

INTRODUCTION

What we need is not knowledge but certainty.

Bertrand Russell

Let's pretend you are Spain.

Brand Spain, being powerful and with the enviable ability to print money, has every method at its disposal to engage a potential traveler. It employs a media agency, and has skilled employees to manage that relationship. This team chooses the platforms and contexts that are best to communicate messages from the brand. These messages are created by an advertising agency, and include television, online, and even viral. They have been tested with a reputable advertising research firm. Brand Spain has also dedicated sizable resources to the creation of a positive experience with the brand once the consumer chooses to interact.

Brand Spain, in fact, has spent a great deal of time and money on these methods, and in measuring their success or failure. It gathers data, and has very smart people to interpret those data.

What they are measuring against is what they have come to know about Brand Spain's previous and even potential customers, which is a great deal.

What they are *not* measuring is the consumer's "ideal country" to visit. They are measuring Spain.

Of course, Brand Spain has some degree of engagement; many customers are loyal to Brand Spain. But Brand Spain would like higher levels of brand loyalty, more engagement with the brand, because it wants more profits. So, Brand Spain examines everything that has happened, everything consumers say about why they chose Brand Spain, or are likely, having been tempted by the advertising, to choose Brand Spain next time. And Spain keeps this information top-of-mind as they use the old and new methods of outreach.

And they see small growth. They see that Brand France had a bit more growth; Brand Italy a bit less. They discuss why they think that happened. Strategies are tweaked.

And, while all this is happening, the consumer sleeps.

The consumer does not simply sleep, as we know, but also dreams. She wishes. She hopes.

She has, in her mind, an ideal country to visit.

This ideal is unconstrained by reality. It is perfection. It is a galaxy of emotion and experience.

Would you, Brand Spain, like to know what that dream is?

Would you, if you knew, be able to better strategize your media, message, and experience? Be more certain of your actions?

Would you, if you got closer to the Ideal, cause Brand France, Brand Italy, and Brand Greece to have long meetings about you, without refreshments, due naturally to the cutbacks?

Absolutely.

We look at brands from the desired result — consumer engagement — and deliver insights on how that engagement is created, as defined by the consumer's Ideal. Only then does the brand have a consequence-driven consumer-generated target at which to aim their corporate and communications strategy.

Only then has Brand Spain measured its customer's engagement against what is *possible to own*, and not just present conditions. Because brands must discover what the consumer dreams of, not just what she sees.

This book is about a consumer view of the world of brands, and the evidence that supports it, because if there's any phrase being more widely-used in the world of marketing than "ROI" we haven't heard it. And rightfully so, with brands continuing to squander millions of dollars on low-return strategies and rudderless advertising campaigns. Procurement, as anyone in marketing knows, has found out where your desk is and wants an explanation for one of the largest line items on the corporate balance sheet. Validations and those pesky correlations to sales have raised their twin heads, and that is not going away.

Engagement has been a tough metric to define. The Advertising Research Foundation is already on definition 2.0, largely because the first pass lacked the concreteness that was corrected in the second. Having always put forth a behavior-centric view of engagement, based on something positive actually happening to the brand, we are delighted. There's a good reason, however, that a lot of smart folks have struggled with defining what all agree is at the center of today's marketing paradigm.

Engagement with the brand is the ultimate objective. Nothing can substitute for it; nothing but that will ensure brand survival. Yet, to get there, brands need and employ outreach of all kinds — conversations, experiences, advertising, and every touch point possible and imagined. That outreach requires an engagement also. But it's not an engagement with the brand. It is an engagement *with the method* the brand is using to get the consumer to engage with the brand.

There are four engagement methods but only one objective:

Methods:

1. Platform (TV; online; print; sponsorship)
2. Context (Program; webpage; magazine; game)
3. Message (Ad or Communication)
4. Experience (Store/Event)

Objective:

1. Brand Engagement.

In a traditional scenario, a brand like Macy's might decide to use television (platform), buying time in a highly-viewed program (context) like *Desperate Housewives*, running an ad (message) designed to bring someone into the store (experience). Each one of these methods is an opportunity to engage the consumer: television is a visual and highly-used platform, and "houses" shows that people are often connected with, and a good ad can peak interest in going to the store. Each one of these methods is also an opportunity for failure, of course. More and more people TiVo, or don't watch TV at all, preferring to catch their favorite programs online instead — absent the ads, naturally. And they can have a poor store experience.

This is an important point because, as you will read more than once in this book, getting attention and even awareness for a brand in no way leads de facto engagement with the brand to a positive end. This can become fuzzy, especially as the scenarios become far less traditional than the one outlined above. Today, a brand may choose to host an extreme sports event, as Red Bull has done, with very little overt branding. Or a brand may recruit bloggers to try its products before a national release and spread the word like Nintendo did with their Wii[®], using blogs as the platform with consumer-crafted messaging — uncontrollable by the brand.

These and hundreds of other forms of outreach are being tried by marketers. With expanding technologies and opportunities for messaging, that's as it should be. What none of these scenarios should be confused with, however, is brand engagement.

Brand engagement is *the consequence* of any marketing or communication effort that results in an increased level of brand equity for the product/service — and therefore loyalty, a leading-indicator of sales and profitability.

Read more of *The Certainty Principle: How to Guarantee Brand Profits in the Consumer Engagement Marketplace*. Published simultaneously in hardcover and paperback and available from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble.com, Powell's.com and select booksellers.