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INTELLIGENCE

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SERVICE AREA:

Business Development Strategies

ANALYSIS

DO WHAT I DO:

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES
FOR PSPS TO IMPLEMENT TODAY

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Introduction

Social media and Internet-driven marketing methods have become dominant in today's market. Despite this move to e-methods, though, print continues to play an important role. Today's print service providers (PSPs) must familiarize themselves with important customer engagement practices that could greatly improve their ability to retain existing customers and gain new ones. There are a variety of strategies that PSPs can employ to use customer techniques more effectively, and to assist their customers in doing the same! This document outlines some of the practices that PSPs can easily adopt to improve their customer engagement implementations. In short, these strategies include:

- Showing rather than telling: Use print in your own promotional efforts, because sometimes actions speak louder than words.
- Teaching: Build education and learning into your customer service and social media practices.
- Building on your Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Print MIS systems: These, in combination with your web-to-print capabilities, provide the data and metrics that are essential to customer engagement methods.
- Promoting print as a gateway to the e-world: Make it clear to your customers that print can serve as an effective gateway to a heightened e-experience.
- Being an engaged customer: Exert your own influence as a customer to influence the development, marketing, and sales of your suppliers' products.

What is Customer Engagement?

In 2008, Forrester Consulting defined customer engagement as the process of "creating deep connections with customers that drive purchasing decisions, interaction, and participation, over time." Meanwhile, the Advertising Research Foundation believes that "The industry is moving toward customer engagement with marketing communications as the 21st century metric of marketing efficiency and effectiveness." In short, customer engagement is the solution to a media challenge that has dogged advertisers for centuries—proving the value of promotional spending.

In recent decades, a shift has taken place. Online interactions are now a central part of the customer relationship, and this type of engagement is different from offline interactions. This, and the ability to closely measure the metrics of online interactions, is why online customer engagement has moved to the forefront. Although customer engagement certainly existed before the transition to online, the way that today's customers can interact with like-minded virtual communities (and even generate and distribute their own written and visual content) is unlike anything that existed before. The



antiquated “interrupt and repeat” method of broadcast advertising has become less and less relevant. Today’s consumers are more empowered than ever before, and they have largely traded their anonymity for being tracked extensively.

It is more important than ever for businesses to listen to and support their customers through a two-way dialogue rather than relying on old-fashioned, one-way broadcast methods. Consumers have become less trusting of mass advertising, and they now place a higher-than-ever value on commentary and feedback from their peers. Truly engaged customers are more likely to become loyal to the brands that they trust, and this trust will in turn make them more likely to provide those increasingly valuable word-of-mouth recommendations that are so highly credible to others.

Customer relationship management (CRM) tools like Salesforce.com can play an important role in customer engagement. Typically, CRM tools enable a company to manage and analyze the interactions it has with its customers (current, past, and potential). The goal is to improve customer service, retain customers, and drive sales growth. For print service providers, the dots connecting them to customer engagement start with Print MIS, continue through integrated CRM tools, and ultimately lead to customer engagement practices that strengthen the customer relationship and open up opportunities for new clients.

What Does Customer Engagement Mean for a PSP?

Customer engagement has multiple meanings for a PSP, and each can bring in a different perspective:

- What can you do to engage your own customers more effectively?
- How can you help your customers engage their customers more effectively?
- What influence can you exert on your suppliers through customer engagement?

We will explore these individually.

Customer Engagement with your Own Customers

Increasing customer satisfaction, driving repeat business, and attracting new customers are key marketing & sales themes for any company. The best way to show that you are serious about customer engagement is to use appropriate techniques with your own customer base. Here are three suggestions:

- **Show rather than tell:** When you use printed pieces in your own promotional efforts, you are demonstrating more than a new technique—you are modeling its effectiveness. Regular mailings to existing clients remind them that you're still around and show them that you believe in the effectiveness of print. A great way to do this is through holiday cards or postcards. When combined with a PURL,



these “snail mail” communications bridge the gap in a demonstrable way. For example, many PSPs send a holiday card to clients with a link that enables them to choose one of three charities that the PSP will send a donation to. This can be repeated year-round at various holidays, or perhaps when you are offering an open house or highlighting a new production or service capability.

- **Be a teacher:** Throughout this pandemic, we have learned about the importance of teachers. PSPs have a teaching role as well, particularly as it applies to customer service and social media practices. File submission is one of the most important areas in which close working relationships with clients can provide an opportunity to educate. In addition, you will find that clients will be much more likely to engage with you on social media if there is some educational aspect to the content you provide. This is where social media needs to be personal and two-way. If your social media efforts are cobbled together among multiple employees who have no true stake in their success, then you are likely to lose the teachable moments that connect you to your clients.
- **Leverage CRM and Print MIS systems:** Your CRM and Print MIS systems are the source for the data and metrics that you need for your customer engagement activities. These will dovetail with your web-to-print capabilities and the activities of your customer service representatives (CSRs). Your understanding of these capabilities will mirror the challenges faced by your own clients as they use CRM tools like Salesforce.com as part of an overall customer engagement strategy.

Customer Engagement with your Customers' Customers

Virtually all of today's PSPs are finding ways to link print to the e-world. This may be through personalized URLs (PURLs), quick response (QR) codes, bar codes, personalized videos, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and near-field communication (NFC) tags. With the following actions, you can show your customers that print is an effective gateway to the e-world:

- **Stress the combination of print and digital in your own client promotions:** This is another example of showing rather than telling. Use your promotions to demonstrate the effectiveness of print as part of a cross-media campaign.
- **Focus on quantifiable metrics:** These are what today's marketers want. If you are managing a website for them, you can track clicks and possibly even purchases. If you are using a system like the United States Postal Service's Informed Delivery, you can provide information on exactly when a mail piece hits the mailbox—and in some cases, whether it was opened.



- **Don't miss the post-mortem:** This is likely one of the trickiest aspects of your relationship with customers. Did the campaign work entirely to their satisfaction? Did their return-on-marketing-investment (ROMI) metrics give them any indication about the success of the campaign? Your customers may be hesitant to share full data with you, but having the conversation after the fact can solidify a customer relationship. This holds true whether the campaign was a success or a failure!

Your Engaged Role as a Customer to your Suppliers

You might be surprised at the level of influence you can develop over some of your suppliers. At the beginning, the relationship between you and your supplier is transactional, but over time you'll have a chance to communicate important feedback to them, and ultimately you may become a valued source of product and development information for them. This happens by becoming engaged in a variety of ways:

- **Provide product feedback gently:** In any supplier/customer relationship, there are bound to be times when you are disappointed with the performance of the supplier's product. Communicate this to the sales representative, the customer service representative, and/or the key technology contacts. Be sure to use their preferred methods for issue tracking. Blasting the supplier on social media or writing a scathing review should only be a method of last resort. If this is a company you want to build a relationship with, the way you communicate with them is key. When there is an issue, it's important to treat your clients the way you would want to be treated.
- **Communicate via social media:** Customer engagement is a two-way street. If your activities on social media are not driving likes, follows, comments, and conversation, they're not having the desired effect. Are your suppliers active on social media? If they are, find out where and meet them there! If they are not paying attention to you, feel free express your disappointment through the social media methods that the supplier uses. Yelling at a supplier on Twitter if they are not active on that platform might make you feel good, but it won't be very effective.
- **Join their user group:** One of the most effective ways to influence a supplier is to join its user group and become active in its activities. User groups are often where the most important feedback forums take place.
- **Tighten up your relationship with your supplier:** If you are well satisfied with your supplier, consider becoming a marquee site or a beta product tester. A marquee site is typically where your supplier's sales force can use your location as a reference. Doing this will often result in additional benefits for you, like a white paper that you can use for your own promotion or discounts on products, supplies,



and services. As for beta testing, it's not for the faint of heart—but if you consider your company to be on the leading edge, this is good way to demonstrate your philosophy to the world.

The Bottom Line

Customer engagement is an important part of any PSP's strategy; it impacts how your clients perceive you as a company. Savvy PSPs will demonstrate their capabilities through promotional efforts that include print. They will educate customers and use learning as a foundational aspect of their customer service and social media activities. They will leverage their CRM, Print MIS, and web-to-print capabilities as a source of data and metrics for customer engagement. They will make it clear to their marketing customers that print is an effective gateway to the e-world because it connects them to the online feedback that they so desperately require. Finally, PSPs should realize that they have an opportunity to become more engaged with their suppliers, and exerting that influence can reap additional benefits. Customer engagement touches on many aspects of your business, and it is key to your success.

opinion



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