
Fifty Ways To Leave Your Digital

My research colleague has a sign in his office that serves as both inspiration and frustration to those that dare to enter: *Research departments should be run like the Mafia—nobody leaves the room until the problem is solved.* The inspiration to come up with solutions to marketing problems is how we run our consulting practice. That part is exciting. The frustration? Solutions to complex problems are not always built in a day, even when you do bring in sandwiches.

However, having hard evidence that those problems that those once seemed intractable sometimes just need to be approached in a new way, we kept at it. This was the case when we got into a stare-down with digital. It's easy to be entranced by the technology at first, stunned by the schematic athleticism of some of these new platforms. But then we backed up long enough from our inner-geek to hit re-start, to remind ourselves to start with the critical question: what was it that brands wanted from this digital stuff anyway?

Marketers want to move people closer to their brands, with the hope that meaningful experiences—some of which are digital—will help accomplish that goal. In a word, marketers want engagement, because they know that people who are engaged with their brands tend to *choose* their brands. Following that logic, providing meaning is at the core to digital working as brands would like it to — discovering how emotions and logic fuse into that Holy Grail of meaning.

Starting from a brand's desired end-state helped develop a solution that *wasn't* contained within the world of digital communication platforms, but rather a solution that provided the connective tissue between those digital platforms and brand meaning. In short, locating digital into categories, instead of the other way around.

To get at this category/digital fusion, we designed and conducted a syndicated study in the U.S., interviewing over 49,000 consumers participating in 83 categories, covering nearly 600 brands. We linked our extensive category research—the Customer Loyalty and Engagement Index—with the 14 most-used digital communication platforms, creating the Digital Platform Engagement Index—DPEI, for short.

This massive study has led to the kind of findings we like best: instantly believable because they make so much intuitive sense and also specific enough to be newsworthy, delivering startling granularity on how to take action in any category. We know:

- Engagement with digital communication platforms is different by category—it's not one size fits all when it comes to how people use digital;
- The digital communication platforms that people use most don't stay centered in one aspect of a brand's world—engagement with blogs doesn't always link up to "brand trust," for example, but can be connected to product or service aspects, all of which can help a brand target content;
- And those who are on the high-end of the scale in each category in terms of digital usage, what we call the "Higitals," see the category differently—sometimes drastically—and always have higher expectations for the brands, though that too differs by which driver of engagement one is viewing.

These and other findings matter deeply to brands as they continue to wrangle with big questions when communicating through digital platforms. At a loss for exactly what to do on Facebook, for example, many brands are emulating people, posting pictures and encouraging "likes." But as we

have already seen in one category, social media as a digital communication platform can link up with “corporate social responsibility” and “value for dollar,” making broader brand-face tactics a lost opportunity for the brand to engage.

We are here to insight rebellion among all CMOs, to encourage the insurrection against strategy-free digital communication planning. Any digital communication platform, channel, widget, whatever-you-call-it can indeed be held accountable to doing the job it’s hired to do: deliver against a brand-specific winning strategy. If not, well, there’s no shortage of ways to leave your digital, especially when you remember that it’s engagement that you want out of the relationship.

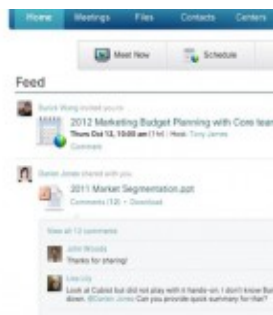


Article Author: Amy Shea

Amy Shea’s unique background in brand communications encompasses both creative development and brand research. Her expertise in the category of branded entertainment is similarly extensive. Her early work with Pioneer producing branded programming, helped create and define the branded entertainment category. On the research side she has lectured globally on her published study of the BMW films—considered by many to be the gold standard of branded entertainment.

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