

5 Best Ways to Engage With Consumers and the Community To Grow Your Business and Brand

Running a business takes work, but in today's world, it takes more work than ever. Why? There's been a fundamental shift in how people interact and connect, where they gain their information, and what messages interest them.

Let's face it. Businesses can follow the standard blueprint and succeed. The steps needed to start and run a business, manage its finances, create a vision, create product, etc. are all pretty universal. However, it is undeniable that two major changes exist today, and both of these impact businesses.

First, the internet has changed everything. Everyone is on the web. It's where they seek information and where they engage and build relationships. Many businesses, who perhaps have always done well, may start to see a decline in their numbers. They haven't changed a thing – so what's the deal? It's often because seasoned business owners rely on old marketing models. They fail to realize that the modern consumer is on the internet. If that's not the case, they may not understand how to leverage this new platform – or they fail to understand how to engage and convert followers to paying customers and clients.



The popular Newport Folk Festival last weekend was chock full of superlative businesses, personalities and organizations engaging consumers and community..

Even more, it's critical to understand what these consumers are engaging with on the internet. They're not liking and sharing infomercials. They don't want to see another ad pop up on their news feed. Consumers today are hooked on social media – which makes it THE marketing platform, however the keyword here is 'social.' They like content that is fun and engaging. They like photos and videos – not ads.

Second, millennials have brought widespread changes in business, consumerism, and lifestyle. There is a difference between what appeals to millennials versus what appealed to the generation before them. Millennials are leisure driven, inclusive, interested in social justice, community, relationships, technology, freedom, lifestyle, and fun...

So if this is true, how can companies work with today's trends? How can companies leverage creative techniques to reach more clients/customers where they are, and convert them to paying customers?

The answer is this – corporations and companies need to engage. Even more, they need to engage on a community level, and in ways that build real relationships. People value companies that they trust. They value companies that are down to earth, and have community platforms. They remember these companies over others, and will ultimately engage with and support these more.

Here's just one example – The health food brand CLIF Bar joined up with the Newport Folk Festival we recently covered. How and why would CLIF Bar market at this? Sure, they can hand out samples of their new product – CLIF Nut Butter Filled energy bars. They can get people to love and hopefully buy them later at the store. However, this wasn't their ultimate goal. Their goal to engage, build lifelong consumers, and build a brand.



*Folk/Pop singer
and songwriter
Brett Dennen
signing his newly
released album at
the Newport FOLK
festival
exemplifies
direct face-to-
face engagement.*

The real payoff was the image and impression they left on everyone that interacted with them. During the entire festival weekend, CLIF creatively engaged with festival attendees (in ways having little to nothing to do with their product). They hosted artist meet-and-greets and record signings to bring people to their tent. After that, CLIF leveraged their festival involvement by giving engaged festival-goers exclusive access to various after parties they hosted. They

talked, took selfies, built relationships, and hooked them up with sold-out tickets. Plus, they still went the extra mile to creatively market their products, staging them in fun ways all over festival grounds. They posted these, plus fan photos, record signing photos, and other 'we're cool' photos on social media. This is creative advertising – indirect advertising – and it works.

The result is this – people might remember the barely bite-sized free samples, but they absolutely remembered all the fun they had hanging out at the CLIF tent and at the company-sponsored after-party. Even more, when CLIF Bar isn't on site, offering tablings and free samples, and hosting fun events, they're hosting health and fitness conferences and expos as another way to engage with consumers.

The point? Do more. Don't just be an infomercial. Be creative. Engage and connect with consumers, and infuse a little fun. This is what builds your brand today and gets you remembered.

Here's 5 steps you can take to start engaging to build business and build your best brand:

1. **Directly interact and engage, face-to-face, with consumers...** and have fun! Get involved in the community. Become a sponsor of a community event or set up a table somewhere. Offer free food. Engage families and children. Do something creative and different... and have fun too!
2. **Incorporate a social justice platform into your business model.** Is there a charity that relates to your business? Perhaps there's an important local cause you'd like to support. Consider hosting an annual charity event or fundraiser to support a cause you value.
3. **Be more social. Don't worry about being 'all business, all the time.'** It's okay to be funny, vulnerable, and imperfect at times. Think about this when you send emails, post blog content, or create social media posts.

Also, engage consumers in social media posts. Ask them a question. Ask for their feedback. Get them talking to you and remembering you. (Did you know this will also make you appear in their news feed more often?)



CLIF bar understands the pivotal role these 5 elements are to getting their healthy, delicious product out to the masses.

4. Use social media to show off your 'feel-good' efforts.

If you sponsor an event, or host one of your own, don't fail to take photos or promote your good work. If you make a donation somewhere, take a photo and share the news. Good works alone are great, but if you want to really build your brand, you have to show people what you're doing. Think photos, videos, quotes from people you interact with, shout-outs to partners, and more.

5. Engage and form real relationships with people. Don't send blanket emails or messages. Don't bombard people with ads about your business. Start conversations. Learn about their family, work, leisure, and interests. This will help you develop lasting relationships. Engaging with consumers is about knowing them – not throwing ad copy at them.

So which of these can you start incorporate into your efforts? Or, what obstacles do you face? Is it time? A lack of staff? ... Perhaps you just don't know where to start!

We have two options for you:

Talk to Ashley Bendiksen. When Ashley isn't working for New Bedford Guide, she is helping small businesses, people, and ideas succeed. Her expertise is in public relations, marketing, and development. All consultations are free. Contact her for a brainstorming session. You can then work on your own to put things into action, or continue with her for training, coaching, consulting, and more. Contact Ashley at ashleybendiksen.com.

Let New Bedford Guide help. Accomplish big results with little to no effort by sponsoring our "feel-good" live stream videos. For a low price, businesses can sponsor our live stream videos. We cover everything from local events, to live music, parades, animal shelters, school athletics and more. You can even tell us what you want covered. All 78,000+ NBG followers will be notified, and we'll highlight you in the post and link your business information. Brand yourself on our feel-good stories. Make your business a household name. Email ashley@newbedfordguide.com.

Give us your ideas! What works for you? Do you have a social justice mission, a community platform? What is it?