



IT'S TIME TO CANCEL THE CONSUMER.

A Roadmap for Brand Marketers to Create More Valuable Relationships

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Like All Relationships, Building Human-Centered Marketing Can Be Messy



2022 Is the Year to Cancel the Consumer

The relationship between businesses and their customers is no longer simply about buying and selling. Whether you're marketing checking accounts or enterprise software, hamburgers or a college education, there is a person on the other end of every purchase, and they make decisions based on a mix of rational thinking and emotion, the conscious and the non-conscious.

In everyday life, you feel connected to certain people. You have shared interests or beliefs, maybe a similar sense of humor, and they have a role in your life.

Same with brands. When we're in sync with a brand, they can play a role in our lives that goes beyond the transaction.

So achieving emotional resonance must be a priority for brands, on par with product development.

Because with deeper, authentic connections come customer loyalty and better financial returns. According to the Marketing Science Institute, a strong brand reputation leads to an average price premium of 26%, even if brand quality is the same. And you create a community of advocates.

As former client and neuroscientist Carl Marci, MD, wrote in a blog for LiveRamp, emotions play an important role in every decision we make as humans.

“We are not rational beings who sometimes have emotion. The truth is, we're emotional beings who are occasionally rational. Emotions play a factor in everything, and it's hard to find any category that's purely rational. Brand choice is not purely based on product attributes.”

- **Carl Marci, MD**, a physician, entrepreneur and leader in the field of neuroscience.

Human to Human

CTP recently polled 1,200 adults to better understand the evolving dynamic between brands and the people they count on for a healthy business.

An overwhelming majority of respondents — 64% — told us they prefer doing business with brands that understand them on a human level and cater to their individual needs, as opposed to the 36% who want brands to just treat them like a consumer and keep it all business. The majority also told us they expect to have a relationship with a brand that goes beyond transactions. So they'll reciprocate. If you and I were talking right now, we'd be sharing a dramatic pause.

Think about it. Most of your customers want a relationship with your brand even when they're not buying something. And 64% said they will pay a premium for a brand whose communications demonstrate that they understand them at a personal level.

In this paper, we look at why human-centered communications are crucial to the health of your business, and how your marketing should be shaped to be personal and relatable. It is those relationships that have the greatest influence on your business health. And we look at the foundational steps you need to take to live like a brand focused on people, not transactions.





Human-Centered Brands Are More Compelling

Step out of your marketing role for a moment and think about your personal life. When you're feeling frustrated or want to celebrate a success, who do you text? The person you give air kisses to every few months when you happen to be at a party? The one who always forgets your name? Or the friend who makes you feel better when you're stressed about a decision? People want to be around others they like and respect. Who make them feel understood. Being a human-centered brand is just like that — behaving like that friend people want to hang out with and depend on.

The friend who respects them and always seems to bring something fulfilling to their life. “Our most basic need is to have a sense of belonging and connection,” Deloitte’s U.S. Consumer Industry leader Anthony Stephan has said.

“When businesses can engage individuals in a way that speaks to their most fundamental values, it ultimately can translate to a level of loyalty that most brands are not seeing today. The connection creates loyalty, which fuels business growth.”



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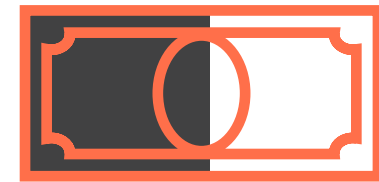
What we found in the CTP survey reminded us that people want every touchpoint in their lives to mean something. As companies, we're meant to make our customers' lives easier, better, more satisfying. And like all positive relationships, that connection with people in your brand's community needs to be a two-way street. If your brand possesses and demonstrates certain traits, people will return the favor.

You meet someone on a flight from L.A. to Boston and start talking. They ask how many kids you have and what you do for work. You do the same. Pretty soon you are developing a sense of familiarity and trust with this person, and you may offer a level of detail that you won't necessarily offer to the person sitting two rows behind you. That's what happens with brands. The level of detail your customer provides you with depends on the comfort level they feel with you.

It's this type of information that will help you begin to build a better understanding of the person you're getting to know.



52% of respondents will share an email address with a brand they like, versus only 34% sharing with brands they don't like



53% will share their income with a brand they like, versus only 26% for those that they don't like

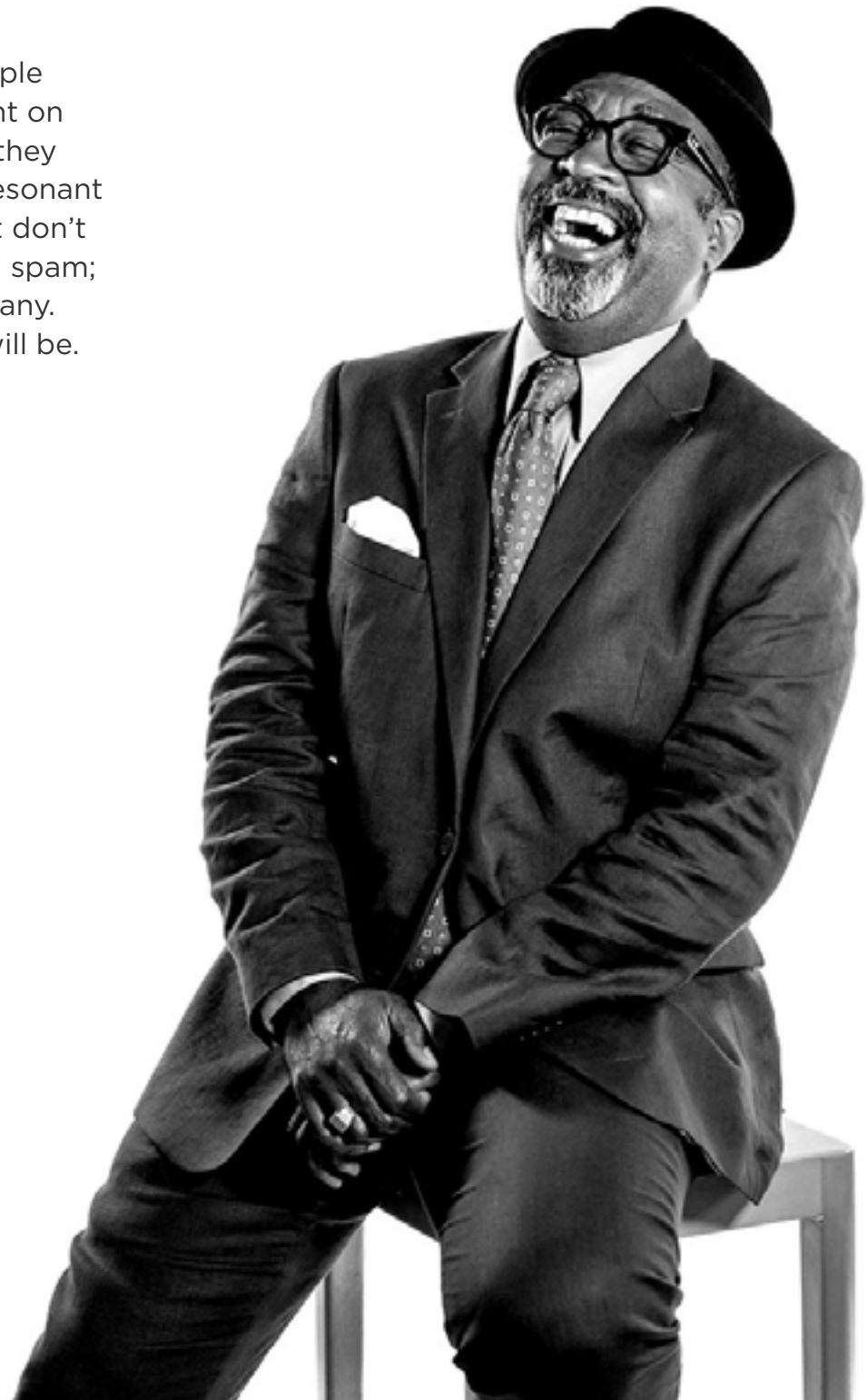
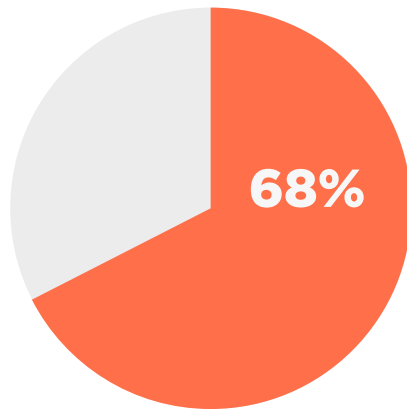


More than **54%** will give you a look inside their interests, like favorite hobbies and music

But to get the goods, you need to meet the test. People want to be in relationships with brands they can count on to treat them honestly, and won't ignore them when they need help. The more they share with you, the more resonant and effective your marketing efforts will become. But don't confuse more with volume. We're not suggesting you spam; we mean sharing more about who you are as a company. The deeper your relationship, the more profitable it will be.

Just be prepared to show your appreciation.

More than 68% of respondents who share information expect you to return the favor by bringing value to them.



Steps

to Creating a More Meaningful (and Profitable) Relationship with Your Audience

So how do you become a human-centered brand? And if you're already one, how do you ensure that you're living it consistently in a way that it draws people to you?

1

Define your brand purpose.

Simple question: Why do you exist?

2

Take inventory of your brand's personality traits.

If your company were a person, what type of personality would you have?

3

Get to really know your friends.

Become insatiably curious about the people who matter to your brand.

4

Invest in the human experience.

What types of stuff will we do if we hang out? How do you make the act of being with your brand more rewarding?

5

Communicate in a way that resonates with people.

Discover real stories that mean something to the lives of your audience, and share those stories in a way that connects with them. Consistently.

But none of those elements matter much if you don't start with a very important step:



CANCEL YOUR CONSUMER!

That's right, break it off with them. Stop thinking about them. Stop marketing to them. Stop selling to them. Whether your brand is B2C or B2B, consumers should be a part of your past. Here's why.

A consumer isn't real. It is a collection of data points and insights amassed to streamline how you efficiently make decisions around reaching buyers to sell your products and services. While data and insights are healthy and important, they alone don't tell us all we need to know. They are a crutch.

A worried daughter looking to get the next flight from Chicago to Tampa to be with her mom before emergency surgery will touch a lot of brands from the moment she gets the call at work to the time she's by her mother's bedside — Discover, Uber, Southwest Airlines, Hertz, Marriott, Tampa General Hospital.

She doesn't want to be a consumer at any point during that nerve-racking journey. She needs a friend who gets what she's going through, and it goes beyond courteous customer service. The brands that help Susan are way more valuable than those who think of her as just another consumer with a digital wallet.

Instead of simply thinking about a demographic, do the things that connect you with the people your business cares about — the individuals who buy your products, sign up for your services, live in your community, work for you, talk about you with their friends, and post cool photos of you on Instagram.

And who may occasionally complain about you to their relatives, or may even post something unflattering about you on Facebook. You know, actual humans.

From there, it's a rewarding journey to communicate with people in a way that touches hearts and minds. Consumers are polite nods and formal handshakes; humans are hugs and shared emotions.



Define your brand purpose.

Take a minute to answer this question: Why does your company exist?

We promise it's not some new-age, metaphysical exercise. But you can't really be human without purpose. Articulating your why — well beyond making money — is a crucial initial step toward delivering human-centered marketing. We promise, your audience cares deeply about the answer.

[Cone Communications/Porter Novelli](#) found results similar to our own CTP survey when they asked adults the primary brand attribute that influences specific types of interactions. They considered purpose, quality and price. While quality and price play an instrumental role in purchase decisions, purpose plays a big role in brand advocacy — probably more than you think.

Have a positive emotional connection to brand



Defend brand if people spoke badly about it



Would share information about the brand



CASE STUDY **Join Us For Good**

Take our longtime client Eastern Bank. They spent decades building their local presence. They had excellent customer service and were embedded in the community. They have long been strong financially with a great balance sheet.

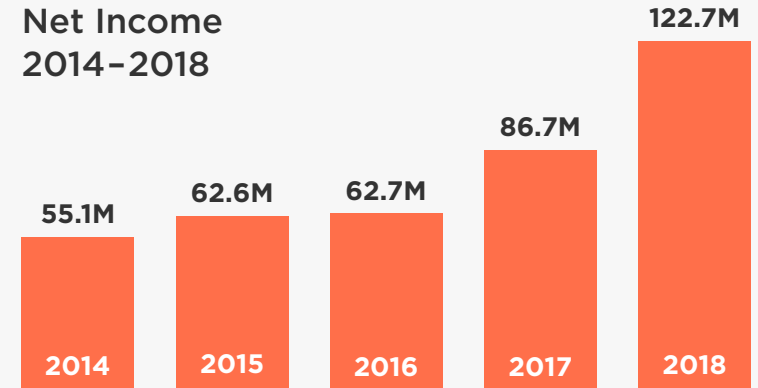
But as the competitive environment changed, they needed to find ways to stay connected to the community. Large, national banks were making their way into their neighborhoods, and they were integrating themselves in the same community activities that Eastern Bank had done earnestly for years.

Luckily, Eastern Bank had a secret weapon: [their purpose.](#)

The bank had long been supporting social justice causes. But they had done so humbly and quietly. It turns out, their customers wanted to know how they lived their values. Eastern Bank practiced courageous advocacy. They knew not every potential customer would share their values, but they also knew attracting those who shared their purpose would mean more of the customers aligned with who they were — people doing good in their everyday lives.

Not only did the “Join Us For Good” campaign feel right because it was more than a marketing slogan, it also drove real business results.

Within the first two years of the campaign, net income increased by 40%.



Source: Eastern Bank





But to have a real purpose infused across the many strands of your DNA, you need to be invested all the way to the top.

Eastern Bank has that. Bob Rivers, the bank's chair and CEO, has driven the bold, human approach.

“I’m concerned that if we don’t have any pushback, we’re not pushing hard enough. We’re not seeking to upset anyone, but we do want to make people uncomfortable if we believe they need to think more deeply about an issue.”

- Bob Rivers, chairman and CEO
Eastern Bank

“Certainly, we’ve had a number of occasions where customers have written to me to say they’re closing out their accounts because they disagree with one of our viewpoints. I always say to them, ‘I appreciate your business and I’m sorry that we can’t agree,’ and let them go. But it’s also true that when I go out to speak at events, time after time people come up to me and say, ‘I appreciate what you said, I didn’t know that about Eastern, and I’m going to move my accounts to your bank.’ And they do.”

It’s not enough to have a purpose. Marketing leaders need to articulate their brand’s purpose in a way others can connect with. At CTP, we call it a Minifesto.

Your Minifesto is a narrative that summarizes the story of your brand, or a moment of meaning to your brand. It is told in a way that is emotional and compelling to those who hear the story.

It’s got a very distinctive voice depending on what the brand is and the problems that you’re looking to solve.

It not only establishes your story but demonstrates the way you want to tell the story. Should you be funny? Irreverent? Is it emotional and serious? Is it sentimental? Is it super smart, but approachable? Which path you take here will lead the way to telling your story across many mediums and formats.



Take inventory of your brand's traits.

If your organization were human, what type of person would it be?

It feels a bit odd to ask ourselves this question, but it is in fact the heart of how people think about brands. Is your brand the strong, silent type that may not give you the warm embrace but is humble and honest? Maybe you're the passionate one who naturally takes to being the center of attention? Or the brave, curious friend willing to be part of a spontaneous adventure?

Whatever the traits you lean into, make sure you're trusted and reliable. According to our survey, 77% of the adults we polled told us trustworthiness and reliability are the most important qualities for building brand relationships, ahead of providing excellent customer service (70%) and superior product quality and innovation (69%).

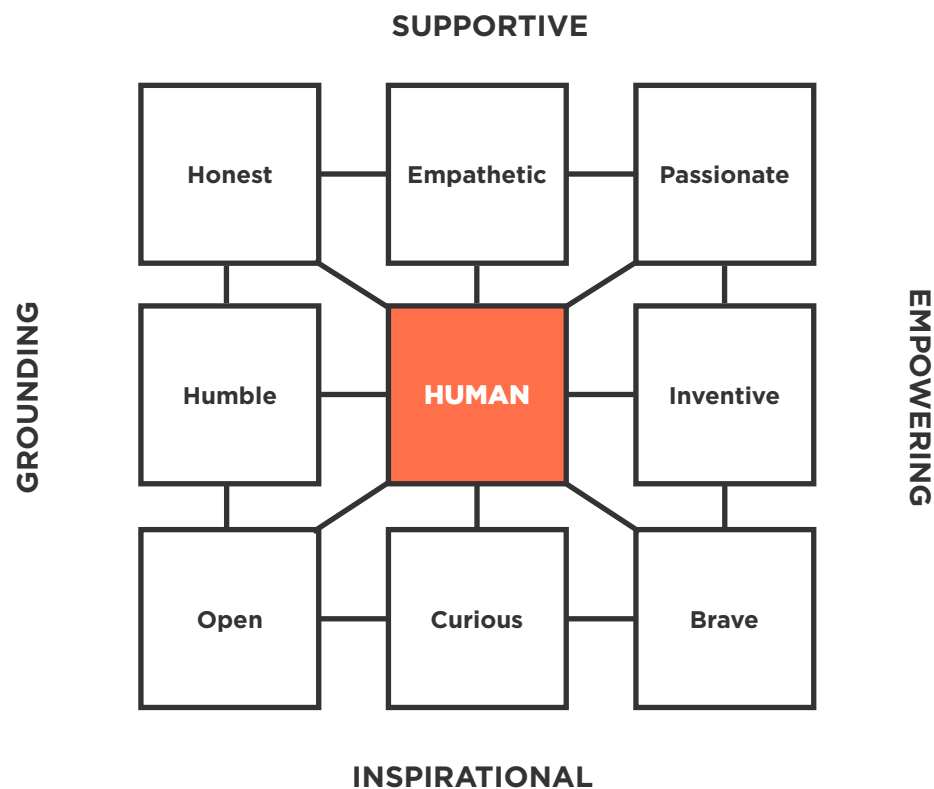
Figuring out who you are will serve as a grounding and a filter through which you make your communications decisions.



Here's a tool to help you think about your brand's **essential human qualities**.

Our rubric below identifies the four key traits human-centered brands share. They are **GROUNDING**, **SUPPORTIVE**, **EMPOWERING** and **INSPIRATIONAL**. Each human-centered brand will lean into these attributes in different ways, depending on the audience served and the culture of the organization.

To understand your brand's human core, look inward. Here's how:





Conduct a simple audit on the ways your organization currently showcases the key traits outlined in the rubric.

Begin by listing all the ways you currently demonstrate each of these attributes. If you find gaps, don't panic; it's perfectly normal. The key is to understand where you do shine, and use that as a jumping-off point for honing your unique human value.

When conducting the audit, take time to think through all the ways you interact with customers digitally and in person. It's helpful to look at processes around those touchpoints but also to seek out your internal stories.

Look through the thank you notes you have received and the social posts your community shares about you. Talk to your sales associates, customer service reps and service technicians in the field. Talk to all who really know what your audience is feeling.

These verbatims and experiences your customers share with you validate who you really are as a brand, and they lend themselves to the type of rich, honest and compelling storytelling that is so crucial to connecting with your audience.

Get to know your friends: Being human-centered means understanding the layers.

You know those people who seem to transform before your eyes, depending on the audience? Not the kind who can carry on conversations on a variety of topics and sincerely treat everyone like a friend. Those people are cool. We're talking about the ones whose values and interests and loyalties shift to meet the moment. Those who are all things to all people. You know, phonies.

It's neither a good human trait nor a good approach to brand-building.

Trying to appeal to everyone will inevitably lead you to mediocrity. A place that serves but doesn't inspire. Occasionally, when we ask marketers who their audience is, they'll tell us: everyone. Uh, not really.





Your brand's audience should never be everyone. Look, not everyone likes you as a person. Sorry, but it's true. It may be because of your fashion style, sense of humor, your political views, your sports allegiances, your laugh or just because they don't like anyone. That's okay. In much that same way, not everyone will love your brand. No worries. So instead let's focus on who you care about and go from there.

In life, we call it our friend group. In marketing, we call it customer segmentation and audience personas. However we define it, resist the temptation to create caricatures of your audience. Age, income, geographic location and other demographic markers give you signals about how to target your audience. We're not suggesting you eliminate them completely, but they alone don't help you connect in a human way.

Rather than base-level demographic specs, your brand needs well-documented personas that help you unearth how your audience thinks. They answer essential questions, like: How do they make decisions? What makes them smile? When do they feel most loved? Where do fears creep into their daily lives? Learn about their lives, not just their favorite product in your line. And never stop listening to them.

It's these insights that feed everything from smart product development to emotional, compelling and relevant creative communications.

Not all experiences are created equal.

CX is nothing without HX.

Survey after survey is telling us that customer experience (CX) is paramount to having strong ties to your audience. One [recent study showed that 92% of people say CX](#) is an important factor in their purchasing decisions.

But those statistics aren't telling the full story. You can't have great CX without incredible human experiences (HX).

Peter Hartzbech, founder and CEO of our client iMotions, is a passionate advocate for HX.

“If the pandemic has shown us anything, it's that we crave human-based experiences above all else.”

Peter wrote in an iMotions blog, “As marketers, it will be more important than ever to understand those experiences and find ways in which your product, service or website fit into them. Brands that don't and continue to treat customers as transactional targets will run the risk of becoming irrelevant, if not disruptive. In other words, CX identifies you and interrupts with reasons to believe and buy, while HX truly understands you and focuses on enhancing and aiding your journey.”

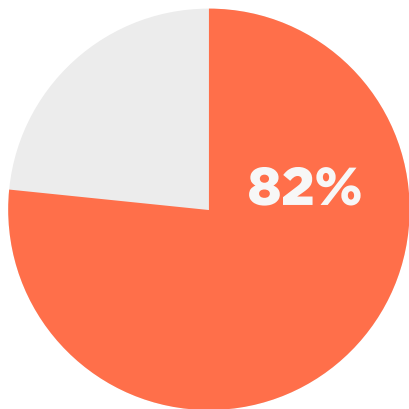


To do that, go beyond functional ease delivered with mobile-friendly programming, straightforward design and sleek workflows. Instead, deliver human experiences that people crave.

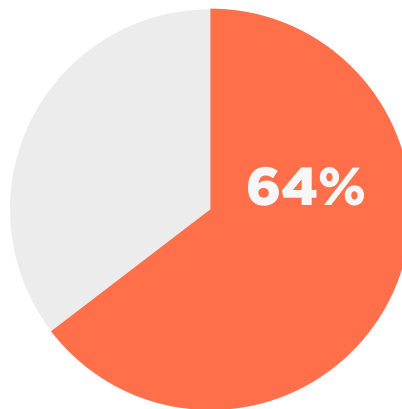
Too often, we think of customer experience as a digital interaction. But, really, customers consider all their engagements with a brand in total. From browsing the website to tracking an order, all the way to the packaging when something is delivered to their home.

From walking in the front door of your establishment to the way you talk to them in that moment and in your follow-up thanking them for swinging by. Be real and welcoming and make their life just a bit better in those moments.

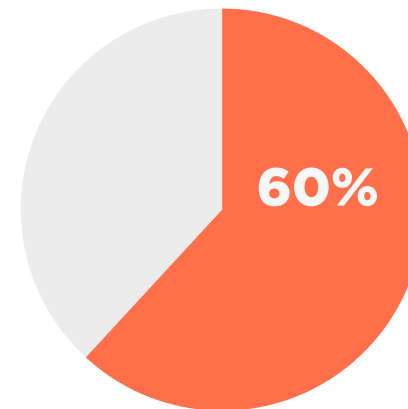
The significance is well illustrated in the [PWC study](#), “Experience Is Everything,” where they point out:



Human interaction matters now, with **82%** of people in the U.S. seeking more of it in the future.



Today, **64%** feel companies have lost touch with the human element of customer experience.



60% said they'd stop doing business with a brand if the service they received was not friendly.

Tell stories that resonate with humans and **reflect your purpose.**

Peak Design operates in a fairly niche world. They make camera bags, born from a frustrating experience its founder, Peter Dering, had traveling Europe with his camera. Because the company operates in a very defined space and because they are crowdfunded from like-minded photography buffs, the brand is infused with how their customers think. In fact, their mission includes a point to “treat our customers as our peers.”

The art of telling stories that resonate with your audience and reflect your purpose starts with really understanding your audience.





Peak tells their stories in ways that resonate with their audience, in part because they let their audience tell the story with them. In blogs, film series, social content.

Bring your audience into the conversation. Give them a voice. Their words carry credibility and can feel more natural. And by listening to them you are now in the type of relationship where they are valued. And they value. Which is what we're trying to accomplish.

When it comes to telling those stories in ways that grab the audience, big, beautiful images and compelling videos are natural ways for Peak, a company that caters to photographers, to do it. It's who they are. But that approach can be just as appealing and natural for a bank or a tech company, as long as the stories you are telling are authentically you.

The rules are simple. Use your natural voice, let your audience in on the conversation, be compelling and make sure you are relevant.

In the end, people have loads of choices about the content they consume. Don't waste their time. And don't waste your shot to really connect with the very people who are the lifeblood of your brand's success.

Like all relationships, building human-centered marketing can be messy

Human-centered marketing is incredibly powerful and rewarding. The steps outlined in this paper are important and will help guide you in the right direction. But it's not a paint-by-numbers process. It requires digging deeply into who you are as a brand and being willing to put yourself out there in how you operate your organization and how you market, and in the experiences you're creating for your audiences.

Developing a human-centered marketing approach that is authentic can be hard. It can feel scary, often awkward and maybe a bit frustrating. But just like relationships, it is always worth it.





**To learn more about this research or
CTP's approach to human-centered marketing,
reach out to Steve Angel.**

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