

Otherwise Engaged

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Branding in a Connected World

By Michael Bayler

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This book, as always, is dedicated to my wife and daughters.

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Michael Bayler has advised some of the world's leading brands, media companies and international stars, including Nokia, Diageo, Telefonica, FremantleMedia, Bacardi Global Brands, BSkyB, BT, Sony Music, Ogilvy & Mather, Robbie Williams, and Simon Cowell.

He is the co-author of the seminal work on consumer-led business strategy, *Promiscuous Customers: Invisible Brands – Delivering Value in Digital Markets* (Capstone, Oxford, 2002)

Why this book now?

Very few firms have established – with both confidence and evidence – their approach to growing and sustaining their brands in the post-Web era.

I've advised a good number of the world's most prominent brands and their owners, primarily across consumer goods, entertainment, technology and communications, since the publication of my last book in 2002.

This work aims to briefly and clearly share with you my best answers to what seem to be the most pressing, frequently asked questions. They all revolve around meeting **the challenge of the powerful, connected consumer.**

THE CONTEXT

Getting Over Digital

Digital is much more than just another a channel: it's a driver of powerful cultural changes that impact **the way we experience the world**. So naturally it also changes the way we engage – to what degree, or not at all – with brands.

And not just when we're using digital channels. We actually think differently now that – at least in the developed world – we're completely connected: to information, to services, and perhaps most of all, **to each other**.

Above all, digital creates enormous, unprecedented choice, placing connected consumers in control, at the heart of a global hypermarket of optional experiences. Critically, they look to **their own networks** first for trust, for validation, and for both identity and belonging.

There is an ever-thickening wall between commerce and culture. To drive through it, we must move from just talking to consumers, to **talking through them.**

Trust in Tribes

Our sense of who we are, and our ways of making sense of the world, increasingly orbit around **People Like Us**.

Trust in church, state and commerce has dropped dramatically in 15 years, in parallel with a huge surge in consumer to consumer (C2C) communications.

Especially among premium brands, permissions are mediated and controlled by **consumer tribes**, while premium value is both conferred and driven up by acceptance and C2C messaging between tribal consumers.

Today, with so many compelling and free experiences being instantly available to the connected consumer, smart brands seek to understand the experiences and most of all the **meaning** these consumers find in their tribes ...

... acknowledging this new type of value, finding ways of significantly enhancing it with brand-relevant services, and sometimes being powerfully rewarded with **networked approval** and positive buzz.

Destination to Departure Point

Where previously the isolated consumer was the **destination** or end-point of brand communications, the networked consumer is becoming a **departure point** for “direct to tribe to consumer” (D2T2C) communications.

Attractive, relevant brands are carried into and across tribes of consumers: access, permissions and precious intimacy can turn into highly valuable advocacy and amplification.

The brand plays a critical but still partially understood role here, as a **facilitator** of the new consumer experiences that the digital revolution has enabled.

When we make these socially inspirational consumers happy, we both equip and motivate them to share their stories – with our brands riding along in the slipstream – **into, across and beyond** their networked tribes.

Freely available media-sharing tools, and the very social networks within which these identities and narratives are enacted day-to-day, provide the means of very effective and economical production and distribution for all this positive **brand energy**.

So ... it's in **recognising, supporting and enhancing** this entirely modern new cultural process that the most powerful opportunities for brand value, access to the tribal consumer, and permissions to meaningfully and intimately engage, lie.

Getting Over Media

Advertising used to be all about media. Media is all about buying and selling **consumer attention**.

Consumer attention used to be a more or less passive player in the game of media.

Think of a **bowling alley**, with the alley as a channel, the ball as a brand; the skittles at the end of the alley, waiting to be knocked over and racked up again, are ... consumers!

The bowler – just like an agency managing a campaign – hurls the big heavy ball again and again down the alley, scoring points by knocking over as many skittles as possible.

This is how the traditional eyeball/impression-based media planning and buying business of reach and frequency works. And when we're looking for **large-scale brand awareness**, there's as yet no better way to achieve our goals.

And let's not imagine that it doesn't take considerable **skill and size** to knock over lots of skittles, and do so repeatably. It certainly does.

The problems for bowling alley-style advertising begin, however, when the hitherto passive skittles wake up, start **chatting to each other, and moving about**.

With the Internet, an entirely new and disruptive type of dynamic appeared in media. If Media 1.0 is best summarised with our bowling alley analogy, then Media 2.0 resembles nothing so much as a **pinball machine**.

We fire the ball – the brand – with perhaps the illusion of some control – up onto the board.

Note that the board is sealed in glass: we can see exactly what's happening, but can do **more or less nothing** about it (we'll come back to flippers and nudging) after launching the ball into play.

And what does happen to the ball?

It's the **bumpers** at the top of the board that produce the high scores. With all the flashing lights, pumping and thumping noises and bells, our brand/ball is bashed back and forth around and between the bumpers.

And note: each of these bumpers has what our skittle consumer entirely lacked – **an energy of their own**.

They push back.

This is what today's active, tribal consumers do with information, with brand communications, with **ideas of any kind**.

With the new **control and energy** provided by the Web – also by increasingly rich-featured mobile – they, not we, determine the flow of the game and the score.

We do, in pinball, have access to those feeble digits, the board's flippers: in the course of a campaign, we have the occasional opportunity to step into the game.

To do what? One thing only: to use the “flippers” to drive the ball back to that high-scoring cluster of rambunctious bumpers: **to keep the brand in the new game of tribal media.**

When all else fails, perhaps we can try a frustrated “nudge” of the pintable. But when we push our 21st century consumer too hard, most of the time **the machine just tilts**, and it’s game over.

This is dramatically different from what went before.

Digital Means Intimacy

Technology alone doesn't tell us where to anchor the value of digital to a brand.

Digital tools and systems are by now **ubiquitous on both the demand and supply sides** of the market.

It's to affluent consumers themselves that we must look. Their expectations of complete control, "my time, my place, my terms" access, and their consistent avoidance of interruptive messaging, define **the rules of attention**.

Digital tools –the Web, the mobile, IM and so on – are most usefully distinguished in this complicated landscape by their **unprecedented closeness to the consumer**.

If mass media provide a sort of background chorus, the new digital services, in sharp contrast, are **leading players** ... they have the ear and eye of the consumer at close quarters. In other words, this is a new challenge of Intimacy between consumer and brand.

And Intimacy, as we all know, is not that easy.

Digital tools are as much guardians of consumers' pet likes and hates as they are – more traditionally – vehicles of consumption. They **express and enact the needs and values** of the consumer.

Getting close to our consumer – getting inside the gate in order to communicate with any credible effectiveness against the background of media noise – now requires the delivery of “up-front value”, rather than a bland, one-size-fits-all brand promise.

It requires the sort of **recognition and intelligent sensitivity** that you’d expect from the concierge in your favourite boutique hotel.

This is all about what we can call “The New Intimacy”. And let’s be clear: **owning information** about an individual is nowhere near the same as having a meaningful relationship with them.

The intimate consumer relationship is built **not in the database, but at the interface**. Intimacy happens at close quarters, in real time.

And this, if you buy the argument so far, is **both the real promise and the massive challenge** of communicating with the connected consumer.

Up Close and Personal

The networked, empowered consumer has created an “infinitely small, infinitely large”, **intimate media space**, owned no longer by the media industry, but by this increasingly private – yet increasingly tribal – individual

This can call this the **i-zone**, as in I for Intimacy

Crossing the chasm both **into and across the heart of the i-zone**, is perhaps the most urgent challenge in consumer marketing today.

Tribes, as well as individuals, have their i-zones ... both are **ring-fenced** by digitally managed preferences, and tend to vigorously resist invasion by uninvited guests.

Why? Because the i-zone **reflects and supports the identity** of individual or tribe ... just as we feel slightly mugged when we're sent mobile spam. Individual or tribal ... **It's All Personal.**

It's no longer just "media".

Return On Attention

Where does this leave media then?

Stepping back, the most significant single impact of the digital revolution is a **complete flip in value**.

The Morecambe and Wise Xmas show – perhaps Carson in the US – in their heydays commanded the sort of audience numbers (and, importantly, their undivided attention ...) that we dream of today.

Attention was everywhere –and media was very very scarce, meaning that consumers would happily pay for their entertainment by allocating their (cheap and plentiful) attention to brand communications.

Now media is everywhere, and the attention of the valuable consumer is the **rare, precious commodity** we must court.

This leads to a new model of media value and a new currency: **Return On Attention**.

So ... what are **the new rules of “ROA”**?

Today's consumer is spoiled for choice in terms of free, powerful, accessible and easy-to-use digital tools for play, creativity and communication: we can call these “Box X”: **they're what's expected**, almost a birthright for the younger consumer.

Attempts by brands to apply Box X-type offerings as engagement tactics, tend to be met with a consumer shrug.

However, when we a) understand **what's already happening** in the Box X of our consumers' digital life and then b) find ways to **enhance** those activities with experiences that are otherwise difficult for consumers to do themselves ...

... we're creating what we can call "Box Y".

This is where the value-added Return On Attention begins, and where **powerful, sustainable consumer>brand Intimacy** originates.

When Intimacy Goes Tribal

We're rightly fascinated by **Advocacy**.

Not only because positive word of mouth has long been recognised for its power and relative impact.

But also because, in a media context where access and permissions become constantly tougher to achieve, and when online media and digital tools have created a whole new layer of consumer **connectedness and influence** over brand equity ...

... the opportunity to go beyond mere “occasional serendipitous buzz”, to **repeatably recognise, deliver, tribalise and measure networked consumer intimacy** seems finally within reach.

So what – really – drives the Advocacy that will drive our brands deeper Behind The Line?

The roots of truly credible, sustainable brand advocacy lie in smart, observant, consumer-led brand innovation. This “true advocacy” can’t be bought in the same way that we have historically bought media: **the best brand advocacy is earned.**

Despite a logical connection and superficial resemblance, **advocacy is not the same as loyalty:** the dynamic’s utterly different; furthermore, while any loyal customer is a powerful asset to a brand, our advocates need many specific extra attributes in order to be of positive value.

But first – and most – of all, **what’s in it for the consumer?**

When consumers act as brand advocates, they're rarely promoting the brand, but **that aspect of themselves that the brand helps them feel good about**: in other words, a facet of their own identity, not the brand's – identifying with the brand, and then speaking about themselves, using the brand as a conduit.

When we're dealing with this phenomenon, traditional planning and measurement are less central, and **personal and tribal models of engagement** become important.

This consumer – strongly influenced by tribal opinions and trends – controls the game of attention and media value, saying “Never mind about your brand. Tell me about ... **myself!**”

So ... advertising used to be just about distribution of content and messaging ... here **it's consumers themselves who are distributed**: their “personal brand messages”, pushed out via ringtone, via carefully-monitored brand purchases, and of course via their media selections.

This we can call “The Distributed Me”.

We know all about brand equity.

This new “Consumer Equity” is the extra value a brand creates in the experience of today’s in-control consumer, no longer just promising, but **repeatably delivering enhanced Consumer Identity and Consumer Expression.**

This is the new currency of premium brand communications: it’s this with this that we “pay the consumer” for the Intimacy – the **warmth, trust and receptiveness and accessibility** – that we need.

Premium and Social Display

What do we buy when we buy premium?

Most of all, we buy access to a story of which we can take some personal ownership.

It's the **new, bigger, richer story of Me**, and I need help to live in it.

This means I seek to accessorise myself with the tools of Social Display, because it's not enough to succeed ...

... **others must see it happening and share it with me.**

Today, the trappings of the premium brand are almost all **social**: it's a new language spoken by the connoisseurs, the (very small) club of aficionados, the inner circle, the “people who know”.

Many of the most important communication opportunities and brand experiences in premium are delivered **via or in the context of the tribe**; in fact, these days it's also the tribe that defines many of those attributes.

Premium brand communications need to support and enable me to enact two ideas about my Consumer Identity.

I am both unique, and I am part of an exclusive tribe.

These are interlocking, mutually reinforcing elements to be managed in parallel by the brand.

While personal concierge-type services and experiences are often used to build the sense of my special **uniqueness**, the complementary **tribal affiliations** are built with, for example, exclusive contract publishing magazines and restricted brand-sponsored events.

Tribal belonging is also powerfully built – not always by brands but certainly by luxury elites (art, wines, yachting, haute couture and so on) – using private **Knowledge and Codes**.

These enable the all-important Social Display, which commonly creates the brand engagement opportunity for the premium consumer.

How on earth can we engage with and manage this troublesome new dynamic?

Identity and Belonging Revisited

In social networks, users share very precise **facts, feelings and contextual information** about their lives, with a wide range of only vaguely-known others.

These games are hybrids of rich reportage, interactive narrative and gaming, tribal calls and responses ...

... within which more subtle threads of **identity crisis and renewal**, social grooming and repositioning, and personal risk and reward, play out.

Deprived by their mediated, globalised existence, of stable traditions of **meaning, identity and social dynamics** ...

... they have a powerful need to continually “recontextualise and revalidate” their **sense of identity**, which is – though they may not consciously experience it as such – under equally continual attack by universal shifts, uncertainties and risks.

They often do this by building and rebuilding a **personal narrative** that stabilises this ever more fragile sense of meaning, identity, and belonging.

Users in social networks derive critical value not from content and service applications in isolation ...

... but from working and playing within agreed sets of **rules and roles**.

A new tribalism is emerging, where Rules and Roles are built into **social practices whose major value is the management of modern identity**.

These new kinds of tribe are usefully treated as **social games**: we analyse them not just as groups of people (the specific members of virtual tribes by definition vary, without affecting the core identity of the tribe) ...

... but as **constructs** under which huge numbers of sophisticated social transactions of display and grooming are frequently –and largely invisibly – executed ...

... and, in varying degrees, rewarded with **Recognition**, an already familiar (but here crucial) currency of social engagement.

“Recognition” here means **affirmation for self-identity** via transactions with tribes, with specific impact on a) my **self-esteem** and b) my **social position(s)**;

The relationship between these two elements is critical, in that self-esteem is powerfully built and validated by comfort and progress in social position

...

... using highly evolved yet recognisable forms of the core anthropological mechanisms of **tribal display and grooming**.

What is branding now?

In the broadest sense, branding post-Web is about the management and optimisation of consumer value **at every touchpoint with the brand.**

In the sense we're discussing here, however – and this may be heresy – branding is increasingly something that is **done to our product or service** by the empowered connected consumer.

Branding, above all, has migrated from being a monologue from owner to market, to being a **dialogue between owner and consumer** (and furthermore, among consumers in the absence of the owner).

This goes far beyond the slightly stale “consumer owns the brand” argument that has been with us for decades. This is about the growing power of tribes of consumers, which now increasingly requires branding to be **“consumer-approved” before it achieves real traction.**

THE IMPLICATIONS

Understanding Social Networks

It is critical to grasp that, despite being generally dependent on advertising revenues, the environments we call social media are **not, in fact media at all.**

They are communication tools that have ridden to remarkable success (Facebook has at the time of writing just signed up its 500 millionth user) on the back of the combination of a) effectively universal **connectedness** and b) the impacts of **mediation and globalisation** that we have explored above.

Above all, they are, for their users, not vehicles not of consumption, but to the contrary, of **self-expression.**

Social networks therefore are not, as they are often regarded in the halls of media, a cause – they are an **effect.**

They depend utterly – as more than one formerly mighty global player has learned – upon the **involvement and commitment** of the tribes that frequent them; their role is solely to **serve the personal and tribal narrative needs** that drive the online behaviour of the young, connected consumer.

And, as noted in passing above, it's **the rules and roles** that social networks and the thousands of suppliers that feed and feed off them are evolving daily, that give structure and meaning to these games of identity.

Does Content Make a Difference?

Content does remain of some value in **capturing and rewarding** the attention of the networked consumer, but again, things are not as they seem.

The most challenging shift facing advertising – and in particular the media planning and buying model at its heart – is that the traditional **value exchange balancing consumers, brands, media and rights owners** is utterly disrupted by the plethora of free media available online, and the corresponding scarcity and preciousness of consumer attention.

Rewarding consumers for their attention with content that – at least in terms of overall perception – is **free anyway**, is appreciably of limited appeal and effect. The power, we gather, has moved.

Where content – and we won't define exhaustively what we mean by the term here for the sake of brevity – does add value for all sides is **clear, but also hard to achieve**.

As with the mobile ringtone, whose value and explosive popularity astounded the music business in the early years of rich-featured mobile, younger consumers in particular are **not so much consuming content, as co-opting it**.

Why? Precisely for the reasons we explored above: to communicate both **their uniqueness and their belonging**. They are, if you like, borrowing from the identity library of Big Media to feed the urgent appetites of their activities in “micro-media”.

And this, of course, is very **hard territory** for brands – for corporate entities of any kind – to operate in.

If the only way we can achieve meaningful and valuable consumer attention is – heresy again! – no longer to persuade them to listen to our brand stories, but to perform a kind of **supporting chorus role** on the outskirts of millions of campfires of fierce self-obsession and private identity crisis and renewal

...

... bolstering and illustrating their tiresome little narratives with the – let's remember – very **expensive and complicated entertainment rights** that producers and rights holders insist on being paid for, what on earth does that mean for brand communications?

Engaging with ... Engagement

At the time of writing, every major brand owner in the developed world is searching beyond advertising, indeed beyond digital, for something called consumer engagement.

What they mean exactly by engagement varies of course.

But we know that one thing it isn't is outbound brand messaging, and we know that – so far implicitly, pretty soon explicitly – engagement acknowledges the shift in power from brands, media and advertising networks to the new networks of billions of connected consumers.

The understandable response by traditional brand owners is to attempt – as was the case initially with digital – to **fit engagement into their existing worldview.**

This is a misunderstanding, close to a fundamental category error.

The new engagement dynamic, the one that we're all feeling our way towards, is built on the proven cultural fact that desirable, affluent consumers are **already “Otherwise Engaged”** in digitally-enabled personal and tribal activities: accessibly, enjoyably, productively, and most of all, without our help.

From this insight, we realise that engagement is not about “engaging the consumer with the brand” (i.e. ads on steroids): it’s about **Marketing To The (already) Engaged Consumer.**

I believe it’s very important for us to get this: consumer engagement is **already happening**, it’s not waiting for brands to come along and start it off.

Before it may or may not become a marketing opportunity, it’s a huge challenge, and often, for obvious reasons, a **threat**. It’s for this reason that we’re starting to see that **the shift to engagement thinking is not optional.**

Can We Plan Engagement?

Otherwise Engaged consumers are already building, populating and living within **their own Engagement Platforms**.

These platforms may seem informal, even random, but they're tangible and constructed from materials and tools that are very familiar to any modern marketer: the **Facebook and Twitter page, the groups and likes and follows, the texts and status updates**.

And across these lie the plethora of **potential brand connection** points ... sports, music, fashion, film, hobbies and so on.

The headline challenges for engagement planning therefore are:

- Identifying and understanding consumers' **current engagement platforms**;
- Finding **ways of adding value** to the consumer-owned platform, building relevance and beginning to exchange value for relationship data;
- Doing this in a manner that is **appropriate for the brand**;
- Becoming over time **indispensable** to the consumers' platform, and thus evolving and actively managing future engagement **permissions**.

This is not about enabling consumers to participate on engagement platforms with – or under the umbrella of – the brand.

Quite the contrary. It's about **enabling brands to participate on consumers' own Engagement Platforms.**

The New Communicators

Connected consumers don't just think and behave differently today compared to "pre-Web" times. They all use their connectedness in widely diverse ways. We can view the 3 major profiles as **Readers, Authors and Actors**.

The huge majority – our **Readers** – are relatively **passive** in their behaviour (the received wisdom puts these people at some 90% of the overall population).

A significant number are very active **communicators** within their various tribes. You'll find these **Authors** are most active on sites like Facebook and Twitter: they use social networks as publishers.

Our **Actors** – most evident in visual and audio-visual forums such as YouTube and Flickr – literally **perform** for their tribes: for them, social networks are a stage.

Authors and Actors – simply because they're connected and communicating – can have a significant impact on the way a **tribe of consumers perceives a brand**. And bearing in mind that the connected consumer looks first to his or her own peers ... you get the point.

Connected tribes have also begun electing – simply by signing up for their feeds and following them – **their own opinion leaders** and, in some cases, celebrity bloggers and Tweeters.

Their (albeit temporary) authenticity and tribal access makes them **into valuable – but of course also potentially negative – influencers**. And their Authoring and Acting can powerfully focus their readers and audiences on your brand and its tactics.

Can we measure engagement?

The assumption that engagement is hard to measure is understandable, but wrong. **We can't see it**, naturally, because we can't get behind the consumer eyeball.

What we can do is assess engagement by proxy (just like most other accepted forms of measurement, by the way ...) by tracking **changes in tribally-expressed attitudes and sentiments**.

To do so, we need to let go slightly of **the dream of 1:1 engagement**. The only individual consumer who can – realistically – explain the nature and degree of their engagement to us, is that notorious moving target, the focus group member.

But as I hope you've come to see, engagement is entirely a matter of tribal connectedness. And by observing the shift – on a tribal, not an individual level – of **sentiment, likes, shares, comments** and so on around the brand, we're able to observe – like a heat map in a way – the reactions of connected consumers.

The important challenge, however, is not about measuring engagement: **it's about valuing it**. Where advertisers are very comfortable with traditional reach and frequency metrics – the eyeball if you like – the value – indeed the very meaning – of engagement to a brand is still being worked out at the time of writing.

I hold my own somewhat radical beliefs here, but it's still **too early to pronounce** with any credibility.

BRIEFING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Listen then speak

No matter how iconic your brand, or how inspired your insights or creative, social consumers and their tribes must be listened to carefully in order for you to **intelligently join and participate** in the conversation.

Carefully brief and use a **quality listening service** before, during and after your engagement tactics.

It's their party ...

Connected users' primary motivation is not consumption of content, it's self-expression.

They're trying on new identities, sometimes every day. Their networks are like sandboxes or playpens, in which they can test and refine these identities.

This is about tribal display, call and response, and it's often more serious than it looks.

Brief your agencies to help your target consumers to self-express more creatively, more richly, to more people, or just to have more fun doing it. This is their story, how you can help them tell it?

Feedback über alles

A golden rule of consumer engagement is that **self-expression without feedback is empty**.

When connected consumers express themselves, this is only one half of an equation that demands balancing with comments, “likes” ... above all: **validation**.

Wherever possible, build **real-time, meaningful** feedback mechanics into every engagement tactic.

Recognition

Take on board connected consumers' powerful need to be acknowledged for who they are: **you're on their turf**. This means that your Readers, but especially your Authors and Actors, need to be handled **according to their profile**.

This is hard and can be costly to get right, but be aware of the issue and at least take steps not to get it wrong.

Ensure that wherever possible **listening tools and consumer profiles** are used to optimise recognition, and brief your agencies on the need for **meaningful, brand-relevant recognition mechanics**.

Reward

It's not just about Reward from your brand: it's **personal** to the consumer, it's on **their terms**, it's genuinely **impactful** and **significant** to their profile.

Brief your agencies to **extend** your Recognition mechanics into your Reward program, and to **align** both of these key engagement elements intelligently with the consumer **behaviour** you're seeking to encourage.

Enabling

Pre-connected brand advertising has, one way or another, been about “We (the brand) do stuff, you (the consumers) watch ...”. This tradition has been powerfully subverted in social.

The connected consumer is looking for **enabling and active platforms**, no longer passive spectacle.

Find the **values and behaviours** that your consumers are keen to enact: **align** them with the overall brief objectives.

Trading places

When audience become stars – and just as powerfully, when **stars become audience**, i.e. become the “witnesses” (don’t forget about Feedback ...) of the consumer’s personal and tribal self-expression – a powerful engagement dynamic is created.

This can drive immense **satisfaction, recognition and reward** among Actors and Authors, as well as their own tribal audiences.

Brief your agencies – especially when your strategy involves **professional performers** – to create and build in “subversive performance” opportunities.

Think useful

Consumer engagement driven by entertainment or novelty (like a quirky online video) can be attractively explosive, but tends to fizzle rapidly, and – also key – achieves little genuine brand attribution.

A **useful, consumer-relevant and brand-credible** utility can establish real, sustainable permissions to get – and stay – engaged.

Even where your campaign is based around entertainment, brief your agencies to seek and deliver **useful, shareable gifts** from the brand.

Using events

Without a highly consumer-relevant focus, branded events can veer dangerously close to “nice party, who invited the suits?” territory.

Rather than using star performances –and the same applies to so-called exclusive content – to try to ignite brand engagement, focus on the **consumer behaviour** you’re seeking to encourage, and use the experiential work to **incentivise, recognise and reward** it.

When briefing the event component of your campaign, try typically to look at it as the icing: stay focused on the “cake” of the **core campaign objectives**.

Host the conversation

By definition, engagement is all about conversation. Rather than dominating or interrupting, brands that ignite, support and add value to Conversations That Matter, are able to achieve powerful access and permissions among connected consumers.

Ask yourselves and your agencies: what – and where – is the conversation to which we can add most value?

BEFORE YOU GO

We talk about **empowerment** so often, we've perhaps lost sight of what it implies.

It's about **power**.

The power of the (relatively affluent, relatively young, fully networked) consumer to control whether at all, and if so **how, when, where – and indeed why** – she invests significant, meaningful attention in our brands.

The choice that is conferred by this power – with its new consumer currency, this Return on Attention – sets up the need for a new and explicit **negotiation between consumer and brand**.

This negotiation was implicitly always there before, but was obviated by the enormous pre-Web **power of media and advertisers**, and an effectively **non-existent consumer choice** in terms of entertainment and channels.

Great advertising, inspired by occasional Big Ideas, won this implicit negotiation time and again, before consumers got joined up in their own networks.

And we got used to that, and an understandable **assumption of entitlement** took root.

Many of us have already forgotten the remarkable **scarcity of media** (both channels and content), and the associated **abundance of quality consumer attention**, that defined the golden age of advertising.

But now the media are everywhere – as well as cheap or free – and it’s the precious attention of the empowered consumer that we seek, and **must negotiate** for both intelligently, and repeatably.

What’s more, we’re forced to perform this negotiation, to reward these new players at the table, with new forms of **brand-side currency**. Because, to put it brutally, the “exchange rate” of **Entertainment vs. Attention** that brands thrived on till recently, has flipped dramatically ...

... to relocate the power and the value on the side of the consumer networks: **hundreds of millions of joined-up people** for whom this heady revolution remains ... exciting!

Visualise then, before you go, a global stand-off between the enormous partnerships of **corporate, media and advertising networks** on the one side, and – a relative David in the face of these Goliaths, but an increasingly convincing one ...

... hundreds of millions of consumers, still feeling the sheer exhilaration, the swagger if you like, of their **new seat at this high-stakes negotiating table**.

Feeling, above all, a growing sense of their own real power.

Thanks for reading

Other books you might find relevant:

Communication Power by Manuel Castells

Mediated by Thomas de Zengotita

Self-identity in Modernity by Anthony Giddens

Metaphors We Live By by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson

Promiscuous Customers: Invisible Brands by Michael Bayler and David Stoughton

Flock and Flow by Grant McCracken

The User Illusion by Tor Norretranders

Simulacra and Simulation by Jean Baudrillard

