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MARKETING

Five Ways Brands Are Changing Their Playbooks to Win

Jan 07, 2020 North America Opinion



Media giants in recent years have been battling for viewers' attention and have spent $650 billion for acquisitions and content. In this shifting media landscape, how will brands win at getting their customers' attention and emotional engagement? In this opinion piece, Gopi Kallayil explore fives modern principles for winning brands.

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Have you heard of a media company called T-Series? Chances are, you probably have not. Gulshan Kumar, whose resume up to 1983 read, "Fruit juice seller, streets of New Delhi," founded it that year. Since its inception, T-Series has become an unlikely media

powerhouse — its YouTube channel has 119 million subscribers. To put that in perspective, *The New York Times*, which was founded in 1851, has a total subscription base of 4.7 million across print and digital. The T-Series channel also has 90 billion views. That's the equivalent of every human on the planet, including babies and people with no access to the internet, having watched 13 videos each on their channel.

According to the Nov. 14, 2019, issue of *The Economist,* media giants in the past five years have been battling for viewers' attention and have spent $650 billion for acquisitions and content. As *The Economist* puts it, with wry understatement, "There will be blood." In this shifting media landscape, how are brands going to win at getting their customers' attention and emotional engagement? In this opinion piece, we will explore five modern principles for winning brands.

1. **Reduce consumer friction using the latest technology.**

How did Lyft and Uber become highly recognized international brand names in 10 years? They established a powerful brand name for personal transportation through a private car rideshare service when nothing like it had existed. They created an entire category and made it an indispensable household service.

Now they are threatening to disrupt the place that brands like BMW and Lexus may have occupied in consumers' mind. According to research by HSBC, car registrations in the U.S. have dropped from 135 in 2014 to 88 in 2019 (indexed numbers: 2011=100). As consumers stop owning cars and use rideshares more, they're less likely to care what brand of car picks then up as long as it comfortably transports them to their destination.

In the process of building their businesses, Lyft and Uber have also shifted a few cultural norms across the world. Ten years ago, parents advised their kids: "Don't get into a stranger's car. It's dangerous." Today, parents often request the reverse: "Honey, I have to stay late at work, Can you take an Uber back after your music practice?"

What led to this shift in perception in the consumer's mind? To gain a better understanding, let's look at how Uber and Lyft changed the experience of personal transportation and took friction out of the process. With the old model of calling for a car, you phoned a Yellow Cab dispatcher and waited anxiously for a taxi to take you to the airport, hoping the driver would find your address, especially if he or she was picking you up at night.

Today, your phone has been turned into a remote control for the physical world. Three clicks and your car pulls up to your address, or next to you if you're on a street corner and not at an exact address. Before you climb into the car, your expectations are set. You know what car will pick you up, the name of the driver, what the driver looks like, and his or her ratings by other riders. And for the neurotic among us, while we wait, we get a minute-by-minute update of the driver's progress on a map. It's a minor miracle — the driver knows your name, where you're going and exactly how to get there. No more annoying crackle of a dispatcher's radio from the World War II era or watching annoying TV ads from the backseat that you may not want to watch. Before you get into the car, you can indicate your preference for the temperature and musical genre. How is that for personalized service? When the car drops you off, you don't need cash or credit cards. You can say, "Thank you," walk away, and the payment process automagically occurs.

From coffee shops to travel to cosmetics, brands that are forming a deep emotional connection with consumers are removing friction from the consumer journey by leveraging the latest technology. The Starbucks app, Booking.com's three-click room booking and the Sephora Virtual Artist are examples in each of these categories.

2. **Partner with neofluencers.**

One of the traditional ways of building your brand was through celebrity endorsements — the voices and faces of Serena Williams, J Lo, and Tyra Banks. But a band of new influencers — the neofluencers as I like to call them — has emerged on the internet with unprecedented power and reach.

In Mexico City, I was backstage at the YouTube Brandcast event, waiting for my turn to speak, when I met YuYa, a 26-year-old woman from Mexico City who creates beauty and makeup tutorials for YouTube in Spanish. YuYa has a powerful influence upon audiences in the Spanish-speaking world interested in that topic. She has 24 million subscribers and her makeup videos have been viewed more than 2 billion times. If you're a beauty brand launching a new product in the Spanish-speaking world, you have to leverage the power that neofluencers like YuYa wield. Across different categories, it's neofluencers like Marcus Brown Lee, Sofia Nysgaard, Harry Wong, and Lukas Marques and Daniel Molo who will establish your brand in the minds of the massive audiences they can influence. Ryan ToysReview — which was just recently rebranded to Ryan's World — is a family-run channel, but the star of the show is 8-year-old Ryan Kaji, who generated $22 million in revenue in a single year.

3. **Respect the modern consumer's power of choice.**

The old-fashioned model of brand building was to shout about your brand wherever the largest gathering of humans took place, even if only a fraction of the audience was interested in your brand. This explains why the World Cup Soccer broadcasts, the Oscar ceremony broadcasts and the Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo were popular with brand builders.

Today, modern consumers are exercising their choices in many powerful ways. To begin with, they've time shifted. They watch the content they want to watch, when, where and however they want to watch it. For them, every day is Superbowl Sunday. Brands better show up on these consumers' terms if they want to get their attention.

Consumers also understand the power at their fingertips — the skip button and the swipe left feature. If the brand's message is of no value, the consumer has no hesitation in swiping them into oblivion. Fortunately, there are now technology-based solutions that allow brands to talk to consumers based on their interests, passions or some self-expressed signal indicating they're interested in the brand or its category.

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Similarly, consumers are increasingly vocal about privacy. They're making choices about the information brands can gather, how long it can be kept and if these brands can use that information to target them. And consumer choices on these topics are as varied as humans are. Some consumers are willing to self-declare that they're buying a new home and are open to receiving brand messages relevant to home buyers. Other are declaring that buying a new home is none of a brand's business, and when they need products and services, they'll come talk to the brand at a time and place of their choosing.

To succeed in this new world, brands have to respect these new consumer choices and play by the new rules.

4. **Be consistent across all touch points, both ancient and modern.**

It used to be that brands had three primary vehicles to reach and influence their consumers. First, there was the actual product (for example, the Nike Air Force 1). The second was the point of contact with the consumer (the Nike store, the Toyota dealership, the Marriott

lobby). And the third vehicle included the marketing messages the brand directed at the consumer. These vehicles were very carefully curated with their agency and broadcast over TV and other mass media.

Today, a brand is shaped by every digital surface it shows up on, every way it behaves and everything said about the brand on digital — often by those the brand doesn't know and hasn't authorized to speak about their product or service, let alone having carefully curated their comments. So, the consumer experience of the brand could be shaped by the brand's website or app (the only two things the brand fully controls on digital), or by a flattering review by a neofluencer or a scathing commentary by a consumer who had a bad experience with the brand and is now free not to tell just 10 of her friends but an audience of 10,000.

To succeed in this world, brands have to show up consistently across all the touch points that the consumer may access to explore or experience the brand. For example, Nike has a simple and elegant brand message — "If you have a body, you are an athlete." Put on Nike gear and "Just Do It." The company works hard to make sure that consumers experience this message consistently, whether they walk into a Nike store, visit the website or watch an inspiring video on their YouTube channel about athletes who defied failure. Nike orchestrates a consistent brand message across all its touch points.

> **"The consumer has changed. And traditional measuring methods like gross rating points and Net Promoter score are no longer sufficient."**

5. **Use a modern measuring tape.**

The consumer has changed. And traditional measuring methods like gross rating points and Net Promoter score are no longer sufficient. They're limiting and address only one dimension.

Today, a consumer redecorating her house may explore ideas in her living room by watching YouTube videos on her laptop or tablet. While watching, she might see a Brightech arched floor lamp that would work really well. She can then use voice search to find who sells it. She might also check multiple sources to find the best price and read reviews. Finally, she can get in her car and use the navigation system to find directions to the nearest store. Once there, she might pull out her phone and check a few more reviews

before buying the lamp. How do you measure your brand and its success across all these interactions, each of which has a role in strengthening your brand in the consumer's mind, ultimately leading to a purchase?

Given the extraordinary number of data points that are now available, hundreds of metrics are flying around — likes, view-through rate, comments and so on. All of these are marginally useful and don't tell the full story. Some of them can be distracting or useless.

Instead, look for a single overarching business metric, tied to your brand goals, that extends across all these touch points and the consumer's journey with you. Depending on your brand and business goals, it could be a single business metric that measures who's aware of your brand, the nature of their emotional connection, and if they're taking action such as buying the product or recommending it.

The modern media landscape is rapidly changing. Consumer behavior and expectations are quickly shifting. Winning brands are changing their playbook and adopting modern principles to reach their consumers and make an emotional connection.

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