

Customer Engagement Marketing In The World of Web 2.0

BY ZAHIR PALANPUR

One of the cornerstones of the customer gap is understanding why our customers buy from us and what their criteria is in evaluating us and the options in front of them. Effective CRM and sales processes will highlight this critical step where you interview your customers to get this perspective and understand their needs and motivations to make their buying decision.

So what if we could take this a step further and have your customer engaged in an ongoing interactive exchange to help you define and develop your products? Now, what if you could take it a step further and engage them in the selection process and have them help you in the marketing of your brand? This approach can dramatically increase the involvement and participation of your customers and sphere of users – they become part of your product development process, decision makers and marketers. This makes them highly vested in your brand.

The ideas behind today's web 2.0 networking technologies are making these ideas increasing feasible. Simply stated, Web 2.0 can be defined as that next wave of tools and platforms on the web that allows for greater collaboration and sharing of information including user generated content. It not so much about new technologies (as some of it has been around for awhile) as it is about new ways of applying it.

You've probably heard about the main platforms like Linked In and Facebook and some of the tools out there like blogs and wikis. So how can you use this in your business context and how can it help you close the customer gap and "engage" the user group that makes your target market?

A recent example that I can share with you is from what we did for a client. Late last year we partnered with them to launch a platform that you can view at - <http://www.txstyle-mannington.com/>. This is an exciting Web 2.0 / social media platform that allows target users for our client (in this case commercial interior designers) to submit design ideas, share these with their network of contacts and vote on the designs. It is taking the collaborative approach to the next with the user being involved in the product design creation process as well as the selection and marketing. By inviting people to come see what they have created and vote, the users are marketing for you and registration has risen rapidly from the first days of its launch. This has been very successful in the market with over 3,000 registered users and about 350 design submissions in the short time since it was launched. Equally compelling is the high level of interactivity including views, votes and comments – a designer called this the American Idol competition for the design community and said she had visited the site over 50 times in the last couple of weeks! You can imagine the level of engagement this

has created and the potential benefits it can bring to our client. They couldn't be happier!

So think about how you can take advantage of this for your business. The above example may not apply to you, for that matter, no one platform or tool maybe directly relevant. Even blogs, one of the most common of these tools may not be right for all firms. By learning more about what's out there and immersing yourself in these new tools, you will surely find the right mix for you. You now have everything from blogs, wikis and networking sites like Linked In to sites with specific applications like Yelp which gets customer feedback and business ratings on local businesses and Ning which allows you to create your own social network in a matter of minutes! This heralds a new level of marketing and sales that can best be defined as "Customer Engagement Marketing". We'll do our part in keeping you informed by periodically profiling some of the tools, technologies and platforms on one of our web 2.0 customer engagement tool – our Azul Arc Newsletter!