

The **Engagement** Principles



Don't Interrupt. Engage.

Create content that engages.

Leverage interactive media and build community.

Show your customers a commonality of passions.

Be authentic (hype & corporatespeak alienate).

Remember - all buying decisions are emotional.



Don't just market at customers. It's time to engage them.

In literally seconds, a customer can exit your Web site and surf over to your competitor's site. They'll trash your e-mail with a dozen others just like it. They'll toss your direct mail into the garbage with all the other mailers, and read right past your ad in the magazine.

What will make them stop? What can you do to justify your marketing budget?

Spam accounts for better than 85% of all Internet mail traffic, and the barrage of broadcast/Web/mail/catalog marketing continues to grow.

In that environment, how are your company's interrupt marketing efforts going to be noticed?

Welcome to marketing in the brave new media world.

How should you adapt?

Traditional "interrupt" marketing is based on the concepts of benefit and interruption. You try to offer prospects and customers a big enough benefit to freeze them - to "interrupt" their scan of the magazine/TV/Internet.

That "benefit" can be as simple as an offer. As effective as an appeal to vanity. Or even the "benefit" of entertainment.

Interrupt marketing works, yet the number of media channels - and the proliferation of marketing messages - is overwhelming the customer. As competition for customer attention increases,

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consumers became increasingly jaded. And interrupt marketing becomes increasingly shrill - even adversarial in an attempt to garner attention.

Is that really the customer relationship you want to build?

As ad rates climb in most print publications, ROI falls. Newspapers are bleeding ad revenues, and while many print magazines are still quite healthy, the trends are clear: more people are getting their news and information from the Internet, and the pace of change is accelerating.

Chase new interrupt opportunities? Build engagement.

The answer to a jaded customer isn't necessarily to market more. It's to market higher - at the level where users are engaged, and your customers are so committed to your brand they won't switch to another.

Simply put, sell a widget, and you've made a widget's profit. Engage a widget buyer, and you've earned a lifetime of profits.

Leverage engagement technologies for a better ROI.

In the past, truly engaging a customer was expensive. Today, online media offer a wealth of contact channels, and engagement has actually become less expensive than traditional media efforts.

You can send an e-mail to all your customers for next to nothing. Physically maintain a blog or message board for dollars a month. And send cell phone text messages for pennies.

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What's the catch? The stumbling block for most companies is content.

Nike launched their "Joga" soccer site to build a community for the world's soccer fans. Their Nike+ runner's site is even more compelling - and worth a visit for any marketer.

Maintaining an ongoing dialog with customers - even via affordable channels - requires that you have something to say. Some organizations create a steady flow of content from within their ranks. Others hire someone to provide it.

At this point, most are doing neither.

Regardless of its source, the content must rise above alienating PR hype and corporatespeak. Remember; you're not delivering interrupt marketing through a new channel, you're building a community among your customers.

You won't do it with hype.

You do it by being authentic. And demonstrating a commonality of passion with your customers. In short, the truly engaged customer knows which values define your company, and embraces those values.

The Content Wars: how do you engage?

You begin with the realization that all purchase decisions are essentially emotional. Give your brand an emotional advantage, and you're going to win.

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What you're creating is community; a commonality of values and passions with your customers that binds them to your brand, engaging them at an emotional level.

To do this, you require powerful, compelling content. Even so-called "user-generated content" sites require starting content, and media like blogs demand quality content to become "sticky."

In engagement, quality content is the key to attracting visitors, and it also entices other bloggers and online sites to reference the content, building links and driving traffic.

Unlike a commercial blog, traffic alone isn't critical to an engagement blog; pageviews are useful inasmuch as they expose potential customers and prospects to your company's message - the crucial first step if engagement is to occur.

Marketing organizations that ignore bi-directional online media do so at their own risk.

In the absence of participation, the online community's blogs and message boards will shape their brand's message for them - and not always in ways they'd appreciate.

Engagement also requires a two-way media channel (customers need to feel they're part of a community, and they demand an opportunity to voice their values and passions).

In truth, this is the part of the engagement equation that frightens companies - the moment where they stand back and invite their engaged community to speak their mind and comment in response to content.

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Some simply aren't prepared to release the reins, unaware that it's already happened online.

Social Networking for Engagement

Social networks ([Facebook](#), [MySpace](#), [Joga](#), etc) can be extremely effective engagement tools, but don't scale down well; they require a significant community to reach "critical mass."

In addition, social sites are complex to manage and are far less "directive" than other engagement venues (like blogs). They offer the advantage of largely user-generated content (once they reach a certain size), but that content won't necessarily promote engagement.

Still, they can be extremely effective engagement tools; the communities are largely self-selecting, and – in what amounts to a marketer's dream benefit – they largely grow themselves (provided the right ingredients are in place).

Social media sites like Facebook are exploding, though effective monetization remains a problem – for social site owners, advertisers and businesses looking to leverage the sites.

One of the best examples social-networking engagement tool is the Nike+ site – Nike's online community for runners.

I took a brief look at this [stunning social media site on my Engagement Principles blog](#); the level of interactivity is mind-boggling.

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Runners can form communities, offer support, track each other's training, receive training and injury advice – even upload their training data (gathered from sensors in select Nike running shoes).

Through it all, Nike's brand hovers in the background, and the company's passion for the sport is delivered at every level of the site.

Email Engagement

Email/eNewsletter marketing is hardly new – and it's not exactly the most interactive of media channels – but you can't beat its ROI, nor its convenience.

For small and medium businesses, email integrates so neatly with blogs and other engagement channels that it simply can't be ignored.

Effective and affordable, email is an effective engagement media.

Blogging for Engagement

Blogs (short for [Web logs](#)) are extremely effective engagement tools which offer a significant advantage over social network tools; the conversation is largely directed by the blog owner.

This allows the blogger to focus on issues related to the

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organization, and to present the organization's values and passions in whatever format works best.

What are blogs? Essentially, a [blog](#) platform is an easy-to-use electronic publishing platform that easily broadcasts words, images, video and other rich media.

Blogs deliver multiple benefits to organizations, including engagement, significant SEO benefits (Google loves blogs), credibility (assuming they're done well), and yes - they provide a platform for disseminating news.

In addition to ease of use, blog platforms typically feature the tools needed to amplify your message in today's interconnected Internet environment: [RSS feeds](#), tags, links, widgets, etc.

While the word "blog" tends to evoke a highly linear, reverse chronology Web site, they are evolving rapidly. Many now sport magazine-style features (like "featured" articles that stay at the top of the chronology), and designers are steadily improving the feature set and appearance of blogs.

In addition, blogs are adding some social media functionality, and yes, they offer significant SEO benefits to those who employ them correctly.

The downsides?

Blogs demand quality content; good quality content typically separates the heavily trafficked blogs from those that fail.

Blogs also lack the hyper-connectedness of social media sites, and may only serve one aspect of a brand's online community.

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Currently, WordPress blog software – an open source solution – is the most popular blogging platform. It's used by everyone from low-traffic bloggers to the New York Times. It's powerful and easy to use.

For companies of all sizes, blogging represents the easiest, most-affordable engagement medium available – provided quality content is available or can be generated.

Mobile Engagement

Texting/Mobile applications are gaining ground on traditional Internet applications, and while still in their infancy, it's possible mobile phones/PDA devices will eventually surpass PCs, though that day has yet to arrive.

In the meantime, many organizations are looking at texting/mobile devices as a subset of the market, and driving their other engagement content onto mobile devices, though often in different form.

The rise of truly Web-ready devices like the iPhone and Blackberry Storm are changing the face of mobile engagement, and this is one area set to explode soon.

The Future of Engagement Marketing

While only a fool would make specific predictions about the future of engagement marketing, the trends are clear.

The technology of engagement (and the Internet) continues to

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evolve on a daily basis, and new engagement-capable media channels will no doubt appear - while those that already exist continue to improve.

Engagement Marketing is acquiring momentum in the corporate world, though a common refrain among naysayers is the lack of reliable engagement/ROI metrics.

Many have struggled to create a meaningful "loyalty" metric, and bandied about a modified version of RFM (Recency, Frequency, Money) with colleagues ("M" [money] is replaced by a combined score derived from comments and time on site).

It's an interesting measure, but the idea's admittedly still in its infancy. Some online marketers also tout "engagement" numbers based on short-term measures (e.g. - a micro-site may be considered "engaging" to visitors if they stay a while, click X number of links, etc), but doesn't qualify as engagement marketing, at least not as we're defining it.

However you measure it, engagement marketing offers a real benefit - and a potentially sizable competitive advantage - to any company willing to engage with their customers, matching their values and passions to those of prospects and customers.

Engaged people amplify a brand's message, and provide the most useful of all sales tools; customer advocacy.

In an era where brand loyalty faces an uncertain future among choice-enabled consumers, engagement marketing offers one way out of the (expensive) need to win customers back *every* time they make a purchase decision.

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The Author

Tom Chandler is a copywriter and marketing consultant with 23+ years experience. While he's happy to embrace new technologies, he possesses a cynical streak, and considers new media technologies only in the context of their effectiveness (and client friendliness) - not their buzz.

He lives and works on the lower slopes of a 14,000' volcano in the mountains of Northern California, and practices his engagement marketing skills on the readers of his top-ranked fly fishing blog and top-rated copywriter blog.

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