The role of content in creating meaningful conversations online: Case study of Henkel Beauty Care's digital campaign in Germany

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Abstract   The advent of social media platforms has had a disruptive effect on the shopping habits of consumers. Whereas once a consumer would be inspired by a marketing tactic to buy certain goods or services, today they will more often than ever go online to research the product further before buying. This paper will look at how this change in buying behaviour is affecting marketing campaigns, and will ask what brands can do to adapt to this new state of affairs. Looking at the case study of Henkel Beauty Care's digital campaigns, the paper will set out the authors' views that far from being a threat to brands, the changing behaviour of shoppers represents a real opportunity for meaningful dialogue and engagement. The tactics described here represent best practice in social media and are being deployed by a variety of brands across many industries.

KEYWORDS: social media, content, Facebook, brand, engagement, communications, mobile, 1:1 dialogue, online consultancy, SEO

THE EVOLUTION OF CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Marketing and advertising have traditionally been based on the art of disruption. The aim has been for brands to interrupt the behaviour of a consumer as he or she goes about making purchases; to insert into the shopping cycle new information that will make an impact on the final buying decision. This method of brand communication is as old as marketing itself, but it is one that today is

going through a period of fundamental change. The traditional way of marketing products — by broadcasting key messages to audiences — is no longer enough to sustain market share, let alone drive growth. Instead, modern marketers must provide multiple platforms from which they can reach out to consumers and engage in meaningful conversations with target audiences. Crucially, this is about establishing two-way dialogue with the public rather than simply talking at them, as was all too often the way in the past. It is a major shift, but one that has the power to transform completely how consumers feel about their brands. But what is driving this change?

THE CHANGING SHAPE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The way consumers interact with brands has been completely transformed. Traditionally, there were far fewer brands to choose from, and their unique selling propositions were grasped more easily. With only a few television channels and a handful of newspapers and magazines to choose from, the vast majority of consumers could be reached with a single prime-time ad slot. The consumer choice was therefore simple. In the traditional marketing model that drove this choice, the seller controlled the process and had complete power over content. Consumer communications were a monologue, flowing from the brand to the consumer.

The situation companies find themselves in today would be completely unrecognisable to the marketing professionals of the previous century. Technological innovations such as the internet and smartphones have run parallel with an explosion in the types of media available to consumers. Brands have proliferated and advertising has become saturated. Today's consumers are faced with a bewildering number of brands and a

bombardment of advertising messages. This has led to increasing scepticism about advertising — consumers today need content that grabs them and tells them something they want to hear. What is more, this needs to be presented to them as a dialogue, not a monologue.

Perhaps most importantly, however, is how word-of-mouth has changed. Previously, word-of-mouth was a one-to-one communications medium. A consumer would like a brand and then recommend it to a friend or family member. With the advent of social media, however, word-of-mouth is now a many-to-many communications medium. Consumers are posting their thoughts and opinions on products to a network of readers that spans the globe. This level of consumer power is unprecedented.

The sum effect of these changes is that companies today often find it much more difficult to influence the consumer purchasing cycle than in the past. The *Mad Men* approach to marketing — running a product advertisement so good that people simply have to rush out to buy it — is no longer enough. In part, this is because there is just too much information for people to absorb in any sort of meaningful way.

To put this into context, worldwide around 5 exabytes of data are created every day — this is equivalent to all the data ever created by humans from the dawn of civilisation up until 2003.[1] With so much information being thrown their way each and every day, people are often overwhelmed and simply cannot be expected to remember the details of advertisements. Instead, adverts will simply provide the impetus for further research so the consumer can make a truly informed shopping decision.

Today's consumers will watch an advert, certainly, but are then more likely to jump online to conduct further research than to grab their shopping bag. Today's

consumers will use Google to research the product; they will read reviews; they will canvass opinions through social media such as Facebook; they will read what their trusted friends and contacts have to say. In short, the web — and in particular the recent growth in social media platforms — has added a whole new dimension to the purchasing journey — one that marketers need to find a way to exploit.

THE ZERO MOMENT OF TRUTH

The importance of this shift in consumer shopping behaviour cannot be overstated.

For decades, marketing platforms have been devised around a simple breakdown of the consumer journey. The model posits three steps behind every purchase:

1. *Stimulus:* This is the primary cause of a purchase. It could be that a consumer has seen an advert on television or heard a recommendation from a friend that has inspired him or her to try a product.
2. *First moment of truth:* This is when the consumer sees the product for the very first time (eg on the shelf). This is the first occasion when the brand promise comes against the reality of the product.
3. *Second moment of truth:* After the consumer has taken the product home and used it, a second moment of truth forms the final impression of the product and affects whether he or she would recommend it to a friend.

It is this traditional, linear model that has been disrupted by the web. According to Google, which came up with the concept, there is now a 'zero moment of truth', sitting between the stimulus and the first moment of truth.[2] It is here that the consumer breaks away from what the retailer is telling them and goes online to form their own opinion.

It is this zero moment of truth that marketers need to play within. However, for far too many brands the web is still seen as something of a communications Wild West, with users having far too much — and brands far too little — control over content. The web is often viewed as a necessary evil rather than the exceptional gateway into the lives of consumers that it actually is. If the challenge of the zero moment of truth is to be addressed, brands need to be sufficiently confident to embrace the full potential of the web and through this effectively become a trusted 'friend' to their consumers.

Just how difficult it is to achieve this cannot be overstated.

CREATING CONTENT WITHIN THE ZERO MOMENT OF TRUTH

By identifying the zero moment of truth, Google has helped bring the art of marketing into the 21st century. Frightening as it may be, companies now recognise that there is a new part of the consumer purchasing journey, one that is actually 'owned' by the consumer.

Importantly, marketers also now know that this zero moment of truth needs to be embraced. Through an elegant social media strategy, this new space will create fertile ground on which brands can nurture ever-stronger relationships with their consumers.

But how does one make such a strategy work without appearing cynical?

This is perhaps the greatest challenge for any social media strategy. The answer lies in one thing and one thing alone: content. For any sort of 'zero moment' communication to be a success, the content has to be authentic and resonate with what the consumer actually wants to read or watch.

This involves brands taking a different approach to the type of information they give their consumers. The one-way,

broadcast-style information that can work for advertising or press announcements — the stimulus content if you will — simply does not work in zero moment environments.

What exactly is meant by this?

Broadly speaking, stimulus content flows from the business to the consumer. It is the information one sees on a daily basis in television adverts, print ads, online banners, brand homepages etc. It is prescriptive and descriptive, providing information that a brand has to get across to the consumer. To take an example from the beauty industry and hair-care category, this would include the following:

- what the hair-care product looks like;
- unique selling proposition, such as ingredients that are particularly nourishing for hair;
- how the hair-care product stands out from other hair-care products or brands; and
- what celebrities think about the hair-care product (testimonials).

This is the core information that brands must deal in — it is essential to get these key messages across to consumers. For this reason, the traditional channels of television and print advertising will always remain important to reach out to a wide range of consumers and generate stimulus at the first stage of the shopping experience.

Content in the zero moment of truth, in the online world of social interaction, must by its very nature be focused on the consumer perspective. It will not come as a surprise to learn that the content a consumer wants to access online is worlds away from the stimulus content that brands have got used to communicating.

So what information do consumers actually want when online?

Taking again the beauty industry and the hair category as an example, it is clear that consumers want content that is personal:

- How do I choose the right hair-care product for my needs?
- How will the hair-care product make me feel about my hair?
- Who else, whom I admire, uses this hair-care product?
- What do other people think of the hair-care product?
- What hair colour suits my style?

Clearly this is information that is difficult to convey through classical advertising, and requires an integrated approach.

CREATING CONTENT FOR THE ZERO MOMENT OF TRUTH: A CASE STUDY

Content must be presented as a dialogue with the consumer. If content is seen in any way as being product or marketing led, it will alienate the consumer and create a negative image of the brand. Remember, this is the consumer's communications channel and they decide what type of content they will engage with on it.

What form should this content take?

The following outlines a campaign strategy put in place by Henkel Beauty Care, Germany for its master brand Schwarzkopf — a brand with a wide range of products in the hair-care, hair-styling and hair-colourant categories.

Henkel Beauty Care set itself an ambitious goal: to get Schwarzkopf known as the premium hair expert/hair consultant on the web by building a meaningful dialogue with consumers. This was not a campaign intending to directly promote specific products. Rather, its goal was for consumers to see the brand as a source of advice on all hair-related matters; to insert Schwarzkopf into the zero moment of truth conversation.

In short, Henkel Beauty Care wanted to make Schwarzkopf a search destination for consumers looking to have their zero moment of truth questions answered.

GETTING DIGITAL RIGHT

With a campaign about content and dialogue, the tools for engagement need to be based on social media platforms, as this is where consumers are turning to for advice and recommendations.

Henkel Beauty Care had already established an international digital team, reporting in to the global marketing function. With the investment of an additional digital marketing manager in its local market, the close collaboration with the international digital team and the support of best-in-class agencies, Henkel Beauty Care, Germany was well set up to develop and run digital campaigns that would resonate well with its consumers.

This is perhaps one of the biggest lessons for any organisation looking to fully exploit social media and digital channels: if you are going to do it, do it properly. Furthermore, doing it properly involves a level of commitment, both short and long term, which should not be underestimated.

ENABLING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The initial phase of the strategy involved exchanging the traditional, product-focused Schwarzkopf brand homepage with something optimised for the new social environment. This was a brave move for Henkel Beauty Care. It involved nothing less than taking all the received wisdom on what makes a good website and casting it aside. Most companies today understand the importance of digital presence, but few would have the courage to do with their brand website what Henkel Beauty Care has done with the Schwarzkopf site: creating a site without any upfront product information.

In fact, this is no longer a brand homepage in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a content hub; a source of information, news and views presented in a magazine format. Henkel Beauty Care engaged a leading beauty publishing house to contribute additional editorial content. Their expertise helped develop an online presence that has more in common with a lifestyle platform than the traditional 'shop window' websites of competing brands (see http://www.schwarzkopf.de).

But why did the content need to be different from the content of traditional brand homepages? Having analysed the search terms on Google, it was obvious that the search queries for hair-related topics like 'hair styles', 'hair colour' and 'shampoo' or even more specific terms such as 'undercut' or 'hair straightening' outnumbered the search terms for brand names. Hence, by following an editorial approach, Henkel Beauty Care wanted to give its consumers the content they are looking for.

With this innovative platform in place, the crucial element was to ensure that the consumer would find this hair-related content hub when searching on the web. Given that 70 per cent of website searches are conducted using natural rather than paid-for search terms,[3] Schwarzkopf thrives through search engine optimisation (SEO) and is top-listed in a number of important hair-related key words.

The content hub is kept up to date with engaging features and editorial articles on the subjects that are of greatest relevance to Schwarzkopf consumers. This content includes stories on the latest 'must-have' hairstyles; video 'how-tos' on how to create the style of an in-vogue celebrity; as well as tips on hair care, hair styling and hair colourants. Recent articles, for example, included a special on

alluring dating hairstyles, as well as a feature on how to accentuate parts of your hair by setting streaks as highlights or lowlights or using block streaks in the right hair colour.

Importantly, product information is always kept to a minimum. As highlighted, the aim of the content hub is not to advertise products in the traditional way, but to provide relevant hair-related content. This is not to say there is a complete absence of product information on the site, but rather that product information is presented to the consumer only when the information will be of actual interest. For example, with tips and tricks articles explaining how to create specific hairstyles, the site makes recommendations on which Schwarzkopf product can be used to get a certain look. The product finder also helps the consumer find the right Schwarzkopf product for his or her specific need. The product suggested by the product finder tool links back to the product's homepage, which offers more specific information on the product itself.

The editorial content is kept absolutely up to date, includes the key words consumers are looking for on search engines, and is crafted to be something people will actually want to read or watch in their spare time. Understanding what content is relevant to the consumer is an ongoing process. With the help of web analytics, social media tools and SEO analysis, the Henkel Beauty Care team works to improve the site by continually analysing what content gets the most response, while paying attention to fashion shows and the latest trends on the street to ensure that the content hub continues to be relevant.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

To engage in meaningful dialogues with its consumers, Henkel Beauty Care has launched a Schwarzkopf Facebook page (www.facebook.com/Schwarzkopf. Deutschland). Consumers are generally not interested in visiting a Facebook page that is obviously advertising a brand or blatantly trying to sell products. Instead, they want to read about themes and topics that matter to them. The Schwarzkopf Facebook page therefore hosts highly compelling content of its own — such as 'Four Easy Steps' guides to getting a certain hair style, or picture stories on how to get the latest look — helping to create dialogues with consumers while also channelling readers to the primary Schwarzkopf content hub. Here, Schwarzkopf fans can have their questions answered — either directly on the Facebook wall, through direct messaging or even through personal conversations over the phone. However, this was only the first element of Schwarzkopf's Facebook strategy.

Comments on the Schwarzkopf page showed that many consumers were very interested in home-colouration products, but had very specific questions on how it is done correctly and what brand colour would suit them. From the questions consumers were posting, it was clear that there was a real requirement for a site that could advise consumers on how to dye their hair most effectively, find the right hair colour and find out about the latest trends in the hair colouration market.

From this insight, Henkel Beauty Care has just created another zero moment of truth platform: Color Expert (https://www.facebook.com/schwarzkopf. ColorExpertTeam.de). On this page, customers can gain access to experts in hair colouration. Users can send questions to the team, headed by Armin Morbach, a celebrity stylist and true expert in the field. Additionally, the team regularly updates the page with, among other things, tips and tricks for getting the perfect hair tone.

Furthermore, Henkel Beauty Care has taken the idea of consumer dialogue one step further with its first Online Hair-Consultancy Tool in the German market. This unique platform will allow consumers to apply for an online consultancy session with professionally trained stylists, held over webcam. Importantly, this campaign involves Schwarzkopf having a dialogue with its consumers on a one-to-one basis. In this respect, it is the most advanced realisation of zero moment of truth communications.

It works because the consultancy is real. Like the content hub, it is not used to push products, but rather to build trust through dialogue.

MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA

Just as it is important to talk to people about subjects that they are interested in, it is also important to talk to them through the channel of their choice. With the rise of smartphones, it was clear from the outset that Henkel Beauty Care would need to embrace mobile social media. To this end, it has launched a smartphone app aimed at providing value-added hair-colouration services to consumers. The Schwarzkopf ColorAdvisor app allows users to take photos of themselves and then digitally alter their hair colour to try different styles based on specific Schwarzkopf colour shades. They can also share pictures with friends via email or Facebook to ask for their advice on what looks best on them. Schwarzkopf was the first beauty brand to provide such engagement in the German market and has significant numbers of downloads from the App Store.

The Schwarzkopf homepage, Facebook pages and ColorAdvisor app have at their heart Henkel Beauty Care's belief that relevant content and meaningful dialogue must always take precedence over simple product information. Whatever the sector, it is vital that marketers attempt to give their consumers more and relate to them as individuals.

REMARKABLE SUCCESS

The Schwarzkopf content platforms have been highly successful. With the new concept, the number of Facebook fans in Germany has increased 50-fold, while visits to the Schwarzkopf website have gone up and up. Within just 12 months, unique visitors to the site have increased 30-fold, as have page impressions. These growth numbers represent pure organic growth, as almost no media investment has been made so far. In addition to this, social media monitoring tools have shown that more people are talking about Schwarzkopf in, for example, blogs, forums and social media platforms, and that there is an increase in positive feedback on the brand.

These are still early days, with many of the long-term benefits still to be felt. The marketing team is confident, however, that it has set out on the right path to influence consumers within the zero moment of truth.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been clear for some time now that online social interactions have disrupted a marketing model that served well throughout the 20th century. Consumers have more power than ever before over what they buy and how they buy it. Brands are facing an evolutionary watershed — they must either adapt, or they will disappear over time.

To adapt, businesses must rethink how they communicate with their audiences. Monologue must give way to dialogue; broadcast to conversation. Most importantly, brands should look to engage in a meaningful way with individuals.

The web and social media may have changed the way in which consumers shop, but they have also provided the means for businesses to respond to this change. As long as brands focus on providing relevant and compelling content, they should not only be able to adapt to the zero moment of truth, but to thrive in it.

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