

# Social by Design

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**W**hat's the return on social? That's the question every marketer wants answered — or at least his or her boss does. Let's be honest, however. The return is not quantifiable even if we think it works. A recent eMarketer survey found that 30 percent of global marketers believe that social would "indirectly" produce return-on-investment. Conversely, 70 percent are searching for a return.

So, let's ask better questions: Are we looking at the right metrics? Are we creating social solutions across the marketing funnel from product development to conversion?

Social has an impact, and brands and retailers are finding creative ways to prove its worth. However, many times these are soft and nebulous metrics like engagement, awareness or intent to purchase. A clean line from social to sale doesn't exist — or at least in any way marketers can present to their boss (i.e., here's a number; now expand my budget).

There has to be a better way to approach social (and the living data that comes with it). We must align social efforts with the product development cycle all the way through audience participation and end up at sales. Each stop is a node on the spectrum of social, and each node provides value. Those values will drive returns.

Social and data converge to paint intimate customer portraits, and this can lead to innovation. Social conversations can define messaging for influencers to affect buyers. If brands aren't creating connections across every asset they own, or even sponsoring conversations across alternative social channels like BuzzFeed, then they are missing out on a huge equity-driving opportunity.

So, forget about return-on-investment for a second; let's focus on what can be done to capitalize

on social. We can use each node on that spectrum of social to drive conversion through a social filter. Think of it as a giant 'breadcrumbs' effect. Social knowledge gathered along the way can ultimately lead a brand from conversation to conversion.

## DESIGNING THE JOURNEY

Before building any social experience, a brand should start with a vital but often ignored question: Why am I here? Is it for product development purposes, or listening to consumers for why they try my products? Am I participating in a conversation or helping to convert looks into buys? Ultimately, can I program many interactions into one critical action — conversion?

This is the prologue to capitalizing on social. It's researching and learning the ways a brand can be active and different in social that consumers will embrace. This comes from mapping the conversations of social channels to identify terms, hopes, or signals in the noise that point to how consumers feel.

It's learning what consumers wished a brand had, what they love about a brand, and what they dislike. From there, something as simple as a 'word cloud' can help identify white spaces and areas of opportunity where consumers want to engage. This can be a powerful data set — a foundation for building products and brands.

## Social knowledge transports brands from conversation to conversion.

A great example of leveraging social is Waze, a traffic and navigation app. Waze started, in Israel, as a traffic navigation app built on social behavior and knowledge. Today, it provides fully developed navigation maps in at least 15 countries, including the United States. At its core, Waze tells users the fastest route from A to B, powered by the movement and participation of people. It is essentially a crowd-sourced navigation app powered by a social network.

For those looking through the lens of a consumer packaged-goods product, this may seem irrelevant, but study the power behind Waze and think about why Google paid an estimated \$1.3 billion to acquire it. It's a great example of following the trail of breadcrumbs. It's about building key performance indicators quickly across each layer of the development process and marketing lifecycle.

*Let's take a look at what social knowledge can design.*

**1. The product.** When using social knowledge to develop new products or innovation, it's important to have an intimate understanding of the market and the consumer. Tapping into the voice of the consumer drives the ability to develop a product. If you listen to your consumers, they are crying out for help. Learn about how consumers feel about your brand and map the conversation over social networks to steer your product development. If your brand has a product in market, unearth what people like and dislike about it, how they are using it, any unusual behaviors, uses or interactions with it. These are the initial breadcrumbs.

By listening to the conversation for simple terms like 'love,' 'hate' and 'passion,' you can start to hear the signal through the noise. Use this information to build discrete metrics and key performance indicators that support that product-development bucket. For example, what are the consumer challenges to solve, and what's the scale of the business opportunity? How do you tie the product into the sales and marketing funnel, including ongoing customer relationship management? Waze discovered the real utility and value for consumers lived within traffic, and built that engagement through a social layer.

**2. The people.** The sought-after micro audience can be found by learning about the mass audience. As marketers, we sometimes spend too much time trying to pinpoint the 'right' audiences. However, if we look within, we can reduce the waste and increase the efficiency of our marketing. We can find out who is sharing, how often, what they are talking about, and learn about brand connotations.

These breadcrumbs can create two discrete opportunities for brands. One is looking at who our 'likes' are and building models to attract other relevant audiences. Second is finding advocates and endorsers of our brands who will drive the message in an efficient and effective way.

**3. The conversation.** As content is unearthed, there's another layer of how it's being shared and amplified in-market. What is it that we are providing our consumers with and, more important, what is the brand's role? Are we curators of content, providers of utility, or scoring agents in a game? Think of Waze as one part valuable content, one part game, and one part logistics. Is it a social movement to help children have a healthier lifestyle? No, but it does have pure brand salience—something we often forget about when entering into the market.

Think about your brand and its role in the conversation ecosystem. Align its goals and objectives with the conversation. Then ask yourself, once those goals have been met, how to pull them through the sales channel. If consumers are talking about your brand, does that mean they are buying your brand? I would submit that brands with conversation value gain transaction value. Look at audiences that are talking about you and provide them with something unique to begin to test the water. See if those who are in the conversation are actually buying your goods and services.

**4. The Transaction.** Can you then take the conversation you've learned about and truly bring it to the Holy Grail of conversation to conversion? After gathering the breadcrumbs, this is where targeting and interactions starts. Brands need to leverage the data developed through conversations to begin to



target. Map those consumers so that you may begin to target them across devices, staying contextually at the right moment. Facebook is a walled garden, however, the opportunity exists to bring various social facets together to form deeper and more personalized interactions with the customer.

#### SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

To look at examples of how brands capitalize on social knowledge, go no further than this month's cover—NASA. Start with the prologue. Should NASA even be communicating with people over social networks? Well, NASA wants people to care about NASA or it doesn't receive government funding.

Next, the marketing team needs to determine whether they have the currency to have a meaningful dialogue with consumers and what role they play. Should they enable scientists to talk through a social channel that NASA owns; would that be the correct voice? Should NASA also communicate back to consumers, set up a social domain in which they respond to others? These are questions the team would face and work through to leverage social effectively.

South African Airways is an interesting example of building social knowledge directly into product innovation. It has created 'Social Check-In.' Passengers can now check in with its 'Social Seat Selector,' which uses a person's Facebook details to add personality or profile information. This might include highlighting whether fellow passengers are traveling to attend the same business or entertainment event. A traveler can see who else has offered information and choose a seat near a likeminded person. I can only surmise that social knowledge led to this concept, or perhaps it was inspired by seatmate horror stories.

An *Ad Age* article recently shed light on an example of how negative social conversations can lead to a drop in conversion over the short term. Bud Light learned that its 'Up for Whatever' campaign carried negative connotations for some consumers. A recent addition to the Bud Light label read: "the perfect beer for whatever happened. This caused negative backlash from consumers who linked it to contemporaneous news accounts about rape on college campuses.

Negative tweets piled up by the thousands over a couple of days as the conversation about Bud Light's campaign went viral. One tweet read: "Bud Light: the official beer of rape culture." The social uproar garnered media attention, furthering

negative connotations beyond the social space. It's a good example of the potentially negative effect of a conversational breadcrumb. The Bud Light campaign was pulled.

Lord & Taylor made headlines in *Adweek* for a campaign where it outfitted more than 50 Instagram influencers in the same paisley dress to highlight its new Design Lab collection. However, the campaign caught some heat in terms of whether the Instagram influencers were divulging that it was a promotional post, as required by the FTC.

In terms of execution, the Lord & Taylor campaign remains a great example of knowing how to fit a brand into social. The retailer sold out of the dress. Consumers clearly wanted to see the dress on influencers they trust. In terms of measuring the return-on-investment, Lord & Taylor could follow links back to its website from bloggers who posted about the dress. The retailer could also cull comments consumers posted about the dress to gauge feedback and follow whether the Instagram pictures were being shared. The campaign was ripe for gathering various data to put to use going forward.

The Lord & Taylor example is also important because as brand marketers learn how to capitalize on social in terms of marrying data with social content, there's a whole new layer coming—image capture. The social world is moving toward image-driven search such as Google Shopping, which consists of nothing more than images of products. In addition, mobile apps like Instagram and Snapchat are becoming more popular than Facebook or Twitter, especially with younger consumers.

Just as brands need to find the signals in the noise to capture content, feelings and posts that help them capitalize on social, they will soon need to codify images and what they mean to the brand.

Maybe the next article topic will be: How to capitalize on the duck-face selfie while holding your product. That is social by design. ■



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