

Shut Up I'm Still Talking – How to Listen, Learn & Engage With Your Tribe

As a marketer, my professional ambition is - to borrow a quote from Steve Jobs – make a dent in the Universe by helping organisations be much smarter about how they engage with their existing and prospective customers. Or, perhaps put more succinctly, help them stop interrupting others to gain their attention. It's not big, it's not clever and it's unnecessarily wasteful.

Interruption : The Elephant In The Room

Today, we still live in a world where the invasive and all too familiar cry of 'look at my brand' is the primary approach to attracting consumer attention. It's a world where marketing campaigns are the equivalent of a one night stand and where consumers are often simply left to cope, despite the best of intentions and efforts.



Wander down the aisle of any supermarket in the UK and you will see on-shelf promotions by the score aiming to entice you and me to part with our hard earned cash. Above the line ads continue to perpetuate more or less in the same way as they have always done since they were first used.

Even in the digital age, web pop-ups interfere with the experience of online engagement with the arrogant (or is that desperate) assumption that by grabbing my attention, this will persuade me to sign up for whatever the offer of the day is. You Tube videos tediously includes bump ads which irritate even if you can skip them after 5 seconds.

Yet, if you are very smart and take the time to think things through (as Lancia cars did in Italy) you can achieve fantastic, tangible ROI using the very online tools you are trying to master. For the record, Lancia combined social media, digital product placement and interactive TV advertising and managed to sell 67 cars during an Italian soap opera.

Today, interruption marketing is the elephant in the room and whilst it is unlikely to be eradicated completely, there are increasingly fewer excuses left for doing it. Yet, brands are having to shout louder to be heard

Find Your 'Big Why'

The challenge many brands have is that the interruption based marketing approaches are engrained in marketing methods first founded in the 1950s. Even with the advent of online communication channels the basic premise of 'look at my brand' marketing for too many brand owners [remains relatively unchanged](#).

Too harsh? I think not. After seeing this [video](#), I think you will know who you are ☺ You can change. All it takes is a little courage and a little effort on your part.

The challenge is lies in the fact that whilst many organisations can articulate what they do (some, can even describe 'how' they do it), very few are clear 'why' they do it. And yet, as [Simon Sinek](#) notes, being clear about your 'why' or, perhaps more precisely, your 'big why' and embodying that in absolutely everything you do is what consistently separates the winners from the 'also rans'.



What's a 'big why'?

Well, it has little to do with the usual guff and nonsense written in bloated, self-serving corporate mission statements. The 'big why' is not inward looking. It is outward looking. A 'big why' is something larger than yourself – a cause – that others identify, resonate and engage with.

For example, people don't buy Apple Computers because Apple make great computers, they buy them because Apple's 'big why' is about challenging the status quo.

People whose values and beliefs resonate with this are the ones who queue overnight in the freezing cold for the chance to be one of the first people to buy on release of a new product.

They are the passionate ones. They are your advocates and the leaders of your community – your 'tribe'.

Let's Talk About Passion

Social media is all about conversations. Brands are keen as mustard to talk to consumers but the nature of the conversation is often intrusive, irrelevant and energetically flat.

Yet, when we can engage in conversations with others where we can talk about our passions, the nature and energy behind the flow of words. Social media was made for this.

For example, I recently connected with a new business contact in the marketing agency world and was sharing a speaking opportunity with them that I thought would be a great profile raising opportunity. A former colleague, also at the agency and working alongside my new contact, had mentioned my passion for rock music and that I was a music nut.

The moment the subject of rock music entered the conversation (he started it!) it changed the dynamic of our interaction completely. We were off comparing gig stories, talking about musical techniques and sharing bragging rights as to who played with who and where – he won! Speaking opportunity, what speaking opportunity?

It was a great muso conversation. Time disappeared. Our speaking energy increased and what was initially a work conversation transcended into something much more fun and engaging. It worked and we bought into the next level of relationship because the mutual sharing of our passion worked for both of us. No manipulation. No sell. Just passion.

And that's all it takes my brand owner friends. Find the other person's passion and find ways to get them to engage in it

If [Ford Motor Company](#) can do it, then so can you too. Even if you are a ball bearing manufacturer you can find ways to discover people who are passionate about ball bearings and what they can do.

Stiff online conversations trying to lure prospective customers and prospects to talk about the latest offer or enticement can instantly be replaced with self sustaining, self motivated and self serving conversations among people sharing and engaging in their passion. As [Brains On Fire](#) noted in their [latest book](#), 'No passion, no conversation; no conversation, no word of mouth; no word of mouth, no successful business.

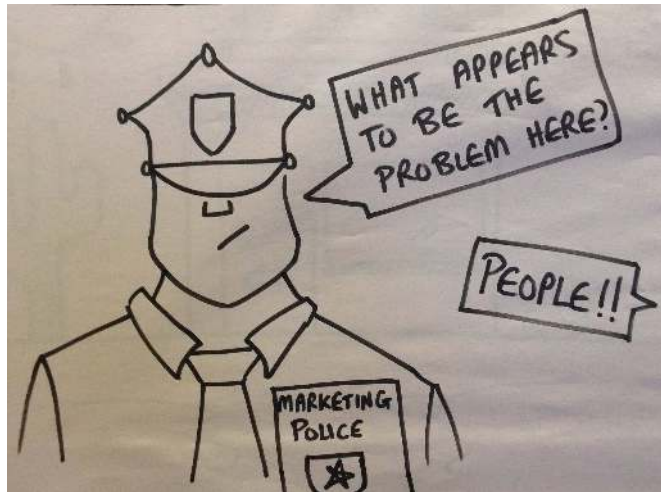


What Value Do Your Bring?

As Jay Baer notes, it's all about '[Youtility](#)' – the value you deliver to the other person. It's all about helping not hyping your products and services.

Successful engagement online is also predicated on delivering value to your 'tribe' not in terms that you, the business think is value, but value expressed in the language and context of individuals within your tribe.

Delivering this kind of value means that you have to stand in the shoes of your customer and see things from their perspective. As [Robbin Philips](#) notes, all marketing problems are people problems and it is the responsibility of marketing to reframe the problem.



Performing this reframe is often counterintuitive and requires a business to perform some mental gymnastics to work on adopting an ‘outside in’ mindset.

For example, brand owners whose USP is focused on something they put in to a product sometimes find this a challenge and occasionally put it in the ‘too hard’ bucket.

'Inside-Out' Mindset	'Outside-In' Mindset
Value is what goes in to our products and services	Value is what customers get out; value to customer
Customers derive value at a point in time	Customers derive value over a period of time
Value happens in our internal value chain or in our distribution chain	Value happens in the customer space and is expressed in their own words
Customer outcomes are fragmented, assumed to be superficial and visible	Customers outcomes are linked, often run deep and may not always be visible
We do everything ourselves	We co-create with customers and others to design and deliver the value proposition
We pursue market share	We discover new market spaces

Source: Adapted from 'Customer Minded Growth', Vandermerwe S

To help define value, brand owners may find the following framework useful. It considers the idea of value in 7 different ways and from the perspective of the individual.



- 1 Are you proactive in helping me to improve the quality of my life, wealth, health, competence and happiness?
- 2 Do you solve my problems by providing the competencies, support and service I need and do the things I can't or prefer not to?
- 3 Do I promote you as a source of personal advice who consistently helps me make best choice for me and significant others?
- 4 Do you serve my needs when, where and how I want them to be served at all stages of buying and consumption?
- 5 Do you demonstrate genuine respect for me, others and the wider environment? Do you always act with integrity?
- 6 Do you help me find personal fulfilment and acceptance by offering me opportunities to connect genuinely with like minded people?
- 7 Do you let me co-create propositions and design, operate and manage key business processes for my own needs?

Key Takeaway:

The 'secret sauce' in listening, learning and engaging with your tribe is in:

- (i) understanding the need to focus on people's passions;
- (ii) defining your 'why' - something bigger than the business and usually a cause;
- (iii) being clear on the value delivered to the individual *viewed from the individual's point of view (an 'outside-in' view) not the business (an 'inside-out' view).*