

COLUMNS

What social currency can do for and to the marketer's brand

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By [Linda Goldstein](#)

The newest currency behind marketing is not money. It is consumers' social reach.

Marketers are experimenting with ways to use social currency to build brands enticing consumers to open their social networks instead of their wallets.

Ante social

Designer Marc Jacobs made headlines last year at New York Fashion Week with a pop-up shop where customers could only pay for a product by hashtag no cash allowed. Shoppers bought fragrances and accessories by posting on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook with the hashtag, #MJDaisyChain.

Reebok gave away pairs of new ZJet shoes to New Yorkers who tweeted their shoe size and address. A runner in ZJets, of course delivered a free pair of shoes on the spot.

Birdseye hosted The Picture House, a London restaurant serving frozen foods. Diners could only pay for their meal by posting a photo of it on Instagram with the hashtag, #BirdsEyeInspirations.

The Kellogg Tweet Shop in London gave away bags of new Special K chips in exchange for a tweet, which is a savvy twist on sampling.

Frito-Lay amped up its "Do Us a Flavor" campaign in the United Kingdom with vending machines at bus shelters: Tweet the brand, get a free package of Walkers chips, one of six Do Us a Flavor finalists.

Mercedes launched its CLA sedan with a contest that put five top Instagram photographers behind the wheel for a three-day road trip, sharing six photos a day with the hashtag, *CLATaketheWheel. The Instagrammer with the most likes won the car.

Fashion and style site Refinery 29 has been hosting "InstaMeets," exclusive parties for influential Instagrammers whose posts, tagged #r29instameet," help boost the brand's following.

Each consumer who touches, tweets, shares, and endorses your brand lends his or her credibility to it. Brand equity comes from consumer equity. Consumers are the brand activation.

A small group cannot do it, of course.

A handful of tweets and Instagram photos will not carry a brand. The trick is to amplify thousands and millions of personal interactions, to tie all the threads together and drive personal interaction at mass scale.

How can we harness the magnificent power of human interaction?

How can we harness the magnificent chaos of human interaction?

Look at the dynamics of Big Data: Just as data sources that are connected together now learn from each other to fuel continuous mutual progress, "Big Marketing" will connect many small pieces of consumer interaction that feed off each other to fuel organic, sustained marketing.

As brands rely more on consumers setting their voices in motion and letting the conversation unfold organically marketing will take on a life of its own.

Three top

As we look at the year ahead, this new consumer dynamic has three implications for marketers.

Multichannel campaign management becomes crucial over the next few years. It is already a big concern, especially for agencies: more than one-third see multichannel campaign management as their top digital priority, according to Adobe and e-Consultancy's "2014 Digital Trends" report.

More than one-quarter of brand-side respondents ranked it as a top priority, too.

Experimentation gets easier. Brands can test social-based brand activations with a small, targeted group of consumers easily and cheaply, and get results quickly.

A marketing strategy based on real-time interactions can be evaluated constantly and tweaked on the fly.

Building scale gets harder. Consumer-generated marketing is complicated to scale up, with so many individuals, so many directions, so many personalities and moods and voices adding to the marketing mix.

Organic marketing is hard to control, and mistakes can snowball publicly, and in real time.

THIS NEW CONSUMER dynamic will complicate the legal landscape.

The process of engaging millions of consumers directly is fraught with risk. Marketers need help to foresee potential problems, plan for contingencies and respond to issues in real time, directly with individual consumers.

After all, consumers hold the currency.

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