

Feeling the love: Building brand loyalty in the digisphere

By [Staff Reporter](#)

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Knights were made to swear oaths of fealty, poems and great literary works have been written on the subject, and great leaders and nations have fallen due to a lack of it. But let's face it since Cain offed his brother, trust and loyalty have proved time and again to be the most fickle of the human conditions.

So does the old nugget that if you want loyalty buy a dog hold true in the today's fast-paced marketing and brand environment?

Several of the speakers on the second day of the Marketing Indaba in Cape Town took a look at the issue.

Confucius say

Change agent, Michael Jackson, mapped out the road ahead in building trust and loyalty by saying that more than ever the need for immediate, up-to-date market-relevant business information and customer feedback is imperative. He illustrated how to develop a better understanding and identifying key trends in customer service using historic, current and future business dynamics in his presentation.



"Research done by the Independent Development Corporation shows that by 2020 people can expect to be 44% busier than they are now. It is therefore critical to find new business techniques, and manage change," Jackson said. "Today customers have all the knowledge, options, choices and power. What they lack is loyalty and trust."

Often the precursor to jokes and fortune cookies, Confucius couldn't have got it that wrong. After all, the Chinese economy is booming in the midst of a global downturn.

From a historical perspective, his wise words of keeping stuff simple still apply, Jackson said.

"Confucian principles are instilled in the Chinese population from a very early age and it continues throughout their lives to influence their choices and decisions," he said.

So how does this work in the modern paradigm?

"Simple," said Jackson. "Identify what's important, eliminate what's not, and with what's left - automate, delegate or ask for help."

He said this stratagem is evident in the new directional trends, which include innovating through looking for solutions, rather than expecting growth from unchanged marketing strategies.

"Never turn a blind eye on ethics, safety and the environment. These are no longer soft issues, but important to customers," he said.

In addition, unyielding integrity through consistency in actions, values and team principles is crucial. While poor situations should never be allowed to persist or go unchallenged, brands should strive for excellence and sweat the small stuff.

"Deliver without compromise or excuses," he explained. "Corporates often fail to deliver because they tend to get bogged down in the bureaucracy of the organisation."

He went on to say that listening respectfully to colleagues and customers and forging trusted sustainable partnerships through actions, words and deeds also play a role.

Last but not least, good leadership is vital to achieving these objectives. "A leader without followers is simply someone out for a walk," Jackson concluded.

CRM in the digital era

"All that technology has done is made customer relationship management (CRM) quicker," said Elizabeth Lee Ming, head of digital marketing at Momentum:

"The new social customer uses online channels and communication tools, and trusts in the advice offered by online acquaintances. As the consumer shares their experience they become content creators," she explained.

Ming expanded on content generating trends that have emerged in terms of online marketing, and how brands can no longer ignore them.

"Prosumerism", for example, is a buzzword that has been bandied about in the marketing industry for years in relation to brand advocacy, but it has taken on a new meaning on social media.

"The rise of social commentary and how it impacts on a brand can no longer be ignored and needs a rethink in terms of how marketing strategy is developed," Ming said.

She also had some golden rules on the approach marketers should take to make social media work for them, using examples from her Momentum experience:

- From content to conversation

The family of young boy with a rare liver condition complained online that Momentum Health would no longer be covering his life-saving medication. The company turned the situation on its head by creating the Love for Zaid fund-raising campaign, which generated a huge online following and support.

- From communities to customers

The company tied their sponsorship of the national cricket team to a breast cancer awareness campaign, where the players wore pink at a match. Momentum also donated money to the Pink Drive - an organisation that provides a mobile mammography service to disadvantaged community - for every share from its Facebook platform during the campaign.

- From social to service

"The response time of brands in reacting to commentary on social media is critical," Ming said. "About 88% of consumers are unlikely to buy a product or service if they see complaints go unanswered, while 71% will recommend a brand to others when their issues are resolved quickly."

- From interactions to insights

Social CRM does not replace traditional CRM, but extends a brand's current capabilities.

Telling the brand story

Eliciting an emotional response will build love for and trust in a brand over time. Therefore winning people's hearts should be the baseline objective of branding.

"With the decline of mass media, cultural agendas are being driven by social media, on which consumers have the unlimited choice of any content at any time on any screen. This is complicated and difficult for corporates to understand because traditional metrics cannot be used to drive new strategies," said Jared Molko, who is head of brand solutions at Google SA.

Essential to this proposition is finding the right people in the digital space, who can access to measuring tools other than demographics. This includes using data from alternative sources such as Google Analytics.

The context or types of sites visited is also more powerful than demographics when building a profile of customers. Travel sites are illustrative of this phenomenon by attracting a broad cross-section of the population, from a student looking for a budget experience to well-heeled Generation Xers wanting first class all the way.

The choice of visiting a site is very much in the hands of the consumer. "By taking the time to hover over a link, the consumer is saying: 'I'm ready to engage'," said Molko.

Story telling also plays a fundamental role. "This is the best expression of your brand promise without the restriction of time imposed by other advertising models," he said. For example, the Dove Real Beauty Sketches runs for more than six minutes on YouTube, and tells a more definitive story than the slots allocated in conventional media for probably the same cost.

He went on to explain that what this achieves is building stronger relationships by nurturing shared values and passions, recognition of the needs of consumers and making conversations more affordable.

The 2014 Marketing Indaba moves to Johannesburg on 28-29 May and Durban on 5-6 June.

Also see [\[Marketing Indaba: Part 1\] Marketers be \(a\)ware, Generation Y is on its way](#) and [\[Marketing Indaba: Part 3\] Channelling the message](#)

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