

Exact Online

# THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

An introduction to the world of  
Engagement Marketing

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# WELCOME TO A NEW ERA IN MARKETING

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When it comes to marketing, the internet changed pretty much everything. Suddenly, anyone and everyone became capable of reaching a global audience quickly and cheaply. Now, the way we market online is changing once again - and fast.

With vast amounts of user-generated content available at a click, buyers can find out everything they want to know about your brand, products or services without having to visit your website or download a brochure. The days of communicating 30-second brand messages to the masses are over. And life has got a lot more interesting.

*“Companies that used to try and influence consumers are now becoming influenced by them.”*

## **Most important changes**

This new era in marketing is completely transforming the way companies go out and win new business. Companies that used to try and influence consumers are now becoming influenced by them - if they're good at marketing themselves, that is. When it comes to marketing, we have learnt to be more responsive, more personal and more understanding in our approach. We have started to realise that the marketplace is comprised of selective individuals who exercise the power of choice, rather than passive groups waiting to be brainwashed by catchy lines or flashy designs.

**Internet Marketing vs Engagement Marketing**  
Before we go any further, let's clarify the difference between internet marketing and Engagement Marketing. The main objective of the former is to create additional traffic to your website, sell more products, build popularity and increase your brand awareness. This entails the use of what are termed push methods, such as search engines, banners, emails and PR, all targeted to general groups of consumers rather than tailored to individual users. It also involves optimising a website to rank as highly as possible in search results.

### No longer differentiating

The trouble is that everyone else is doing it, creating an endless cycle of tweaking and fine-tuning content, meta tags, and tactical advertising campaigns. So while you still need to include it in your marketing mix, Internet marketing is more of a given than a real means of differentiation.

### For example: online advertising

Take online advertising. Sure, it can drive more people to a site, but in reality how many ads do you click on while surfing? The truth is, most people know where they're going online and have become immune to diversions on route, however cool the flash animation or video content might be. With the odd exception, click-through rates are minimal. The truth is we just don't see banners any more, just as we fast forward through ads on TV.

### Drop off

Even ignoring that fact, what happens when a customer does actually click through to a site, whether from a list of search results or a banner? The majority will drop off well before reaching the point of making a purchase. Most won't even get beyond the home page, never mind exploring the products or services on offer. And of the few that do, fewer still will click on that magic 'Add to basket' button and carry on to checkout.

In short, internet marketing is a numbers game, delivering as many people as possible to a website knowing that just a tiny micro-percentage of visits will ever be converted to sales.

### Enter Engagement Marketing

But these days, driving traffic to your site is no longer the end game. It's just the start. The growth of Web 2.0 has in turn shaped a natural evolution in sales techniques to match: a kind of Online Marketing 2.0 or, as it is otherwise known, Engagement Marketing

There's no single definition of Engagement Marketing, but then again there's no single way of doing it. What we can safely say is that it goes well beyond traditional internet marketing, taking advantage of the Web 2.0 phenomenon by allowing brands to participate in a constant, multi-faceted and genuinely two-way dialogue with the consumer.

### From statistic to customer

For example, 1 of the major ways in which engagement differs is a focus on listening to individual customers and then responding with optimised messaging tailored to their characteristics, behaviour and input. This is likely to be more valued by them – and more likely to start creating those precious interactions that will form the basis of an ongoing relationship.

Needless to say, driving traffic to your site remains important, but it's what visitors do when they get there that really counts. Engaging them will make them act differently and can determine whether they become a customer or simply another statistic.

### Analysis and profiles

That understanding begins with analytics: monitoring the visitor journey from banners, search engines, affiliate sites etc. to your site and then the way in which they interact once they arrive. It helps to develop accurate profiles of every individual, establishing what interests them, what help or encouragement (if any) they may need, even identify potentially high value customers.

### Strategy and brand experience

This data will in turn help to shape a strategy to create interactions on and beyond your site, whether that's a live chat, webinar, emails, telephone callbacks, blogs, social media platforms or targeted content. Personal interactions create sales in physical shops – and it's no different online. It means your website is more than just your website. It's part of your brand experience.

Understand. Entertain. Reward. Communicate. When you really drill down into things it's not particularly complicated: Engagement Marketing is all about engaging your prospects and customers.

Which is all very well in theory. Now we'll take a look at how it works in practise.

### In a nutshell, Engagement Marketing involves:

- 1 Listening to your prospects and customers to understand their characteristics, needs and expectations.
- 2 Creating and sharing relevant (that's going to be the key word here) content across the right channels.
- 3 Provoking the interactions with your brand that engage people and slowly, but surely, lay the foundations for a strong and lasting relationship with them.

*Easy, right?*

# LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

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Listening to someone makes them feel good. It makes them feel like they're the centre of attention, that their opinion really matters (which is true, of course!). And that's the whole point of Engagement Marketing – to put customers at the heart of a brand experience that revolves around them, understands them, and fulfils their requirements.

For future-facing brands and their marketing, it's no longer a case of 'me, me, me' but of 'you, you, you'. And that starts with listening and creating a shared understanding.

## Also for B2B

By the way, this is just as relevant for B2B marketing as for consumer, if not more so. After all, business buyers not only have access to an equally wide marketplace as consumers, but also tend to spend a lot more too. That applies to time as well as money, with most businesses usually seeking more information before making a purchase than the typical consumer.

Customers aren't customers, they're people. Business or consumer, customers and prospects increasingly expect to be treated in a different and more engaging way. More than just being interested in a brand (or product or service), they want to be part of it, holding conversations and building relationships with organisations that see them as partners, rather than mere sales leads to whom interaction is limited to a selling opportunity.

## More pull than push

Online engagement is about creating this emotional added value. Its primary goal is not to directly sell more, but to open the channels that create, strengthen and maintain relationships and keep people committed to the brand/product/solution and – oh happy days – talk about it to their friends and contacts both online and in real life. In short, online engagement is much more a pull than a push strategy.

To make that pull strategy work, we need to listen in order to understand:

- who the customers are, based on their demographic characteristics.
- what they are looking for e.g. general interest, product preferences, specific content.
- how involved they are with the brand e.g. using Net Promoter Scores.

*“Customers are transformed into active participants, truly engaged in the evolution of the brand.”*

### Logical outcome

Engagement Marketing is the logical outcome of this listen-first philosophy, developing a genuinely two-way relationship between organisations and their consumers by enabling a dialogue between them. Taking this one step further, it means not only allowing customers and prospects to voice their opinions about the brand, product or service – but actually responding to them to enhance the offering. In doing so, customers are transformed into active participants, truly engaged in the evolution of the brand.

### The tools that help you listen and understand

There are loads of tools available for marketers to help them (better) listen to your leads and customers. These are the most important ones:

#### Web analytics

Web analytics tools collect and measure web activity, allowing you to measure your advertising ROI as well as track Flash, video, and social networking sites and applications. They enable you to measure sales, as well as provide insight into the way visitors arrive at your site, how they navigate through it, and what makes them come back again. Standard products such as Google Analytics automatically generate standard reports that make it easy to measure and understand the levels of engagement on your site.

### Social media monitoring

Also known as social listening, social media monitoring deploys and tracks messages, applications and activity on Social Networks. As you might have guessed, its job is to identify what people are saying about your brand across the usual suspects like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, forums, etc. The process involves text mining specific keywords, giving you the NSA-like ability to listen and monitor conversations around whatever you're interested in: your company, brand, products and services. You can then use that information to improve the brand experience and even engage with customers in realtime on the same social networks.

### Personas

Personas are the Engagement Marketing equivalent to crash-test dummies, but with the aim of creating a different kind of impact. The creation of personas is a well-used strategy in developing marketing strategies, entailing the development of fictional characters that represent the different types of visitor to your site. A persona will have a name, a face, a demographic profile, a behavioural and psychological 'constitution' and a task (or set of tasks) to complete.

As a basic example, you might create 4 basic personas that come to your site for different reasons:

### Rational

- Quick and effective decision maker
- Decides on the basis of logic and objective analysis
- Logical thinker
- Intuitive
- Targeted
- Autonomous
- Forward-looking
- **Asks first: what?**

The Rational visitor wants to see what a page offers - fast. Is it new? Is it an offer? How fast is it implemented? Short and concise texts, USPs, clear bottom lines... He wants to get an answer to the question: "What's in it for me?"

### Artisan

- Fast decision-maker, based on emotion
- Is spontaneous and impulsive
- Sensitive to discounts and offers (temporary, emergency, direct advantage, now!)
- Afraid to lose out
- "Feminin"
- Visually Oriented
- Lives in the now
- **Asks first: why?**

The Artisan is looking for advice instead of searching for and analysing information for herself. She wants to see if people recommend the service/product. Her question is: *“Why should I want this / why did others choose this?”*

### Idealist

- Slow decision-maker, based on emotion
- Is searching for authenticity, transparency, reliability
- The company behind the product/service is important
- Reads and writes reviews
- Is looking for background information
- Extravert
- Has the long term in mind
- **Asks first: who?**

The Idealist looks for opinions of others – and especially of the connoisseur – and finds images of people an important part of a site. He likes information from a broader perspective and asks: *“Who’s behind this”*

### Guardian

- Decides slowly and on the basis of logic
- Product-oriented, wants to know all properties and details
- Orientates internally and externally
- Is an authority in the field of technology
- Considers multiple options before making a purchase
- **Asks first: how?**

The Guardian likes to read all the technical details and likes schematic representation. Everything must be as tangible as possible, all explained in a precise and exact manner. Scrolling isn’t a problem. Checklists are a dream come true. She wants to know: *“How does it work? How do I avoid risks”*

Approaching your site from the point of view of these various personas allows you to understand how easy it is for them to complete their various tasks, identify any problems that might get in the way, and take any action required [e.g. ensure product information is displayed as clearly as possible].

That is ultimately the goal of what we do as companies: continually improving the relevance of the offer to draw people into our brand. But first, we obviously know who we want to convince and what they will respond to – and that is what Personas help us to do.

So now, once you’ve listened and understood more about the behaviour of your customers and prospects, you’ll be in a far better position to create and share the sort of content and experience that will attract them.

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# CREATE AND SHARE



When you understand the interests and behaviour of your target market as a varied group of individuals, you can start proactively supporting them with personalised content and messaging. It's all about being relevant - in what you say, how you say it and the channels in which you say it.

In generating content, the golden rule is to avoid talking too much and focus on saying the right things. Engagement Marketing is all about quality, not quantity. So you don't need to publish reams of information on blogs, or spend half your days on Twitter. Just make sure what you do share is informative, insightful and interesting.

#### **Did you know?**

You must understand that a strong user experience and community health is measured by engagement, not necessarily how large your audience is. But remember, many businesses aren't media companies, so you don't have to share information several times per day to build the right kind of audience. As a matter of fact, my most successful small business clients created around 24 pages or posts per year (2 per month). Source: [www.technicallymarketing.com](http://www.technicallymarketing.com)

Think about it. Do you care if your accountant Tweets or blogs three times a day? Probably not. You want them to do your taxes. And if you're the accountant, publish less often and keep the content high quality.

#### **Did you know?**

*The largest growing category of online tools is mobile. Nearly 1 out of 2 of marketers say they anticipate significantly increasing their use of mobile apps in the coming years*  
Source: [www.business2community.com](http://www.business2community.com)

## SO WHERE CAN YOU SHARE YOUR CONTENT?

### Websites

Well, let's start with the most obvious one: your own website. The design should be easy-to-use because people want to browse quickly and effortlessly. If they can't do that on your site they'll simply go to one where they can. Navigation should use 'web' language people have grown familiar with. So for example, if you want to get in touch with somebody via a website you'll naturally look for the Contact or Contact Us button without even thinking about it. Trying something unexpected can make you different, but it's also dangerous. Talk to me or Ask me anything may stand out, but they may also lose potential customers. Whether your site aims to collect data, sell a product or interact with customers, make sure people know what to do through clear, strong and visible calls to action at the points you expect prospects to start getting interested.

Right now, the trend is towards responsive design optimised to both desktop and mobile users. Depending on the size of the site, you might want to talk to a decent digital agency, or look at the services offered by Wordpress, Squarespace or Wix.

### Emails

As one of the earliest tools of Engagement Marketing, email campaigns require the permission of your target audience. Sending out communications that haven't been asked for is a sure way to put people off your brand.

Even when people do opt-in, they don't expect to have their inbox inundated or it's straight to the dreaded Junk folder you go. Send regular but well spaced out communications and make sure they contain the kind of stuff you've identified your audience wants to read, share or take advantage of such as useful advice, special offers, first looks, invitations to events, freebies etc.

If you can get to the point where your content is good enough for recipients to share with colleagues, friends and family - bingo! Customers make far more effective advocates than the brand itself.

### Social networking

Social networking sites have become some of the biggest, most talked-about brands in the world. Giants of the genre like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter offer ideal platforms for online engagement by allowing people to interact with your organisation in a two-way dialogue. Look around you in the office, on the train, in cafés...pretty much anywhere.

The chances are, somebody (or more likely everybody) will be interacting with one or more of these sites. Today, you have the opportunity to share relevant content with customers and prospects wherever they are. It also allows you to be much more responsive as a brand, answering comments on your Facebook page for example, or using Twitter as a help desk.

Aside from the big three mentioned above, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest could also be worth looking at, depending on your sector.

*"Customers make far more effective advocates than the brand itself."*

### Blogs

Blogs allow you to share your opinion and points of view, position yourself as an industry leader full of wisdom and expertise, or offer insights into your business. Less intrusive than emails, readers will come to you rather than having content pushed into their inbox, but even so the number of times you blog depends on how much time you have – and also how much time your intended audience has too. Posting at least once a week is the generally accepted guide. As with any other area of your business, planning is vital – so make sure you create and follow a content strategy. Aimless blogging tends to fade away as you lose sight of the reasons you started in the first place, or simply can't think of anything to write about. Once you've started writing, don't forget to publicise the latest posts on your site and social networking profiles, as well as by being an active participant in other industry-related blogs.

### Webcasts, Webinars and Podcasts

Webcasts give you your very own online TV channel and audience. Unlike smaller, internal video meetings, webcasts are – or can be if required – large-scale online events aimed at a much bigger and public audience. They are typically available on-demand, which allows viewers to tune in whenever it suits them, just as they would catch-up TV. You can even help them brighten up those dreary commutes, by watching you via their tablets and smartphones too. Webcasts can be based around tutorials of a product, for example, or expert advice on specialist topics. If you're an accountant, perhaps you could explain the ins and out of tax planning or any other issues that may be relevant to your customers or specialist area of expertise.

Podcasts (and vodcasts) tend to work in the same way, but are usually a series of related webcasts rather than standalone.

Webinars are two-way, interactive presentations so they take place live, which means your audience needs to know where and when they take place and be ready to participate in realtime. Invite audience members to ask questions via Twitter using a hash-tag (#taxwebcast), which will help publicise your initiative. Live webcasts help you to create a real and meaningful face-to-face dialogue and add a human dimension to your brand. As such, there are few more engaging methods of building relationships short of old-school 'real-life' wining and dining (and webcasts are much cheaper, of course).

*"After all, you don't need thousands of fans, friends and followers – you need customers."*

# PROVOKE AND ENGAGE



OK, so you've optimised your site, got your social networking up and running, made a start on your blog, sent out an email or two and proudly put up your first webcast. But let's stay focused on why you've done all that. After all, you don't need thousands of fans, friends and followers – you need customers.

Needless to say, it can take time for your audience to react and start engaging with your brand. To make sure they do, we've already spoken about the importance of creating relevant content. The more closely interactions with your brand reflect their needs or interests, the more engaged they'll be and the more likely to convert from prospects to customers.

### Creating interaction

The more personal the interaction, the more effective it is. For example, you'll undoubtedly create a closer bond a session over Skype than you would from an email, which means going further than simply sending a Tweet or updating your Facebook business page. To fully engage with your customers and prospects, create a dialogue. Keep the information on your social media pages fresh and relevant. Create original, timely and engaging content - and avoid repetition.

And keep it relevant, tailored to your customer personas rather than a generic 'catch-all' approach (which usually ends up catching none).

It's worth bearing in mind that the majority of people are passive spectators who won't interact with anything you put out there, whatever useful features, tools and content you've generated. They might look, consume, download... whatever, but they don't want to join a conversation or share stuff with peers.

In reality, however, powerful brand experiences, authentic two-way relationships and dynamic communities are measured by the levels of engagement they achieve rather than the amount of people take part. Web 2.0 tools have created both the need for, and solution to, this kind of engagement. So...what are they?

*"Spread the message wide, but keep it relevant – and keep it focused."*

### Engagement Marketing methods that actually work if you do them well

As ever, the theory behind things is all well and good – but the big question is always the same. How does it work in practice? How do you get people talking to and talking about your brand, interacting with it, engaging with it?

The unhelpful answer is that there is no set way, no perfect mix, and no one-size-fits-all magic bullet. After all, your prospects and customers will be quite different to the audience of an organisation in a completely different industry. By following some of the steps outlined previously, you'll have identified the kind of stuff they are likely to respond to, so now it's time to experiment and try different ways of doing things.

### Build a sense of community

Try to foster a sense of community around your brand. Community is a natural instinct that runs extremely deeply in the human psyche – think of football clubs, rail enthusiasts, dog owners... In the past we derived a sense of community from geographic location, but now so many people are in Cyberspace a different sense of community will be defined by the interests we share. So offer like-minded people a place to come together, whether that's around a product, service or even the shared goal of minimising tax!

### Spread your messaging over multiple channels

We've already described the kind of online channels you can use to share relevant content. Taking advantage of cross-channel communications will not only help you to reach more people, but also reinforce your branding through increased visibility. Be realistic about the amount of time you have to spare, and don't forget that in addition to the usual emails, blogs and webcasts you can also try your hand at RSS feeds, targeted landing pages, surveys, white papers, online forums, articles, newsletters, comments and more. Spread the message wide, but keep it relevant – and keep it focused.

### Make it personal

Smaller businesses traditionally offer one clear advantage over bigger rivals: a more personal service. To extend this competitive edge into the digital space, try filming videos that introduce yourself as well as your business, offer useful advice [e.g. a workshop], or offer glowing testimonials from satisfied customers. This will allow people to meet you and get a real feel for who you are. Appointing a visible community leader can also play a big part. The community leader will interact with prospects and customers, respond to their questions, encourage them to participate and contribute content, even provide tips and ideas. Remember, people don't want to hold conversations with companies. They want to

talk to real people. By incorporating a strong human element on your website, you allow them to do so.

### Get key people involved in comment threads (by blackmail if necessary)

Community leaders aren't the only people who should be engaging your audience. When senior staff or industry leaders (and who says they aren't one and the same?) generate content and participate in conversations such as comment threads, say, or on forums, people sense that you care enough to spend time with them. Like anyone else, your prospects and customers respond positively to attention – and that obviously won't do any harm to your relationships. Or why not invite customers themselves to contribute? Again, it demonstrates that you care about their point of view, not to mention that extra level of credibility that 'real people' can deliver.

*“Review what you're doing to identify what works and what doesn't as part of an endless process of fine-tuning.”*

### Support and encourage interactions

Some people love to give an opinion (occasionally a little too loudly and a little too often...come on, we all know someone like that). Allowing visitors to comment on site content, give a review of your service or take part in a forum all represent a powerful invitation to interact with your brand and stimulate conversation. One comment leads to another, then comments are made on comments, suddenly discussions are taking place – and all on your site. And every answered question, opinion and debate adds a new thread of credibility and authenticity to your brand.

So don't forget to place social sharing buttons by content and make it easy for people to add reviews. In fact, you should positively encourage them to. Telling people how important their feedback is not only makes them feel good, but provides a valuable source of input to help you identify and solve pain points and make your brand experience even better, from messaging to product development.

### Notify community members when they get responses

Actively encouraging comments on your content is a great way of developing a dynamic community around your brand, product or service. But these threads and discussions can come to an abrupt halt, so it helps if you can keep these participants engaged and their valuable conversations going.

By notifying participants whenever an additional comment is added to a thread – with email alerts, for example – you can remind them the discussion is still ongoing and staying up to date. Allow them to select the frequency of alerts: every time a comment is added, once a day or even once a week. And in the case where the volume of emails they receive starts to become annoying, or they're simply no longer interested in the thread, ensure you make it easy for them to unsubscribe.

### Keep at it!

Once you've got up and running, effortless posting a blog, Tweeting an offer or filming a webcast, don't fall into complacency. Review what you're doing to identify what works and what doesn't as part of an endless process of fine-tuning. Keep planning ahead in terms of the sort of content you develop. Take advantage of conversations with prospects and customers to ensure your site, blogs, Tweets, email campaigns, offers, help desk etc. are continually aligned to people's requirements and expectations.

Remember, just because you've attracted somebody's attention once doesn't mean you automatically keep it. People are easily, erm...distracted, that's right. So you have to keep working hard to maintain and improve levels of engagement. If nobody is reading your blog, is it because they don't know about it or because you're not talking about what interests them? Remember, everything starts and ends with the customer.

### **Did you know?**

*Online community engagement opens up the conversation to new voices, helping expose stakeholders to new ideas. This can help break down old mental models surrounding an issue and introduce "new truths". Source: [sustainet.com](http://sustainet.com)*

# THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT MARKETING

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By now, it should already be fairly clear what kind of benefits you can expect from a well-planned and well executed Engagement Marketing strategy.

There's nothing complex or esoteric or mysterious about Engagement Marketing – it's really just a matter of going back to the basics of listening, understanding and communicating with customers. Sort of like the 'good old days' but online and en masse.

You get to know your customers and prospects better. As you understand their requirements, you can be more responsive to them. That makes them more satisfied with you. Conversations begin – both with you and about you. You provide a better experience with useful information, great offers, relevant content, good advice, the opportunity to voice an opinion...you add value. They feel valued (engaged, you might say). The relationship develops. Prospects become customers. Customers buy more than before. They recommend you. And the virtuous circle is complete.

## A positive impact

Engagement Marketing takes a far more comprehensive and forward-thinking approach than a sales-focused or traffic-driving strategy. Engagement is about enhancing reputations, building brands, strengthening loyalty, reducing costs, improving efficiency, providing the products or services that people really want...all of which, in one way or another, make a positive impact on your business, your brand and, oh yes, your bottom line.

### **Did you know?**

*It's well worth knowing that customers report positive experiences in online communities more than twice as often as they do via calls or email. Oh – and that brand loyalty is twice as high for companies that offer online community experiences. Not forgetting that community members generally remain customers 50% longer than non-community customers. Source: [socialmediastatistics.wikidot.com](http://socialmediastatistics.wikidot.com)*

## THE TOP 10 BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT MARKETING (in no particular order)

- 01 Strengthen brand loyalty** by building and maintaining strong relationships with customers.
- 02 Enhance your reputation** by being active, publishing high-quality content and answering questions.
- 03 Improve customer satisfaction** through active online support, 24/7 customer service, proactive help and one-to-one personal communications.
- 04 Build trust** by not only offering the opportunity for customers to share opinions, but also by being honest and open when replying to questions and comments. Winning the loyalty of influencers and ambassadors can empower your message and convince their peers.
- 05 Gain deeper customer insight** engaging in real-time through community discussions, comments, polling, RSS feeds, blogs and chats. Learn about your customers – and competitors – directing this knowledge into new product feedback, shorter product development time and identifying future needs.
- 06 Decrease operating costs** by using online help, customer forums and social media platforms to answer questions and to reduce the need for support staff and/or allow them to focus on more complex issues.
- 07 Increase brand visibility** by communicating across a wide range of channels and platforms, helping prospects come into contact with your brand, positioning yourself as a specialist and reducing the need for prospects to “check out” the competition
- 08 Improve crisis management** using customer interaction and social media monitoring to detect and solve potential problems [e.g. negative comments and reviews] quickly and visibly.
- 09 Identifying new prospects** in groups and forums, interacting with them early in the consideration period and using the power of personalised, well-timed messages – in response to status updates, say – to gently nudge them to purchase.
- 10 Oh yes – increase sales.**  
See above. Ker-ching.

### So where do you start measuring engagement?

As with anything, begin with a benchmark. For example, Google Analytics will show current levels of engagement (if any), with typical measurements including time on site, pages per visit, inbound links, mentions on Twitter, return visits, new visitors, interests and pages viewed. If you see an increase in some or all of these benchmarks, then you can be pretty sure you’ve started to engage customers and prospects more effectively.

### It’s a problem solver too

Google Analytics can also be useful to find out where any problems might lay, for example if visitors are dropping off from the same page of your site, check out or registration process. By identifying the point where engagement breaks down, you can make the relevant tweaks and changes to make sure more people continue, complete and convert.

*“The world is more social and interactive than ever before.”*

**Are you relevant?**

Bear in mind that increasing levels of engagement in isolation isn't enough: it has to be relevant to your business too. After all, you might amass an impressive number of fans on Facebook and Tweets on Twitter, but are your sales figures keeping up? Are people buying from you as well as talking about you? And if visitors are spending a lot of time on your site, have you made sure it's because they're engaging with your content rather than because they're lost? When you measure engagement, make sure you also look at how it helps you to achieve your goals.

**IN SHORT...**

Marketing has always been about relevance and relationships. Engagement Marketing takes that a step (or leap) further by adding a new level of responsiveness, encouraging people to assert more influence over brands and participate in dialogues with them. One-way traffic is a thing of the past. As the most informed consumers in history, we are all instantly capable of finding out everything we need to know about a brand, product or service. So TV ads and billboards are no longer enough to build a strong, 'living' brand. We have to go beyond one-way marketing to persuade people in more experiential, more personal and, oh yes, more engaging ways.

**It's not about the money anymore**

That's obviously good news for owners of small businesses, who can enjoy the same access to engagement tools as multinational conglomerates. Time may be a barrier to connecting with a larger audience, but finances no longer need to be. But that doesn't have to mean working harder, just smarter: today's successful brands of all sizes are empowered by the consumers themselves.

**Attention is king!**

Ultimately, the goal of Engagement Marketing is to create relationships that benefit customers as much or more than the companies themselves. People will become increasingly indifferent to businesses that are indifferent to them. They don't demand engagement from you, but why are they going to be interested in brands that aren't really interested in them beyond their wallets?

**Did you know?**

Stronger relationships with more engaged customers is proven to improve sales productivity. For example, a two-year analysis of brand-customer social media engagement with Canada's 10-million+ member AIR MILES Reward Programme showed the higher the level of participation in a social media event, the greater the impact on a consumer's purchasing behavior.

**The future of marketing**

To cut a long story short, the future is going to be more social. More mobile. And more concise. The world is more social and interactive than ever before. On the plus side, that offers small businesses and entrepreneurs easy access to a range of tools that engage customers and achieve real, measurable results.

**The future is mobile**

At the same time, even the smallest business will need to optimise communications to smartphones and tablets as consumer adoption of all things mobile grows exponentially. Content will become richer and ever more engaging, but also shorter with strong, clear calls to action.

In this new, evolving and involving world of marketing, the strength of the relationships you develop with customers will prevent your emails from going to junk, your webcasts from being cast among the great unwatched, and your online communities from turning into digital ghost towns.

So yes, the world of marketing has changed and continues to do so. And that keeps it all interesting not just for companies - but for everyone. •

*"Why are people going to be interested in brands that aren't really interested in them beyond their wallets?"*



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