



How Companies Engage External Audiences

CATHERINE POWELL

USA | Mexico | UK | France | Turkey | India | China

www.cgnglobal.com

cgⁿ
Good thinking. Globally.

How does a company engage its audience? This question has been asked by every CEO of every company ever existing. For a business to be successful at the very core it has to actively engage its target market. If a university doesn't market its unique education programs to the right students, the institution will not attract new students. If a daycare does not advertise its childcare abilities to the right demographic, they will not get new children enrolled. If a hospital does not create awareness to the public on their services, they would lose potential patients. If a bank does not explain its financial advantages they will not gain new investments and deposits. If a consulting firm does not share its problem-solving skills to the company with those challenges, then they will not gain new engagements.

At a high-level, it's easy to see that whatever product or service a company is selling needs to be shared with the "right" audience. For a company to engage the audience, it must find its' audience first. A company can have to best product or service in the world but if it's not sold to a person that has a need or want for it, the company's engagement efforts will not be heard. The expression of "talking to a brick wall" definitely applies here. Let's take a daycare service provider as an easy example. Say a daycare provider is advertising their childcare services to a demographic that is not currently parents, clearly they will not reach or engage their audience. You might be thinking that's a pretty obvious example, but even that simple of a mistake happens all the time.

The most successful companies have done a considerable amount of research to identify their "right" audience.

A company might have a longstanding product with a consistent market base, but its revenues have plateaued. Research and development was done to identify a new audience base that would be interested in their product and how to reach them. That is exactly what was done when [Walt Disney pushed it's core animation into other areas](#) such as theme parks, cruise lines, resorts, and live entertainment. This gave Walt Disney new revenue streams and a way to ensure a connection between the audience and its animation.

Another business developed a new product with their innovation skills but suffered losses on their investments. After low sales, customer research showed that their customers did not associate the new products with their brand. [Lego established unique branding avenues around their new products](#). Lego developed the movies "The Lego Movie" and "Lego Star Wars" to showcase their products. This had a twofold effect on building their brand and connecting with their audience. The movies made customers aware of their innovations and put their products back on the map.

Another example is the author of one of my favorite books. She struggled to get her book published and got rejected by numerous publishing houses. It was rejected on the basis that it was a children's book with over 120,000-word count. [JK Rowling did finally publish Harry Potter](#) and became one of the most successful

women with over 120 million copies sold. The wonderful wizarding world of Harry Potter might not have been such a success if it wasn't for Chris Little, Rowling's agent, who took the time to identify the best publishing options and helped others understand this wasn't your typical children's book.

Once a company has found its target audience, it has to understand what the target markets' likes and dislikes are and how they live and learn. Each of the examples I shared above, Walt Disney, Lego, and JK Rowling had to conduct some degree of research on their audience. If a business doesn't understand how their target audience thinks, talks, or understands, then it's a shot in the dark if the audience will get the message. Below are examples of big business that did due diligence to understand its audience and the outcomes by applying their knowledge.

Of course, it's no surprise that Amazon makes the list. Besides constantly gathering input and feedback from customers, the tech giant also invests the time in conducting focus groups and trying out their innovations on select markets. One of the more recent additions is [Amazon's free platform for publishing books](#). Amazon listened to their original customer base of avid readers and understood their need to share their content. Imagine what JK Rowling's life would have been like if this was around during her struggles.

Other organizations are calculating what improves customer satisfaction. Hospitals and outpatient offices measured how long people are on the phone and learned that patients cannot wait the typical call-time to reach a doctor or nurse. OSF Healthcare understood their audiences need to reach doctor and created [OSFMyChart, an interactive platform for patients to connect with their doctors](#). Patients can now reach their doctor, refill a prescription, or pay their bill all online instead of waiting on the phone.

Even your everyday grocery stores are listening to their audiences and solving consumer challenges. Shoppers have an ever-shortened amount of time to spend grocery shopping, add that to the typical number of checkouts available at one time, it's not a shock that consumers are becoming increasingly unhappy with how long it takes to buy food. Stores like Hy-Vee and Meijer did the research to understand what a shopper wants in their grocery experience and created grocery delivery. [Meijer shoppers can order online from their local store](#), the profile saves preferred choices, and delivers items within an hour of ordering for a reasonable subscription. I can't even get in and out of the grocery store under 2 hours, Hy-Vee and Meijer understood this need and created a new avenue to reach their audience.

Now that we have identified our audience, done the research to understand them, we can connect with them. There is a ridiculous amount of ways to reach out to a customer, considering most people are interacting with some sort of smart device; phone, tv, computer, car. That's not to say printed adds aren't important in our digital age, if your audience is a demographic that preferably reads the local newspaper for

information then engage your audience through that medium. The point is, to be sure to engage your audience on their level. Here are some unique ways a business has engaged their audiences.

This provider of products wanted to know exactly what their customers want and where they wanted it. They engage the consumer as they are in their facilities getting answers to; if they like a product, what products they would like to see, where products should be placed. [Trader joes implemented this hands-on approach](#) to get audience feedback guaranteed to be from their direct audience. Trader joes used this type of engagement to customize their inventory and re-design their store floors. This increased their sales, customer satisfaction, and even higher levels of interaction.

Another business started with the sole premise of changing the way consumers interact with choosing and purchasing clothing products. [Stitch Fix starts with a tailored personal connection](#) to the consumer by filling out a style profile, understanding their price preferences, size, and taste. The consumer then requests a Stitch Fix delivery of clothing handpicked by a fashion guru. There are free delivery and returns, the more the customer interacts the more a delivery improves. This unique engagement took the guesswork out of choosing clothing for people who can't or don't want to.

Another company wanted to engage their customers on a level that would provide the opportunity to for each audience to express themselves and receive a product completely tailored to their wants. [Build-a-Bear created a personalized customer experience](#) in which their audience receives a stuffed animal built by each preferred furry friend, clothes and shoes, sounds and scents, and accessories. Build-a-Bear established a storefront so that every customer whatever their age, likes, and comforts can each build a unique product. In this way, they truly are engaging every audience member that purchases their product.

And of course, there are the more common ways, but no less effective if that's how your audience listens such as; Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, word-of-mouth, networking and conference events, internal and external websites, newsletters, handouts, billboards, print ads, business cards, blogs, messaging and video platforms...the list goes on.

We could tell you 101 ways to increase your audience engagement or 20 failsafe ways to reach your audience, but let's keep it simple and short. To summarize below are the 3 R's, the three major steps on how a company can engage their audience:

1. Right audience – identify the audience which has a want or need for the product/service
2. Research – research to understand how your target market lives, learns and likes
3. Reach out on their level – engage the audience in the way they would understand

It is always a journey for a company to discover its right audience, conduct research, and reach out to the audience successfully. The consulting firm [CGN Global](#), I am proud to be a part of has a great story to engaging its audience. The marketing and sales team discovered that [80% of CGN's business is repeat clients](#), reasoning that the best way to engage the audience is through current clients. Following this, project teams make an effort to connect with the audience at their current engagements. This can be done by helping a client become aware of another challenge and how to solve it, or going that extra mile to deliver CGN's brand promise. There are other efforts to reach an audience outside of CGN's current client base, with the goal of diversification. That story is still on its journey, current research has led [CGN to attending networking and conference](#) events that give CGN the opportunity to build new relationships and start building that audience trust. In the consulting world, and I believe most other businesses, it's the little things that people remember and can set a business apart from all the other companies trying to engage with the same audience.

Next time you recognize a brand, take a second to stop and think why...the journey that company and its CEO has been on to reach their audience made you recognize it.

Resources:

1. <https://www.businessinsider.com/discourse-on-diversification-2011-3>
2. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/27/lego-marketing-strategy-made-it-world-favorite-toy-brand.html>
3. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/harry-potter-synopsis-jk-rowling_us_59f1e294e4b043885915a95c
4. <https://blog.aboutamazon.com/job-creation-and-investment/8-amazon-facts-you-didnt-know>
5. <https://www.osfmychart.org/osfmychart/>
6. [https://www.shopmeijer.com/?cmpid=Nonbrand - MHD - 2018 \(BMM\):Delivery:%2Bgrocery%20%2Bdelivery:GOOGLE](https://www.shopmeijer.com/?cmpid=Nonbrand - MHD - 2018 (BMM):Delivery:%2Bgrocery%20%2Bdelivery:GOOGLE)
7. <https://blog.qualaroo.com/2017/03/21/the-best-ways-big-companies-use-customer-feedback/>
8. <https://www.stitchfix.com/>
9. <https://www.buildabear.com/brand-about-story-mission.html>
10. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/05/01/four-corporate-communications-best-practices-to-learn-from-ge/#3829e5423b87>
11. <http://whybenchmarking.com/enhancing-external-communication-building-an-organizations-reputation/>
12. <https://clutch.co/web-designers/resources/25-ways-increase-audience-engagement>
13. <https://www.jeffbullas.com/55-ways-to-increase-engagement-with-your-target-audience/>
14. <http://www.cgnglobal.com/>
15. <https://app.hubspot.com/documents/4329837/view/27903778?accessId=e9f0ad>
16. <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6463066816209047552/V>