

Customer-driven Online Engagement

Transitioning into a Blueeconomy

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Management summary

The market has adopted new rules to the game, allowing the customer more control than ever before. Trends like full adoption of e-business, social sharing and co-creation, ongoing individualization and the splintering of the Internet pose new challenges for the online marketer.

Such trends change the way marketers must fulfill their roles; it is increasingly difficult to set up consistent messaging across multiple channels. As sales cycles have turned into multi-step, cross-channel journeys, it is also very hard to make a correct sales attribution per channel. The so-called Splinternet means that marketers must collect, store and interpret customer data across various lock-protected networks such as app stores, Facebook and Twitter. Companies do not own nor control these channels. On top of that, anyone can publish and share information about your company on these social media channels, but as marketer, you have little influence over what is being said.

However, the positive side to all this is that, marketers can use these same market trends to interact with their customers in totally new and much more effective ways. A key element is to “engage” with the customer.

Customer engagement is the process of being involved with (prospective) customers by interacting with them through relevant dialogues and experiences, in order to optimally support customers and their networks in their buying decisions. Engagement consists of listening, understanding and interacting with the customer on the individual level. Relevant one-to-one dialogues are needed, that take place at the right time, at the right place (channel) with the right message: content is king, with context as his queen.

Implementing customer-driven engagement helps companies move from being market-driven to becoming more customer-driven, but there are implications for the organization. One important element is that true engagement starts from within. The external value creation process needs to be paired with an internal collaboration process. If both are set up correctly, a company enters what is being called a “Blueconomy”.

In a Blueconomy, customers, employees and companies collaborate. This allows them to operate in an ecosystem made up of customers, employees, partners and suppliers. The benefits of a Blueconomy are evident:

- Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty
- Unified experiences across channels
- New cross-sell opportunities
- Transparent sales attribution
- Shared marketing best practices

Mutually influencing and supporting each other through a transparent, interconnected cloud of business relationships ensures that all participants in a Blueconomy - customers, partners, employees and company alike - have a distinct competitive advantage!

New rules of the online marketing game...

“The customer is king.”

This is one of the phrases that companies use frequently to profess a philosophy that the customer* comes first in their business. In reality, however, most companies were only paying lip service to this statement, while putting their own goals and objectives first. Shareholder value, EBITDA rates, sales quota and bonuses all were more important than helping the customer. The company was king; the customer was merely led to believe he was important as well.

But this situation is rapidly changing. The transformation has not been imposed by a particular company, customer movement or trade union, but by new internet technologies. The Internet has dramatically shifted the balance in power between companies and customers in favor of the customer. It has changed the rules of the game, giving the individual a loud and clear voice.

Why did this change not occur until recently? Several trends have contributed to the transforming of the marketing environment.

E-business is the standard

In November 2010, there were nearly 2 billion internet users world-wide, which is roughly one in every four persons¹. In the industrialized nations, this ratio is significantly higher. For the U.S., 77% of all people use the Internet, while in Western-Europe the rate is about 67%. These numbers indicate that the Internet has become an integral part of everyday life. Because the Internet is everywhere nowadays, people spend more and more of their time online.

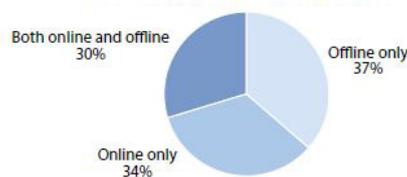
And what used to be called “e-business” has simply become the de facto standard for doing business. People use online channels to look for information on products, services, jobs, housing and so on, or just to meet up with friends old and new. Increasingly, they have also become online customers. People buy their books, music, insurance, electronics, travel and furniture online. For more expensive products such as cars and housing, they begin the process by acquiring information online and then close the deal offline. In both cases, the purchase originated from an online channel.

Social sharing and co-creation

The enormous rise in social sharing and co-creation is another trend changing the landscape. Online customers turn to other customers for assistance with product selection by using peer reviews, online user forums and Q&A via Facebook and Twitter. The vendor’s own product information is no longer taken for granted. In fact, people rely more on what other users say about a product than on the glossy product

1-2 More than one-third of researchers researched their product purchase exclusively online

Among US online adults who researched a financial product in 2008, the percentage who researched by channel:



Base: US online adults
(percentages may not total 100 because of rounding)

Source: North American Technographics Benchmark Survey, 2009 (US, Canada)

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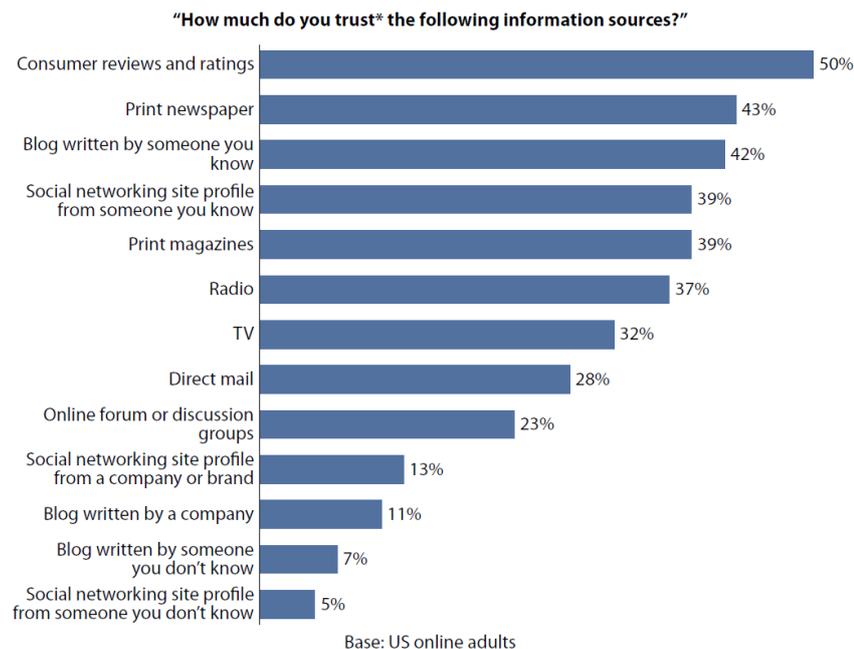
Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

image source: 1

* Throughout this White Paper, the word ‘customer’ can be substituted by ‘prospect’ or ‘online visitor’.

sheet or costly TV commercial crafted by the marketing team. There is a clear difference in trust level for “owned media” (belonging to a product vendor) versus “paid media” (advertising) and “earned media” (social sites where a vendor must earn credibility). Consumers trust the people they know and those that have gone through a similar buying process. Research analyst firm Forrester found that 50% of all consumers trust peer reviews and consumer ratings, with about 42% trusting blogs written by people they know².

Figure 3 Consumers Trust Those They Know



Source: North American Technographics® Interactive Marketing Online Survey, Q2 2009 (US)
 *Trust is defined as a 4 or 5 [trust a lot] on a scale from 1 [do not trust at all] to 5 [trust a lot].

56537

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

image source: 2

Customers also flock together online around sites like Groupon. Such sites allow customers to join forces before they decide to make a purchase. In doing so, customers gain more buying power as a group rather than making purchases individually.

Moreover, social media are used as a low-barrier way to influence product decisions. Consumers have become “post-modern nomads”³ who actively provide their feedback. Occasionally, they even set up Facebook pages to convince other people to support their ideas, and by doing so contribute to and “co-create” product roadmaps.

The benefits of using social media to get information about products and services are evident: information is coming from a relatively unbiased source, is usually instantly available and allows for direct feedback and additional questions.

On-going individualization

Another trend has paved the way for “King Customer” – ongoing individualization. Western societies have become increasingly individualized, with people striving to become more independent from one another.

Both men and women earn their own living nowadays, making them more or less financially independent of each other. Today, there are more single-person households now than just 5 years ago.

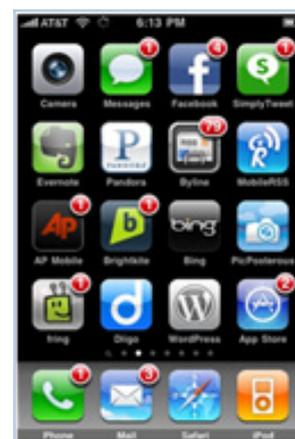
This individualization trend is also visible on the Internet. People want to publicly express what they have been up to through social sites like Facebook, Blogger, Flickr, About.me, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter, distinguishing themselves in all sorts of creative ways.

The trend towards individualization also means that customers want to be treated as unique human beings, not simply as a “face in the crowd.” Whether online or off, they expect recognition as individuals. Browsing a virtual store, they believe, should give them the same feeling of individualized attention. Because of this expectation, the online store experience should show some intelligence when dealing with the customer. This trend was recognized early on by vendors like Amazon.com, who offer all kind of sales support fine-tuned to an individual’s search and browse behavior, with features such as “other people bought this as well” and “related searches.”

Splintering of the Internet

Most companies own at least ten different sites and channels on which they promote their products and services. Some companies even use more than 50 (!) different sites⁴. This in itself is already quite a challenge to manage for the online marketing teams.

However, there is another phenomenon in today’s market that is causing some additional headaches for online marketers: the splintering of the Internet. The Internet is splintering across proprietary hardware platforms like the Apple iPhone, Google Android and Windows Mobile. Hardware platforms like interactive television have their own proprietary format. This phenomenon has been dubbed the “Splinternet⁵.” If you want to broadcast a message or sell a product using a mobile app or interactive television, you now must build, test and deliver the same functionality or advertisement each time you want it available on an additional platform.



Along with a division along hardware platform “flavors,” there is an on-going division along software platform flavors. Social sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn shatter the unity of the Web with content only available behind a password. This content also tends to be invisible to search engines (or search engines must pay to get access). Familiar online marketing tools like links, online advertising, search engine optimization (SEO) and analytics work differently or are missing in these new environments. Yet as a company and a marketer, you want the ability to interact with your customers across all these separate environments.

In summary, customers can now share their individual impressions, reviews, comments, likes and dislikes with everyone who wants to know about it, using their Facebook walls, Twitter accounts, public forums and personal blogs. The Internet has made communications once again a level playing field, where the voice of the individual customer can be just as loud as or even louder than the voice of the marketing department of a large multinational company!

This leads us to the challenges faced by online marketers AD 2011.

Challenges for the online marketer

Marketers at one time controlled (most of) the information about their company, their brands and their products. This has always been their job: by sharing information, they promote their companies and products in such a way as to add value to both the company and prospective customers. Marketing has been a means to facilitate the sales process, bringing company and customers closer together. This part of the equation hasn't really changed; it remains marketing's primary reason for existence.

Customers in control

What has fundamentally changed is the way marketers now must fulfill this role. As we saw in the previous section, the market has adopted new rules to the game, making the customer king. More than ever before, the customers and prospects are in control of your brand, your reputation and in control of your (online) marketing. A striking example is the public response to the way in which British Petroleum (BP) handled (not!) the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Case Study: the BP oil spill, or how social media can hurt...

A recent example of the influence of ordinary people using social media to highlight the role of a large multi-national corporation is the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico⁶. When you search for "BP PR" or "BP public relations" in Google, the top organic result is @BPGlobalPR, a parody account on Twitter with more than ten times as many followers as BP's official account. The satirical @BPGlobalPR began to dominate the online conversation soon after its launch, especially since BP did not respond to the parody using Twitter and Facebook. In fact, the company did not communicate much at all via @BP_America. The official account did little in the way of responding, retweeting or following anyone else on Twitter, making it a purely one-way communication channel. Given that the oil spill was the most twittered about topic worldwide during all of 2010 makes this lack of response by BP even more remarkable⁷.

What we learn from this is that each customer should be seen as a member of the media, since customers have such a variety of ways to exercise influence and express opinions online via forums, blogs, Twitter and so on⁸. The single biggest challenge for an online marketer today is how to engage with his customers – and their networks – in a positive way.

No consistent communication across customer silos

Most companies have structured their marketing operations around their products, brands, verticals or regions. Consequently, they communicate with their clients from *multiple silos*, lacking a holistic view of their customers. Often, there is no single owner of the customer experience, resources are lacking and the technical infrastructure is incapable of breaking out of these silos.

A complicating factor is that within each silo, *multiple channels* are used to reach the customer online. Traditional thinking in marketing means that most companies have spread their online presence across many different partially-owned sites and channels. The result is difficulty in tracking customers and effectively communicating with them. Corporate websites, landing pages, regional websites, product blog sites, mobile sites, but also Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and mobile apps: the average company manages at least ten online channels simultaneously per brand. On top of these, companies use paid media for additional awareness and lead generation purposes.

So while marketing teams continue to work along the traditional lines of silos and channels, the customer is happily surfing across the various channels for each silo, not bothered by any of these organizational and technical barriers.

It is quite a challenge to streamline the communication efforts across all channels and silos, a fact confirmed by Forrester in a survey conducted among 167 marketers⁹. Forty-nine percent of marketers surveyed indicated they have great difficulties coordinating cross-channel communications.

Figure 6 Coordination Across Channels And Measurement Puzzle Marketers

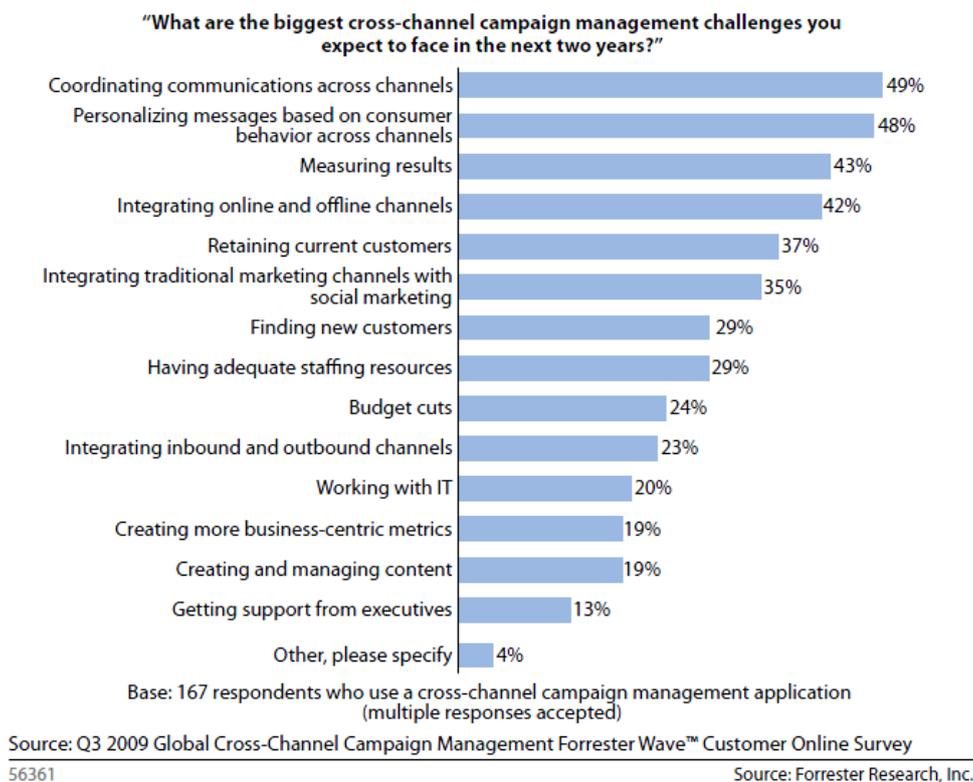


image source: 3

One underlying issue is the lack of a shared “customer profile.” The actions performed by a customer on Twitter are not linked back to what he does on the corporate website, the product site or on the mobile channel. Not to mention that his whereabouts in the “insurance silo” are not noted and cross-linked with his online activities in the “banking silo.” Technical and organizational hurdles prevent companies from building a collective customer view. More importantly, they simply do not have the tools to effectively set up cross-silo, cross-channel interactions with each customer.

Issues with sales attribution

A challenge related to this is proper sales attribution. Over the last few years, the Internet has become the principal starting point for people looking to educate themselves about a product before deciding to make a purchase either online or offline. According to market research, back in 2008 two-thirds of all people looking for financial services such as a mortgage, a credit card or a loan were already using the Internet as the first step to evaluate various options¹⁰. Particularly for more complex or expensive

products and services, a multi-step, multi-channel purchase process is very common. This makes correct sales attribution difficult. Only if you as marketer know which path your customers followed in closing their deals, can you try to guide prospective buyers taking the same route. If you can attribute a sale to specific sites or channels, you can make well-founded decisions on how to spend your marketing dollars across all channels. On top of that, proper sales attribution significantly supports marketing departments in their annual budget discussions; after all it's not only the sales department who closed the deal...

Proper sales attribution requires a much deeper insight in your customer's whereabouts. Sometimes this can be solved for those customers who exclusively use the sites that are wholly owned by the marketing team, but it can become quite complex if you want to monitor a customer across different brands or departments. Obviously, this lack of shared customer information is counterproductive to overall company strategy, as there will be little synergy between channels and between departments. The company is sitting on top of a wealth of customer-related information but this information is only fractionally used, if at all.

Splinternet exacerbates these challenges

By standardizing web content management systems across all teams, setting up a centralized customer database and consistently storing online customer behavior in a central repository, you could overcome the lack of customer insight. This in itself is already a rather difficult challenge, but is still doable since all these sites and channels are owned by the company itself.

However, the problem increases in magnitude if you include external online communication channels as well: the paid media and the earned media. The latter category in particular poses big hurdles to collecting, interpreting and pro-actively responding to customer data, spread out across multiple password-protected networks. This is the area where customers are truly in control. For earned media, information is primarily pulled by the customer rather than pushed by marketing.

But... there is an upside, too!

Still, the fact that the game has changed from marketing-push to customer-pull is not necessarily a bad thing. Social media offer companies a great, unintrusive and very cost-effective way to start communicating and engaging with their customers. Companies do this, not by using the unidirectional information stream illustrated in the BP oil spill case, but by listening carefully to their customers – fans and critics alike – and responding to them whenever required. You as marketer must make sure you stay in touch with people who take the time to write to you or comment about you. In this new game, a satisfied customer can be your best sales representative. A peer-to-peer reference is usually very instrumental in convincing a prospective customer to buy your product or service. The best part: this type of reference is totally free!

After all, everybody nowadays can be seen as a member of the media...

Customer engagement is the answer

The trends and challenges as described before require the online marketer to come up with a proper answer. How can you stay up-to-date with your customers, listening to what they feel is important? How can you respond to their questions and doubts, retaining a consistent message across all channels?

Customer engagement defined

In our vision, customer engagement is the answer to this. Brian Solis, prominent thought leader and author in the area of new media, uses the phrase “Engage or die!” to indicate that companies currently have only one option to continue to stay competitive and profitable¹¹. Engagement is a term that has been around for a while now, with various meanings at different points in time. Therefore, it may be good to use the following definition throughout the remainder of this paper:

Customer engagement is the process of being involved with your (prospective) customers by interacting with them through relevant dialogues and experiences, in order to optimally support your customers and their networks in their buying decisions.

If we analyze this further and break it down into the key words of this definition, we have the following:

Engagement is a *process*. A process usually consists of several steps that are carried out in a coordinated fashion, and can be repeated. It is not a one-off activity, and aims to build a long-term profitable relationship for both parties.

Engagement is about *being involved with your customers*. Involvement goes beyond a mere handshake – it is about genuine interest in what your customers feel, say and think in relation to your company, product and market. It is about having a mutually influencing relationship between customer and vendor.

Engagement requires *interaction through relevant dialogues and experiences*. It is not enough just to listen to your customers’ needs, store them for subsequent analysis purposes and then forget about them. It is about reacting to customers’ feedback, showing you care about your customers. By entering into meaningful dialogues, an adaptive, two-way communication stream can be maintained that is relevant in the context of where the customer is in his journey at a given time.

Engagement is about *supporting your customers in their buying decisions*. In the end, the relationship between your company and your customers is a business relationship. As in any good relationship, both parties will benefit from it. The customer has a demand and seeks to solve this with your product or service, and you want to sell this solution to generate additional revenue for your company. The better you manage this engagement process and stay involved with your customers, responding to their needs as they occur, the better you will be able to help your customer make the best buying decision for them and for you.

Engagement is about looking after a *network* of people. In today’s world of social media, people seek help and support from each other if they want to inform themselves about new products and services.

Engagement is a process. It should take into account that each individual customer has not only a whole network of family, friends and colleagues but also Twitter followers, blog readers and review sites visitors who actively or passively notice and are influenced by what this customer has to say about your company.

Moving from market-driven to customer-driven

True customer engagement transforms companies from being market-driven to being customer-driven, and changes the way they communicate as well.

Market-driven companies, as the word already implies, see the market as leading all activities. Such a company does not look at the individual customer but rather divides the market into more or less homogeneous target groups. A target group represents a market segment with similar demographic characteristics, which responds similarly to a specific market stimulus. It fully disregards the individual's needs and wants, and the uniqueness of each customer. Because the word "market" connotes trade and revenue, it primarily tends to look at people as a possible source of revenue ("what can I get from you?" instead of "what can we mutually offer each other?"). It is perhaps subtle, but striking nonetheless!

Being customer-driven, however, requires a totally different attitude and way of thinking. It demands that organizations make the customer the starting point of all their processes instead of the result. Customer-driven companies seek long-term customer relationships. From this type of company's viewpoint, the customer relationship is regarded the most important asset. This fits very well in with the model of customer lifetime value. Customer lifetime value, calculated as the net present value of all cash flows attributed to the relationship with the customer, places emphasis on customer service and long-term customer satisfaction, rather than on maximizing short-term sales¹². Occasionally, being customer-driven might even mean the desired result would be to not close a deal if it were not in the best interests of the customer at that particular time. Eventually, this type of customer-centric behavior will pay itself back, as it will be rewarded by the customer. A short-term investment may have a long-term payback.

Real-time dynamic segmentation

Making the transition from being market-driven to customer-driven requires a much more fine-grained marketing approach. Instead of looking at large groups of similar customers, the marketer looks at the individual customer's need and wants and tries to fulfill those. It will no longer suffice to segment

Target markets

From a historical perspective, it made perfect sense to define upfront those *target markets* that could be reached with a specific marketing campaign. In fact, it was the only logical way to do so, as there was no other cost-effective way to further differentiate within target groups. An advertisement was printed in a magazine, and that magazine was mainly read by a certain audience. As marketer, you wanted this audience to learn more about your product, so you used this magazine to reach the individual by means of reaching an *entire group* of people. Of course there would be a group of non-interested readers as well, but it was the best you could do. Spray and pray. The larger the magazine's readership, the more likely that you would get some ROI on your marketing investment. How much exactly was unknown, as sales attribution in an offline marketing model is even harder to accomplish than in an online marketing model. Hence the famous quote by Lever Brothers founder Lord Leverhulme: "I know that half of my advertising budget is wasted; but I'm not sure which half."

customers *prior* to the marketing campaign. Rather, as marketer you let customers dynamically ‘segment themselves’ in real time as they express their own needs to you. This segmentation is based not only on demographics, but first and foremost also on individual characteristics like interests, needs and online behavior. Segments, this way, become *areas of interest* rather than a collection of people with a similar demographic profile. In an individualized society, as we have seen, it is advisable to listen and respond to the individual rather than imposing certain generalized behavior upon him.

Content is king, with context as his queen¹³

Being customer-driven also depends on anticipating customer needs and delivering upon these needs. This requires constantly listening to and properly understanding the customer at the one hand, and quickly responding to him at the other hand. This is different from traditional *push* marketing, where pushing the right content onto a website was king. The marketer decided upfront what message would fit his target audience best, and published this on his channel(s).

In today’s world, it’s much more about *pull* marketing, where the marketer tries to “pull” the needs, wants and desires out of the customer, in order to know better what to offer him, at the right time and at right place. Applying knowledge about your customer adds context and relevancy to your content. Content still remains important, but the customer has a clear say in it. Going back to Brian Solis’ book *Engage!*, “content is the new democracy and we, the people, are ensuring that our voices are heard.”¹¹ Let the customer tell you what he’s up to, and respond to this at once, in a context-sensitive way.

Customer engagement: implications for the organization

Being customer-driven automatically increases the engagement level a customer experiences with you and your company. This customer-driven engagement may require initial investment. However, research carried out by Gallup Consulting shows that engaged customers on average offer a 23% premium in terms of share of wallet, profitability, revenues and relationship growth¹⁵.

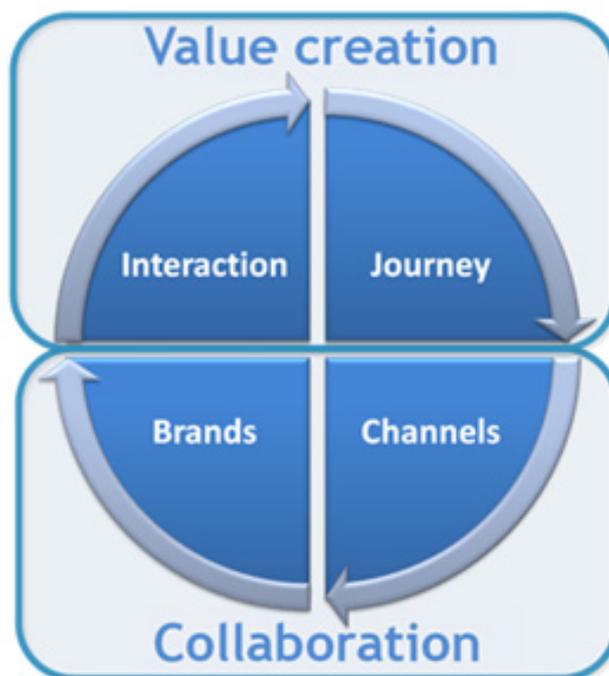
In addition to the extra money an engaged customer is willing to spend, engagement also improves customer loyalty. Loyalty leads to a more reliable, constant revenue stream at a lower cost. As loyal customers require less marketing, promotion and sales efforts, the total cost-of-sales will be significantly lower than for a new customer.

The new game rules require organizations to become more engaged with their clients. Engagement strengthens the customer relationship, which benefits both the customer and the organization if set up correctly. At the same time, engagement will also have its repercussions on internal processes. Internal collaboration between colleagues, teams, departments and even divisions needs to be enhanced. Silos need to be torn down. Information on the various channels needs to be synchronized and customers to be consistently listened to across all channels, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the customer.

This requires closer cooperation and thorough orchestration of the flow of information, especially when dealing with multi-step purchase processes. Some internal guidance and sharing of best practices are needed amongst all customer-facing representatives. Everyone interacting with the customer needs to be involved. This calls for a new approach: *creating your Blueconomy*.

Creating your Blueconomy: doing business in today's world

Customer-driven engagement is the answer to the new rules of the game where the customer is much more in control. Organizations need to implement a customer-driven engagement program. This requires changes in the way marketers and other customer-facing departments interact with (prospective) clients. True customer-driven engagement goes beyond the traditional silos along the lines of labels, brands or divisions. It will also change the way teams and departments collaborate *internally*. This entire eco system of customers, online ambassadors, employees and partners is what we call your company's Blueconomy.

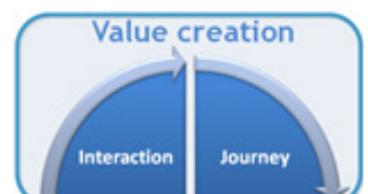


In a Blueconomy, value creation and collaboration are the two guiding principles. **Value creation** is the process aimed at delivering something of “value” to the customer and requires a strong and meaningful relationship between the customer and the organization. To build such a relationship, in-depth customer insights via meaningful interactions and the ability to immediately respond to these insights are prerequisites. After all, the best interaction is reaction!

Collaboration is about improving relationships within the organization itself by sharing customer knowledge and best practices with each other. This collaboration process is aimed at achieving the overall business goals at the enterprise level.

Value creation: joining the customer on his journey

Customer engagement is the process of being involved with your prospects and customers by interacting with them through relevant dialogues and experiences, in order to optimally support your customers and their network in their buying decisions.



Value creation always starts with listening to what the customer wants. By listening to the customer, you can collect more information about the issue he is trying to solve. This information will be the basis for further meaningful interactions such as an interactive dialogue on one of the online channels.

Buying decisions often are based on a series of interactions across multiple online and offline channels. Multi-step, multi-faceted processes can be seen as a journey on which the customer collects his data in order to make an informed decision. He uses his family, friends, experts, colleagues, peers and other sources of information to form his opinion before making the actual purchase.

Customer journey: purchasing an underwater camera

Suppose someone is a passionate scuba diver in need of a reliable camera able to take pictures at a depth of 100ft. Assuming he does not know a specific store or company to help him out, he can start his journey by looking for an online forum on underwater photography, mobilizing the knowledge available in this network. These experts can recommend camera models rated for 100ft dives. He can then look for other consumers who recently bought a similar camera and ask about their experiences. They can provide him with first-hand reviews and comments on specific cameras, sharing information on features, prices and accessories. This group of underwater photographers is also able to recommend companies which offer great service or pricing. Only then will he go to one of the recommended stores or websites to finalize his journey and make the purchase.

To be able to join a customer (or prospect) on his journey, you as a marketer need to understand where the customer is in his customer life cycle. The more you know about his personal situation, buying intentions and purchase history, the better you can assist him and add value to his buying decision. If you can also reach out to all the relevant touch points of your customer before he makes the decision to buy – in other words the “road marks” in his opinion forming process – you can help him during the earlier stages of his journey. This way, you can support the customer by managing the interactions during the entire customer lifecycle.

Because it is not realistic to set up one-on-one interactions for thousands of customer journeys, partly automating this process is strongly recommended. Based on sets of pre-defined interactions, marketers and other customer-facing employees can enable right-time feedback loops to customers while these customers interact with your company through one of the various channels.

Collaboration: sharing best practices across channels and brands

When a company starts to truly interact externally, it needs to enable collaboration within¹⁴. Internal collaboration will lead to increased brand and channel effectiveness, as well as a better understanding of the attribution per channel and brand. This is valuable information for brand and channel managers to further optimize their campaigns and brand awareness.



Organizations need to foster cross-functional, cross-departmental, cross-channel and cross-brand information sharing. Not only customer-facing employees, but everyone within the enterprise needs to look at the way they talk among themselves. Proper internal collaboration can be a major hurdle for companies to become effective in their customer engagement. It involves a new business culture supportive of sharing knowledge and best practices with each other. This can be institutionalized using

monetization principles, meaning that teams internally charge each other for the use of their customer data, cross-references or content displayed on one of the other's online channels.

Usually, the marketing department is the front runner in setting up an engagement strategy and in making sure everyone is aligned, as they are closest to the prospective clients. However, it is not only up to marketing to implement customer engagement within the organization. Other departments and employees that interact with customers – senior management, sales, business development, consultancy, education, support, receptionists and management assistants –all should be involved. That's why it is so important to consider how to get the proper management buy-in¹⁶ for the engagement strategy. Cross-channel, cross-brand engagement requires explicit support from the senior management team to facilitate information sharing between departments and teams.

Benefits of a Blueconomy

If customer engagement is set up properly, this indefinitely will lead to synergies between customers, teams, departments and companies. Everyone inside a Blueconomy, regardless of their roles, contributes to this.

Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty

In this modern age of Internet and individualization, (prospective) customers value an individual treatment. Everyone appreciates being taken seriously. When a company takes the time to listen to their needs and demands and uses these in subsequent interactions, customers feel far more engaged because these interactions are relevant to the customer's context. Engagement in turn leads to increased customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Unified experiences across channels

Building a shared “institutional memory” on all (prospective) customers across all channels inside a Blueconomy can spin off huge benefits to an organization. Using this memory, a marketer might, for example, synchronize his interactions on the mobile channel with previous interactions on the Facebook channel. This gives the customer a “unified” online experience and contributes to a seamless sales flow. A Blueconomy ensures the customer does not have to re-share information he has already shared with your company in a different channel. The customer is indivisible, and the enterprise itself should act in the same way.

New cross-sell opportunities

A similar benefit is applicable across brands. In a properly functioning Blueconomy, brand managers share information about their customers. A customer with a new mortgage is likely also interested in new home insurance. If a financial institution sells both mortgages and insurance under different brand names, it is worthwhile for the brand managers to share customer data with each other. The fact that a customer just completed the mortgage process is extremely relevant information that can be used in interactions between the customer and the insurance brand. To facilitate sharing among Blueconomy participants, a monetization system (reward system) can be set up based on number of successful cross-references, leads, visitors or ads displayed.

Transparent sales attribution

In a Blueeconomy, the online channel marketer has insights into the journey the customer took to make his purchase. Combining data from multiple customers who made the same purchase will lead to better understanding of the optimal conversion route for a new prospect. It also makes clear which channel contributed most to the conversion. This supports online marketers in making informed decisions about how much attention and money they should invest per channel within a given product and/or brand.

Shared marketing best practices

Sharing new insights with other internet marketers across the enterprise on how customers' journeys are effectively guided by interactions through the various channels leads to a set of best practices for executing online marketing campaigns. In a Blueeconomy, online marketers have a much better understanding of their customers' behavior and the interactions that took place, like the most frequented route taken by customers between channels or brands when buying the product as well as interest shown in other products and services.

Entering a Blueeconomy

Customer engagement leads to new internal synergies that benefit both the customer and internal operations. Properly set up customer engagement leads to a new “universe” in which all customer-facing teams – regardless of brand, department, channel or even legal entity – participate alongside with the customers themselves, and in which they all share information on customers and products in mutually rewarding relationships.

As a result, communication between everyone participating in this universe improves. People are now intrinsically motivated to share information, tear down old silos, and help each other with cross-sell opportunities. At the enterprise level, effectiveness goes up and operations become more efficient.

By entering a Blueeconomy, companies not only unlock the gold mine of customer-related information, they also have ways to capitalize on this information by optimally supporting their clients in making the best purchasing decisions! As a Blueeconomy fosters information sharing, it allows the customer to share his ideas, feedback and questions with your organization. Vice versa, it allows you to respond to the customer in right time.

Mutually influencing each other through a transparent, interconnected cloud of business relationships will ensure that your customers, partners and employees all have a distinct competitive advantage!

About BlueConic

BlueConic is a state-of-the-art online engagement solution. It enables companies to optimize their customers' journeys across all online channels.

BlueConic puts the customer right at the heart of your marketing operations. It listens for, identifies and records the characteristics and online behavior of your customers, prospects, followers and other interested individuals, storing all their engagement activities in unique personal profiles. Using BlueConic's dynamic segmentation capabilities, marketers can then directly target individual visitors with highly relevant information and continue the online dialogue, across all online channels.

BlueConic recognizes visitors from their very first visit onwards, even if they start out as anonymous visitors at first. By progressively building visitor profiles, BlueConic helps marketers to recognize anonymous visitors sooner. Offering the right information at the right time in the right channel increases conversion ratios significantly. Moreover, BlueConic also helps to discover new up-sell and cross-sell opportunities better for existing customers based on their individuals' interests, improving customer loyalty and retention.

BlueConic easily adds engagement to your existing websites, mobile apps, social media and email programs and includes many sophisticated features, including:

- Cross-channel progressive profiling, even for anonymous visitors
- Dynamic segmentation and automated marketing decisions
- Highly relevant dialogues with each online customer, invoked at exactly the right time
- Real-time engagement tracking across multiple devices, brands and labels
- Compliance with international customer privacy regulations
- Out-of-the-box integrations with leading marketing solutions
- Optimized customer journeys across all channels and devices

BlueConic has been developed with the enterprise in mind. It integrates with most marketing solutions in the areas of customer relationship management, email management, content management, web analytics and campaign management. Moreover, BlueConic features exceptional scalability and performance capabilities, allowing you to keep track of literally hundreds of millions of online customer interactions over time!

For more information, visit www.blueconic.com or follow BlueConic on Twitter via @blueconic.

Appendix: reference list

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