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Engagement: 4 perspectives

Four participants of the upcoming **Engagement Debate '08** chime in with their perspectives on Engagement



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We've asked four participants of the upcoming Engagement Debate '08, to chime in with their perspectives on Engagement

Impressions are one way. Media is now two way. Something has to change. Measures of Engagement have to emerge as brand dollars move online and marketers develop analytical competencies.

Digital brand marketing and digital direct marketing used to reside on opposite ends of the spectrum, but now they are closer than ever. Changes in the way consumers interact with and navigate the web have exponentially changed in the past year giving brand marketers the opportunity, for the first time, to run campaigns outside of expensive microsites that have tangible and quantifiable metrics based on Engagement. However, while most digital brand marketers agree that engagement is critical to the success of a campaign, the definition of engagement often differs depending on who is using it.

That is why we've set up The Engagement Debate '08. Top new media experts will have a forum to pave the pathway for:

- Defining digital marketing engagement
- Understanding the most engaging online environments
- Quantifying, and measuring engagement
- Putting a tangible value on engagement



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Publisher Perspective

Key Metrics:

- Time spent
- Clicks made
- Action taken

Engagement is not reach. Reach is the number of people who may potentially, in a perfect world, pay attention to your message. Marketers have traditionally purchased reach. They've bought subway ads because millions of people walk by them every day. They've purchased television ads because millions of people watch the program that's being interrupted with the marketer's message. The reality is that reach is not engagement. Reach doesn't even necessarily lead to engagement. People take bathroom breaks during commercials, and they breeze right past subway ads (perhaps chuckling at the model's blacked out teeth and goatee).

Engagement, in my mind, is just a fancy word for "attention." If someone is paying attention to your message, they are engaged. This is measurable by time spent, clicks made and action taken. It is here that the Web enjoys a healthy advantage over non-digital (or analog) equivalents. Whereas it is all but impossible to determine how many minutes of attention your subway or television advertisement demands, you can measure nearly everything in a digitally interconnected environment. You can actually determine how much time consumers spend engrossed in your brand message down to the second. Not only does it allow you to track engagement, more importantly the Web can offer extraordinarily rich experiences to capture people's attention in the first place. We're not talking thirty second spots or full-page ads here, we're talking about full, immersive experiences. Games. Hyperlinked product reviews. Socially charged sharing experiences. This is a revolutionary change. It means that instead of buying millions of "impressions" with indeterminate effects, you can buy fewer that are exponentially more effective.

Here's a quick example: A user sees a Web video overlay advertisement and clicks on it. The overlay spawns an in-player environment where they can play a game and, if they wish, share the game with their Facebook friends. The first click is an action taken. Their time spent is the time between this first action and their exiting the branded environment (going back to the video, say). Sharing the game with their Facebook friends -- another action taken. All precisely, beautifully, measurable. All more valuable than a passing glance on a subway platform.

Agency Perspective

Key Metrics:

- Time spent with “the experience” (including post-click activity)
- Sharing (passalong, widgets, etc... I also would like to see measures of engagement as a function of the engagement that caused them...making some engagement more important than others.)
- Activity/Interaction (e.g. What somebody is doing, not just for how long)

Engagement, in terms of digital marketing, occurs when a consumer decides to take any sort of interaction with an ad at all, past an initial exposure, impression. Once that step is taken, physically or psychologically, an ad becomes an experience.

While it is difficult to measure psychological engagement (beyond post-impression studies), we can certainly measure physical engagement. This can be done in what are now “classical terms” -- length of time, number of pages/clicks deep, passalong, widget adoption, or any other measurable online activity. There are no standardized metrics of measurement for physical engagement, and I caution against development of them, as each experience can and should be customized to a particular brand, promotion, or campaign. But I would advise brands, and maybe even industries, to establish market norms for benchmarking purposes. Engagement metrics likely can not be absolute — they are best used when related to other, similar efforts. I believe that agencies (BOTH creative and media) are responsible for making this happen.

Research Perspective

Key Metrics:

- Average time spent
- Average number of visits
- Percent of visitors who pass along
- Percent of people interacting with the ad
- Percent of people clicking on the ad
- Average percent of video ad watched
- Percent of people who play the entire video ad

My belief is that marketers truly care about two things when they do advertising: 1) did my advertising drive sales? and 2) did my advertising make people feel more positively about my brand? Therefore, when using some of the metrics mentioned above, engagement is a potential diagnostic but not an endpoint in itself. Engagement is often used to diagnose problems when one of the two real goals (sales or branding) are not met or cannot be measured properly. Also, the correlation of engagement to sales or engagement to branding varies quite a bit by industry and by brand and that it is not necessarily strong in most cases.

On the attitudinal side, I think engagement should be thought of as the moment when your brain begins to actually think about something. It is similar to the difference between watching some B-movie versus one that you spend the entire weekend pondering. It can also be as simple as the double-take when you see someone on the street wearing something crazy. Things that trigger engagement are interesting and/or relevant to you and unexpected (get above the clutter).

Engagement, in a digital environment or otherwise, is the ability to go beyond basic reach and frequency and actually have an impact on any combination of the defined communication objective metrics: knowledge (awareness), attitude (perception, intent) and behavior (purchase).

When attempting to quantify engagement, it's also important to recognize the multiple engagement components that should be considered and that each is VERY different when attempting to decide on overall effectiveness: engagement with the medium / engagement with the message / engagement with the brand

My overall point is that engagement can be measured in many ways, and can be useful in getting an overall understanding of people's interaction with the brand, but should never be confused with effectiveness which relates directly to sales or changes in brand perceptions. Lastly, we need to be weary of creating a series of data points that get lost and have little relevance or understanding to the actual brand managers and media allocation decision makers. We need to keep digital measures simple, straightforward, and most of – useful. For Dynamic Logic, our role is to provide to our clients traditional brand metrics that they use for ALL media and help them gauge whether or not exposure to their marketing has shifted perceptions and key attitudes (awareness, message association, favorability, and purchase intent).



Brand Perspective

Key Metrics:

- Sales
- Sales
- Sales

What is engagement? Put simply, to me it is active attention. In these days of fragmented media, advertising avoidance, and a user-generated culture where the consumer is the creator, consumer, and distributor of content, it is harder and harder to reach an audience who is willing to give an advertiser his or her undivided attention. Engagement is that sweet bliss when a consumer actively recognizes an ad, sits forward, and becomes engrossed for at least a small amount of time with brand-relevant content. Engagement based on an equity-building brand strategy has the potential to deepen a consumer's loyalty to a brand, change perceptions, or drive sales over and above what the basic media value of an advertising impression can do.

How do you measure engagement? It is quite simple. Sales. All other measures of performance are proxies to help determine an ad's effect on sales. Time spent, clicks, CTR, cost-per-interaction, etc... all attempt to provide insight into the overall effectiveness of an ad, but in and of themselves, don't mean anything. Who cares how much time is spent engaging with an ad if that engagement doesn't result in incremental sales? How do you measure the impact of an ad on sales? That's the easy part. High-level quantitative regression-based modeling is one way. At Bayer, we've proven online advertising's value in relation to traditional media. Drilling down deeper to understand how the engagement added to sales is harder. One method is to test the advertising and compare its impact on a metric like Purchase Intent among a sample of consumers who saw and engaged with the ad to a comparable sample of consumers who saw the ad, but did not engage. Yes, Purchase Intent is yet another proxy for sales, but it gets us closer to understanding the true impact of the engagement.

Join us...

All four of the contributors are leading digital marketing experts and are individually helping to define what advertising will look like in the future. To have side by side insight into their thought processes is incredibly valuable. While their opinions of what engagement varies greatly, there are some common threads:

- **Reach does not equal engagement**
- **Engagement is part of the consumer experience that goes beyond an impression**
- **Engagement is associated with a positive consumer experience**
- **Engagement on the most basic level (not affinity, etc.), can be tracked in a digital environment**

This, however, is just the beginning of the conversation. Can we find common ground to build consensus? Can we simplify measures and definitions to arrive at standards? How long will it take?

Join us as we move the market forward together.



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