

# Brand Engagement: The New Mantra

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Today consumers and channel members are time and attention challenged. Marketers will have to devise innovative methods to engage both these vital stakeholders such that their relationship with brands gets richer and more sustained leading to favourable purchase behaviour.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT:

In the beginning there was broad-cast media (one sender to many receivers) and brand awareness was key. The quicker, more wide-spread and cheaper the better. It was also an era of demand exceeding supply and a high level of monopolistic commerce – both in products and in media.

## TODAY ON THE OTHER HAND:

The tables are quite comprehensively reversed.

There is media explosion (over 250 channels versus just one 20 days ago) and audience fragmentation. There is also niche-audience and customization of content. Enter Narrow Casting.

The Internet is driving user generated content; consumer communities; influencer blogs and chatrooms; much more dialogue and choice and pull (in place of push).

The other interesting aspect is "Time and place irrelevance".

Except for critical, time-sensitive news, most consumers are happy with content being made available at their convenience and preferably advertising free!

There is also increasing credibility associated with another user's opinion and experience than the marketer's sales message.

This, of course, can act both ways.

As all of us know, an unhappy consumer shares his dissatisfaction seven to eight times more than a satisfied customer.

Even in Media Content, consumers are resorting to reviewing as much as viewing. Indeed, more and more media owners are actively encouraging their customers to comment rather than just consume.

This can lead to some serious damage eg. Encyclopaedia Britannica was over-whelmed by on-line info providers like Encarta who, in turn, are getting blind-sided by Wikipedia.

Google, of course, is another story by itself.

Till recently, the onslaught of the Internet was delayed due to low PC penetration.

But expect the mobile to be the lead delivery platform. With exploding numbers, this can re-define entire categories.

The other developments of relevance – Sub \$ 100 PC's and the mushrooming of public access through cyber-cafes that offer hourly surfing at Rs. 10/-

When one maps all these developments on a young, mobile, digitally savvy, ambitious and confident Society – one realizes how exciting the current times are for all of us.

## POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO THIS CHANGE.

As with all other fundamental transformations there are three:

- Those who make change happen
- Those who watch change happening
- Those who wonder what happened

Particularly when several aspects of this change are gradual and not overnight, most marketers and communication specialists are taken by surprise.

## A FEW SAVVY MARKETERS ARE ACTIVELY EXPLORING THIS PROGRESS

- They invite their consumers to co-create innovative products and services.
- They adopt a dialogue rather than broadcast.
- They become much more flexible and nimble in matching their consumer's current and emerging needs.
- Their entire organizations are customer-focused and not just Marketing and Sales.
- They explore newer channels of logistics – from sourcing to manufacturing to distribution.
- They offer an integration solutions approach to discrete products.
- They bundle financing, after sales, customer care and other solutions to overcome the consumers' apathy or lack of action.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION AGENCIES

- To demolish all silos and get their specialist units to work together.
- In many cases, to develop domain knowledge in Out-of-Home, Interactive, Activation, Rural and CRM.
- To place the client brand and its consumer at the core of everything they do. To do this in practice rather than more lip-service.
- To keep track of latest trends in blogging, technology, direct response, retail etc.
- To get Global exposure at a regular frequency so that their perspective broadens.
- To encourage younger talent to try new initiatives and to reward with titles, responsibilities and money.
- To systematically weed out the passengers (typically the bottom 10 to 20 per cent of the workforce).
- To learn from other industry practices that are relevant.
- To adopt an organization structure that has a core group of Client Servicing, Creative and Planning. All else to be outsourced.
- To partner with external talent in areas like gaming, mobile, film making etc. such that new solutions are devised to overcome consumer apathy and fatigue.

## SUMMING UP:

Recently, I heard this at a Global Seminar:

"Any communication that does not influence consumer behaviour is a luxury that no one can afford".

I believe this is very valid, particularly as we move into an era where Product Managers are associated for less than two years with their brands and CEOs are judged on quarterly numbers.

I submit therefore a guiding principle for our industry:

**"Brand Engagement that Creates Brand Demand."**



LAKSHMI NARAYANAN  
CEO  
MUDRA MARKETING SERVICES

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