

Seven Building Blocks of a Customer-Centric Marketing Strategy

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Date : December 19, 2015



In an **advertising** and content-cluttered **digital** landscape, how can a **marketing** professional cut through the noise? In my experience as the director of **marketing** for a global Fortune 500 company, the answer is easy to identify yet challenging to achieve: connect with the customer.

Why do I include "easy" and "challenging" in the same sentence? Because the idea of focusing on the customer's viewpoint is decidedly not new in the **marketing** landscape, but creating a campaign that focuses on the values of the consumer takes commitment and research.

From data dives to field research and anecdotal market intelligence, building an accurate picture of consumer values and priorities, then acting on that information, is hard but rewarding work.

Here's a look at why this customer-centric approach matters, along with some actionable tips for making the customer connection a reality.

Make the Connection

Why should companies connect with consumers from a values perspective? Because doing so builds a lasting relationship with customers rather than treating every transaction as a one-off. Moreover, developing values-based personas can help the company remain relevant to existing customers and introduce the company to new customers.

Our team's research, for example, has revealed that many consumers in our market are "dual believers"—people who feel they straddle two countries and lifestyles. When you consider that US 2010 Census respondents [self-identified in eight or so racial/ethnic categories](#) (including dual race and the ambiguous "other"), it's evident that for us there is **marketing** power in paying attention to race and culturally driven alignments.

Customer-Centric Building Blocks

Based on my experience, I suggest these seven actions as fundamental building-blocks to a customer-centric strategy:

- **Get inside their heads and hearts.** Some of our best campaigns were a result of [listening to the customer](#), from hearing life stories to capturing their beliefs and family connections. Large data is valuable, but sample groups, video interviews, and other tools put a personal stamp on large swathes of intelligence.
- **Align offers with consumer values.** Campaigns should deliver on [offers, prizes, and collateral](#) that are emotionally powerful and solve consumers' real challenges. Solutions and incentives that resonate with consumer values can help bridge the gap between a service and a trusted friend.
- **Mix it up, think omnichannel.** While most consumers use some sort of **social** media or **digital** channel, it is a mistake not to diversify. Use a mix of touchpoints and take the message to the channels where the community is most engaged. In our case, this is [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).
- **Video is powerful.** A visual and audio message can engage a consumer in a way that simple print (**digital** or otherwise) simply cannot. If budget is limited, consider throwing it behind a well-produced video, or evaluate the performance of some of the simpler, do-it-yourself video options out there.
- **Match the message to the medium.** When you consider that [over two-thirds of Americans own smartphones](#), it almost goes without saying that mobile-specific content is a must. However, don't overlook the long-form appeal of earned media, or the hyper-linked content delivery capabilities of **digital**. Your market will most likely respond to a mix of these, giving you valuable cohort data, but take the time to ensure the message and presentation are a fit for the channel.
- **Check in, early and often.** While content calendars are a must to ensure **brand** continuity and meeting the message strategy, don't lose sight of the real goal: community engagement. Make responding to community interaction a priority for your **social**. By taking swift action in response to community dialogue, you will not only realize your enterprise's goal of engaging the consumer but also earn valuable insight and new opportunities.
- **Timing is everything:** conversation threads, post topics, and supporting dialogue shouldn't simply track to the enterprise's calendar. Be sure to align content with your community's interests and priorities. In our latest campaign, for example, we created an almost year-long calendar of creative and conversation to align with consumers' key milestone and holiday periods. Partnering with trending interest in back-to-school, holidays such as Mother's Day or Thanksgiving, or other key topic areas, ensures that your content is relevant, timely, and easy to introduce into trending **social Timing, part 2:** Calendar-focused timing is important, and clock-focused timing is equally critical, as well. Don't forget to closely watch your community's preferred engagement times and days of the week. Some communities come to life over the weekend, others are most active during their early AM coffee before heading off to the workday. Closely monitor when you are seeing the most engagement overall to your posts and tweets, and adjust your campaign to prioritize dialogue during these segments. Think of it this way: You wouldn't arrive at a party two hours early and expect to find good conversation, nor would you two hours after everything's wrapped up. **Social** interaction is as much timing as it is good content, so make sure you're on time and in the mix.

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The takeaway: Understanding consumer preferences and values may take some detective work, but the payoff in building strong relationships and a better bottom line makes the data and fact-finding mission more than worthwhile.

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