

Community Marketing: three things to do differently

If you are trying to leverage communities as part of your marketing, there are a few things you need to approach differently. Some of them have already been described in other posts but I wanted to reiterate them here as part of a bigger picture.



1. Think consumer tribes - not market segments

As I described [last week](#), the most important thing to know about your potential community members is how they behave with one another. That is much more important than to understand the market segment to which they belong based on market characteristics. That does not mean that traditional market segmentation will not allow you to discover tribes in some cases. As someone pointed out last week when [we presented](#) this concept at the BRITE conference, traditional market segmentation might have uncovered the stay-at-home moms as a segment in the health market. While true, traditional market segmentation would have described them by age bracket, income level and other such characteristics - and not by the behavioral characteristics that are so critical to understand how to structure the initial community.

2. Think network - not channel

Many marketers consider social media as another channel through which to push stuff to their customers and prospects. What they do not yet understand is that the conversations that are happening between those customers and prospects are much more important in making buying decisions than the conversations that they might have with those same people. So of the essence are the people networks through which the most influential conversations and recommendations are flowing, not the inner workings of social media as a communications channel.

Related to that is how marketers create and distribute content. Instead of creating lengthy white papers and long in-depth case studies, successful marketers are chunking up their branded content, or as my partner [Lois](#) calls it “social mediafying” their marketing content, so that it has a higher chance of being picked up and redistributed as part of the network conversations that matter.

3. Think customer-centricity - not product/brand/ or company-centricity

To be successful in today’s marketing 2.0 world, marketers need to rethink many other traditional marketing concepts as well. In most cases all it takes is to recast those concepts in the context of the consumer instead of around your products, brands or company. Examples of concepts that need to be reevaluated include:

- Value proposition - instead of being product-centric, a value proposition needs to become consumer-centric. Look to position your offering as a customer-centric solution, not as feature, function, benefits.
- Brands - most brands are product or company-centric. They need to become customer-centric. How do your customers feel about themselves in the context of your brand? Do they look cool, smart or informed? That is what really counts.
- Focus groups - are usually “focused” on your products or company. They need to become customer centric. Get insights from ongoing customer communities instead of having focus groups, and don’t run those communities as focus groups.
- Product platforms are important, but in addition to that companies now need to look for customer platforms. When a company [as diverse as GE](#) can find consumer platforms, that means that most other companies can find it too.

So recapping - every community-based marketing 2.0 activity you undertake needs to have the customer at the center of the activity. When you think about how to engage with those customers and prospects, think behavior, not market characteristics. And remember to always focus on the networks that matter.

If you are running communities, make sure to participate in the 2009 Tribalization of Business Study. You can [take the quantitative survey here](#) or you can visit the new companion web site at <http://www.tribalizationofbusiness.com>.