SEARCH ENGINES. SEARCH ENGINES USE THE DIRECTORIES.

Search engines scour the Web, retrieve information, index pages, and apply various algorithms to sort things out. Search directories depend on site owners to submit information about the site. Although search engines sweep the entire Web for content, having an entry in DMOZ is critical to your site's visibility.

Google appears to have its own directory (directory.google.com), but it's really just DMOZ with a different face. This isn't a trade secret; Google freely acknowledges that it uses DMOZ.

If you're wondering how paid search, industry search engines, and localized search engines fit into this two-piece layout, they don't. I'll address them in later sections of this series.

Selecting Domain Names

THE DOMAIN NAMES (PLURAL) THAT YOU SELECT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOUR SITE'S SUCCESS. FIRST, YOU'LL WANT SOMETHING THAT'S EASY TO SAY AND TYPE. IF I HAD A SHOE STORE, I MIGHT CALL IT BLINN SHOES.COM.

Why no hyphens? They make for clumsy pronunciation. "Blinn Shoes dot com" is clearer than "Blinn hyphen Shoes dot com".

In one regard websites are like cats: They must have many names. To paraphrase (badly) the poem by T. S. Eliot, *First of all, there's the name that the family use daily; there are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter; a name that's peculiar and more dignified; but above and beyond there's still one name left over and that is the name no human research can discover.*

The other names that your site needs are those that will be helpful to search engines. For my fictional shoe store, I might choose Columbus-Ohio-Discount-Shoes.com or Arch-Support-Columbus-Ohio.com. These are not names that are easy to pronounce or remember because you each hyphen would need to be stated.

However, it's those pesky hyphens that separate the words and make them visible to the search engines. Key words in the domain name are extraordinarily powerful.

Take care if you invent additional domain names this way, though: Don't have your hosting company redirect all traffic from those domains to your main site. Some search engines may take this as a sign that you're trying to dupe them. Instead, create a one-page site that is specific to each domain name. Include text that is descriptive and helpful—useful to humans in its own right—and filled with key search terms. Then link these landing pages to your primary site so that the search engines will follow the links.

Next time we'll continue to examine some of the ways you can improve your website's visibility and performance. Ω



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