

Has the marketer lost control?

By Lori C. Bieda

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Their brands no longer resonate the way they were designed. Consumers are fast-forwarding through multi-million dollar ads with their PVR-powered fingers, engaging with brands on demand. The growing number of marketing mediums and connectivity between the virtual and non-virtual worlds are making marketing campaigns more complex, and messages harder to deploy.

The control that has eluded the marketer is going right back to where it has always belonged—into the hands of the customer. Our precious, meticulously-crafted brands are being shaped and redefined as we speak, with every key stroke, by customers who sit happily in front of their computers, collaborating and voicing their opinions

in cyberspace. They tweet, blog, recommend, like, endorse and become fans of everything from Lady Gaga to the Lexus 400 hybrid.

So what's a marketer to do? Progressive marketers need to focus on three things:

- Create and deliver a really great customer experience (don't give customers a reason to talk badly about you in the first place; earn their loyalty and endorsement);
- Listen to customers more, promptly address issues when they arise, anticipate their needs;
- And, by all means, mine your data wisely.

What our customers want, how they really feel about our brands and how to engender loyalty and advocacy is in the data. And social media has data like we've never seen.

The volume of data transmitted through online channels is massive. With more than two billion people online, 500 million Facebook users, 90 million LinkedIn members, and over 10 billion video streams per month being uploaded in the U.S. alone, this is no aberration, nor is it a young person's game. In fact, adults are one of the fastest growing segments of online users.

Embedded in that barrage of data are the public sentiment of your brand, real time reactions to your product launches and marketing campaigns, the response to that innocuous change you made

inextricably bound through social media. Who knew the 70s ad from Faberge Organics shampoo ("you tell two friends, and so-on, and so-on, and so-on...") would prove to be so prophetic?

Data derived through social media is a gold mine of information, a feast for the marketer of the future. Setting up the systems and software to mine that seemingly endless flow of information will be crucial. Analytics advancements have allowed us to take free form text from hundreds of millions of sources, and package and theme it into insights that can directly inform our business and marketing strategy. Text analytics, content analysis and sentiment analysis are real possibilities and statistical software allows us to pool data into useable pieces of information. Social media analysis has the power to give us the best of what traditional behavioural data, sourced from our marketing databases, offered us, combined with the tremendous insight that attitudinal research delivers.

This new data source has the power, if used strategically, to be leveraged for ongoing advertising tracking, online customer panels and research forums, public relations barometers, customer service issue tracking, competitive intelligence, new product and feature development, as inputs to our predictive modelling and segmentation schemes, and as direct inputs to inform marketing strategy. And that's just at first blush—

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to payment due days that you thought nobody would notice, the whys behind your client satisfaction woes, and the early indicators of competitive groundswell.

Don't believe it? Google your brand, or drop into a few industry blogs. There's an opinion out there about everything, and it rarely lines up to your brand promise and marketing intentions. Just ask Kryptonite locks, a company who was at the mercy of but ultimately leveraged social media to turn itself around.

Rapid technology advances have fuelled a core human need: the desire for connection in an increasingly depersonalized world. Technology enabled the connection of people while at the same time giving them a global soapbox from which their voices could be heard. The power of the customer is on a steep rise.

The implication of this for marketers is that customers are retrenching from the push of advertising messages and getting the real goods on companies and products from those they know best and trust: their friends. Those friends are

imagine what we'll find when we get in there and really start mining it!

And so, has the marketer lost control? As a marketer I can tell you that we had too much of it for too long anyway. We'd run our course. How quickly we adapt to the changing tides and let the customer become part of shaping our message will make for healthier, more honest brands in the long run. Besides, our ability to adapt in business is what differentiates and sustains us, and all this really does is position us on the cusp of reinvention—our next marketing frontier.

Lori Bieda is a marketing and analytics executive with 19 years experience devoted to helping companies leverage data to drive profitable business growth. Lori recently joined SAS as the Executive Lead of Customer Intelligence where she helps companies across Canada, the U.S. and Latin America drive profitable business growth through the strategic use of analytic software solutions.

Lee Valley TOOLS LTD.

Lee Valley Tools has created an envied brand built on solid merchandising of quality goods in four distinct lines of business that have made their reputation: Woodworking, Gardening, Hardware and Gift. This private, multi-channel marketer is now seeking to add a valuable member to their management team:

DIRECTOR, PUBLICATIONS

Reporting to the V.P. Merchandising, the Director, Publications will connect the strategic and business goals of Product Development and Retail Marketing into the design, photography, editing and execution of the company's renowned catalogue in North America. Stewardship of the development and direction of designers, photographers and merchandising make-up of each catalogue page to the graphic presentation standards of the company are the fundamental responsibility of this position.

As a candidate, you will have a compelling track record of success as a hands-on manager of creative and technical process and at least 8-10 years of relevant experience managing and mentoring talented teams. Guiding the publication activities, advancing and directing the production of over 25 catalogues a year, you bring a background in a related function, possibly in retail, packaged goods merchandising or advertising. Creative capabilities, visual competencies, good knowledge of the print industry and solid information technology savvy will go a long way in a seamless entry to this fascinating role.

Interested candidates should apply in confidence to **Maureen Sinden Executive Search, Suite 200, 440 Laurier Avenue W., Ottawa, ON K1R 7X6 sinden@intranet.ca**

We thank all respondents, however, only those candidates selected for an interview will be contacted.