

Persuasion Along the Path to Purchase:

Engaging Consumers in the Age of Digital Media



By: Kimberly Sarubbi



Introduction: Engagement and the Consumer Connection

Since the time of peddlers and pushcarts, those with products to sell have faced the challenge of attracting buyers. In that respect, nothing much has changed. However, today’s abundance of communication technologies – especially digital place-based media – now enables marketers to target and engage prospective buyers precisely where their message will have the most impact.

As this medium matures and the message becomes even more sophisticated, engagement with the buyer will inevitably increase. Thus the “one-to-many” concept of marketing (flyers, inserts, postcards, etc.) will subside. Instead, network owners/operators and brands will have the ability to engage the consumer/end user at the “moment of truth”: the very place where the message is personal enough to inspire the behavior that achieves the network’s business objectives. And the way to achieve that maximum engagement with the consumer is through DOOH (Digital Out-of-Home) dynamic signage.

Terms of Engagement	page 2
The Challenges of Consumer Engagement	page 2
Five Elements of Consumer Engagement	page 4
Building a Winning Engagement Strategy	page 5
Maximizing and Enhancing Return on Investment	page 6
Guiding the Consumer’s Path to Purchase	page 7

DOOH is more than just a one-way flow of information based on the hope that a consumer might see a screen and respond to the message. The new landscape, consisting of interactivity and self-education via kiosks and touch screens, now allows for a two-way flow of information and exchange between the consumer and the message “owner”. This is especially critical in our “wired” marketplace where individuals – especially the Generation Y children of Baby Boomers – absorb a constant flow of media content, making it even more difficult for a single message to stand out. So how does one offering break away from the pack? It’s by creating the right content that will engage the right audience at the right time.

Every marketing strategy has numerous components, but this paper will focus exclusively on consumer engagement as it relates to DOOH deployment. More specifically, its definition and relevance in the digital marketplace, the challenges involved, its key elements and, most importantly, how engaging an audience with DOOH is a winning strategy that can measurably achieve and transcend an organization’s return on investment (ROI) goals. It is also intended as a wake-up call to marketers to listen to their targeted audience, learn what makes them tick and create content that will be equal to – and enhanced by – the powerful messaging technology that is DOOH.

Terms of Engagement

In March 2006, the Advertising Research Foundation announced the first definition of customer engagement:

“Engagement is turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context.”

Social media, the web and hand-held mobile devices have all played their part in changing today’s “turned-on customer” in terms of what is important to them, how they consume brand messaging and how they purchase. Along with redefining what we think of as engagement, this technology has also created opportunities for deeper and more targeted one-on-one dialogues with consumers. As a result, the value of engagement has increased substantially as a critical part of the consumer’s “buy in” to a product or service along with triggered “on demand” content that enables the marketer’s messaging to hit the desired target.

In terms of DOOH media space, engaging the customer often means taking on different approaches and mechanisms based on business goals, objectives and specific applications. This list would include interactive kiosks, touch screens, mobile apps, outdoor LED signage and more. But regardless of the path, the critical mission of embedding digital media within an organization’s over-arching brand marketing and content strategy is to build upon the “customer bonding lifecycle”.

That’s where it all comes together. Engagement is making that impact – knowing and delivering on customers’ needs, wants and values. The one-to-one customer interaction is the ideal for any marketer and the pinnacle of the marketing path in driving relevant predictable behavior. Ultimately, engaged customers will not only be the best customers but true evangelists for the product, the service and the company. And the keys to creating engaged customers are involvement and interaction.

The Challenges in Consumer Engagement

“Relating” to the consumer/end user requires having an in-depth knowledge of their habits and desires. This is absolutely critical information if you want to engage them. Here are seven key questions to address for successful consumer engagement in a DOOH marketing initiative:

What should the engagement experience be?

First and foremost, the experience must have impact and resonate with the consumer, thus bringing them “closer” to the brand and compelling them to act in a planned, action-based behavior. Of course, relevant messaging and a “WOW” factor (courtesy of the latest in technological magic) adds additional muscle when delivering the message in close proximity to the time of consumer response.

What will truly engage my audience?

Over time consumers have become more distracted with less time to make buying decisions. Consumer expectations are also increasing rapidly in an ever-changing dynamic digital landscape. At the moment a buying decision is being made, engaging the audience means meeting those expectations by tapping into who they are and how you (or your product or service) can add value to their life.

Who is it that I'm trying to engage?

The question as to who is being engaged is always an interesting proposition. In most venues, hours of the day and days of the week dictate a changing audience. In terms of deploying a DOOH network, success will depend largely on breaking down patterns of consumer traffic and building custom creative in alignment with those patterns, again reinforcing the concept of “the right audience at the right time”.

How can I best leverage engagement?

Engagement can be the best marketing research tool any network owner/operator can use. In fact, employing the engagement process in this way can enhance an over-arching marketing direction beyond the DOOH component and help address critical questions regarding content and playlist strategy. For example, is it accurate and correct as per the original vision document? Or should it be adjusted accordingly based on new findings, metrics and engagement feedback?

Why should the audience care?

Consumers are inundated with media options meant to simplify their buying decisions while they're in a comfort zone. When a DOOH network is effectively deployed, the network owner/operator/brand/marketer is supplying information and/or an offering that the consumer cannot afford to miss. They, in turn, care a lot.

How much value does content really add?

Developing original content (or “custom creative”) can be a challenge. On the other hand, generic content such as community-based television, Power Point slides, RSS (Rich Site Summary) Web feeds or broadcast video provide ineffective content and, at worst, can be a recipe for disaster because it's using a shotgun approach to a digital media deployment with little thought given to the critical aspect of engaging the viewer, delivering added value to the consumer or building brand loyalty. In short, everything that makes DOOH successful.

How do I build consumer trust using a new medium?

Social media has added a new dimension in terms of how consumers acquire and digest information. For example, according to the 2010 Arbitron Digital Video Display Study, 70% of teen and adult U.S. residents have viewed digital video displays in the past month. That's an estimated 181 million people. In this new world, building trust with your audience is based on tapping into the online “communities” where they share new ideas, discuss concepts and assess value. It's also within these communities that product/service “evangelists” are born:

“Evangelism marketing is an advanced form of word-of-mouth (WOMM) in which companies develop customers who believe so strongly in a particular product or service that they freely try to convince others to buy and use it. The customers become voluntary advocates, actively spreading the word on behalf of the company.” (Wikipedia sourced)

Five Elements of Engagement

The world of social commerce has forced marketers to reconsider where, how and why consumers make their buying decisions, as well as how exposure to an online DOOH network can complement an in-store experience in a way that engages the consumer and leads to the desired purchase. To that end, there are five key elements that marketers should keep in mind when planning a digital deployment that will engage the customer within the out-of-home space, augment the online experience and fully integrate with the over-arching marketing strategy:

1. **Know your audience...extremely well**

The advent of life-style marketing using a holistic approach is now firmly entrenched in business and plays a critical part in a successful DOOH network deployment strategy. It's more than just knowing who your audience is. It's also knowing the what, why, how and where of their actions, especially with regard to their buying patterns. This is mission critical to the effective messaging and engagement of a select audience.

2. **Create the WOW factor**

When it comes to technology, you can always count on the fact that whatever is current today will be dated next week. That being said, some of the eye-popping displays and interactive components currently available are adding plenty of WOW factor to the DOOH space. The importance of this can't be understated. There has to be a mechanism in place that stops people in their tracks and compels them to watch the screen. And that critical "dwell time" – the moment of engagement itself – is where you can make the most of your message.

3. **Always add value**

When faced with a buying decision, especially one where the consumer is considering a new product or making a brand switch, it usually comes down to the one value question every consumer asks themselves: WIFM (What's In It For Me)?. Adding value is likely the most important element in the engagement loop. If that value proposition is not in play at the moment when the customer gives the offering a "stop, look and listen"...they will simply move on. Speaking directly to the consumers' specific needs and wants is what brings value to their lives and once that value is personalized, it translates into a positive buying decision.

4. **Increase relevance through emotional connection**

When a message makes an emotional connection with the end user it means that they have internalized the value proposition and are ready to act upon it. Therefore, creating message content that will resonate with an audience requires that the message be easily understood, relevant to their needs and connects on an emotional level. Once the message is identified and refined, it can easily be deployed at the right moment to induce the desired outcome.

5. **Build loyalty through curiosity**

At this point, it's important to understand that a single campaign won't be sufficient to sustain the consumer's engagement with your offering. There need to be building blocks in place to maintain that relationship and keep earning that trust in terms of your value. The fact is, sophisticated consumers are always looking for more, so keeping your most loyal customers engaged via continued DOOH messaging that speaks to their needs is just as critical as securing new customers.

Building a Winning Engagement Strategy

When DOOH campaigns are fully optimized, they enable network owner/operators/brands/ marketers to develop growth strategies and mechanisms that span the life cycle of their customers. This becomes critical as marketers find new ways to connect and interact with consumers to maximize their return on investment (ROI) across multiple channels, including in-store and mobile. But in order to maintain this optimal engagement with the consumer in a dynamic signage space, it's essential (as noted before) to identify the specific target group and create the relevant message.

There are two tools that can help you build a framework for a successful DOOH deployment. One is geo-targeting and the other is transmedia.

Geo-targeting is a methodology used to deliver creative content/messaging based on the website visitor's country, region/state, city, zip code and/or other geographic/demographic specifications. The more marketers want to focus in on specific target groups with relevant messaging, the more defined the geo-targeting becomes in terms of audience.

Transmedia, on the other hand, is actually more "system" based as it refers to a marketing strategy comprised of several media formats distributed on multiple platforms that can interact with each other in multiple locations. It's here – in the thick of the transmedia mix – that DOOH has evolved as the most effective of all the media employed.

Now that the audience is targeted and the media platforms are in alignment, it's time to focus on the content strategy. Ultimately, your content should be objectives-based and integral to the marketing mix. You can win your audience's attention by tapping into their knowledge, interests and opinions. It's also helpful to use language and mechanisms that are clear, simple and define a distinct "call to action". You can accomplish this by...

- Explaining to your audience how the message relates to them and how they benefit
- Spelling out what's at stake in terms of their decision
- Telling a story that engages them on a personal level
- Using dynamic visuals to make the content more compelling
- Stating the facts that will persuade them to respond with the desired action

These are the building blocks to creating engagement that results in brand/product loyalty and the type of personalization consumers respond to. This recognition/relationship becomes synonymous with the brand, thus convincing the consumer that this particular retailer/product owner cares about them, understands them and values them as a customer. Their responses will provide the insights that will refine the message further and bring in more customers.

Building a DOOH strategy that targets individuals effectively by applying geo-targeting, a strong transmedia strategy and personalized content creates a consumer base filled with life-long evangelists for your product or service. Anything less is merely a fishing expedition trolling for whoever happens to come by.

Maximizing and Enhancing Return on Investment

The ever-increasing value of DOOH in terms of its unique potential to engage consumers has led marketers redefine the standard ROI (Return on Investment) with the additional acronyms ROO (Return on Objectives) and ROE/E (return on engagement/experience). In fact, within the DOOH market, ROI – on its own – becomes the default discussion when the business case and objectives of a digital deployment have not been well established. In other words, how can you measure ROI or the efficiency of an investment if you don't establish beforehand what the real investment is and define what constitutes success?

Now that we see that there's more to gain than the standard ROI, it's important to define and measure the additional returns gained from achieving objectives and engagement/experience.

For this, we need to harness the power of analysis.

Some early players in the DOOH metrics and analytics space quickly re-invented themselves as gurus providing critical insights for optimal results in the digital media world. Unfortunately, having the analytics and knowing how to act on them are two different things. It still leaves us questioning what the best option/alternative is to gaining desired results based on historical data captured. Hence, the need to establish goals.

Simply stated, ROO creates return when business objectives are achieved. From there, the ROO will inherently take care of the ROI but only when the objectives have been defined and are measurable. Goals must be established from the onset of any DOOH deployment in order to design a content strategy that will deliver the desired outcomes, as well as the ability to measure the achievement of those objectives.

ROE/E is about creating a sensory experience, leaving an enduring impression and helping the customer appreciate the relationship they have with your business. Measuring and quantifying ROE/E has given rise to new-found metrics for network owners to gage the effectiveness of both the content strategy and custom creative messaging. The numbers are culled from a variety of sources:

- Incoming traffic from links
- General inquires, requests and comments
- Sales, new leads and marketing opportunities
- Subscriptions
- Additions to newsletters and social media groups
- Trackbacks to Web postings
- New advocates/evangelists

Summary: Guiding the Consumer on the Path to Purchase

The digital realm has created a new “path to purchase” for the consumer that includes everything from the earliest influences to the final buying decision. At the beginning of the path, an effective DOOH deployment and network campaign sparks interest, provides education and successfully engages the consumer. Then, as they proceed on the path to the shelf where the “moment of truth” still resides and upwards of 70% of buying decisions are made, the right consumer-focused messaging delivered in-store via digital signage creates further impact and reinforces all that has come before. The result: Desired purchase made, objectives achieved and an evangelist is born. Digital media has engaged, nurtured and delivered the consumer through an effective in-store DOOH deployment.

Author

Kimberly Sarubbi

President/CEO Saddle Ranch Productions

*To learn more about Saddle Ranch Productions Content Solutions: (310) 746-5652
or email: kim@saddldleranchproductions.com*

