

COLUMNS

## Why “interactive” is not synonymous with “online”

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*Gavin Finn is president/CEO of Kaon Interactive*

By **Gavin Finn**

A product manager was presenting his product's features to a group of prospective clients at a live event when his presentation suddenly froze on the large screen behind him. He apologized, saying, "I'm so sorry, this interactive presentation seems to have lost Wi-Fi connectivity. Please bear with me."

Slowly, his audience drifted away, while he attempted to restart the presentation, or re-connect to the Web.

Sadly, by the time he had his Web demo back online, the prospects had dispersed.

While it is a shame that his presentation had technical difficulties, his reference to the type of demo as "interactive" was interesting. All he was doing was going through a series of HTML pages, with some images and a text-based explanation of the product. What is interactive about that?

Three dimensions

This product manager's use of the term "interactive" in reference to online applications or content is all too common. But it is actually a significant problem for business-to-business marketers.

Just because something is online does not mean that it is interactive. Similarly, an interactive experience does not have to be online.

Simply broadcasting or presenting product features or marketing messages to an audience is highly inefficient, and actually results in misalignments in expectations and perceptions.

Watching a video is not interactive, even when the video is online. It is a fundamentally passive process.

An application that delivers relevant information preferably visually, as well as using text based on an individual's specific input and responses during the "conversation" is an example of interactivity.

When B2B marketers think of engaging with their audience segments, they should be thinking about a wide variety of interactive experiences, both online and offline. Why?

Because interactivity is the best way to ensure that prospects and customers remember important information. When people engage interactively, their knowledge retention increases by a factor of three.

True interactivity is the process of engaging in a dialogue involving three primary dimensions:

Sensory experience: using any combination of touch, visual, audio, smell and taste

Emotional experience: developing an emotional response or connection to the experience

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Intellectual experience: the exchange of information that is relevant and useful

When an experience involves these three aspects of connection and communication, true interactivity has taken place.

Lines up

Interactivity is non-linear, meaning that specific responses are provided based on individual actions, resulting in a meaningful exchange of ideas and information.

The user does not have to follow a prescribed sequence of events. Rather, she creates her own personalized path by exploring areas of interest to her, at whatever degree of detail is relevant.

"*Customer Experience Management*," a study published by the Aberdeen Group, fully investigated the benefits of better engagement with clients and prospects, and the resulting effect on customer acquisition, satisfaction and retention.

Prospects who were involved in interactive marketing were not only able to provide valuable insight into their needs and purchasing behavior, but they also were likely to be converted into customers.

This occurs because sellers can demonstrate products and provide information or offers that are more relevant to prospects' individual needs.

Even existing customers were more likely to be satisfied and loyal when they were involved in customer-centric experiences, with 28 percent of respondents citing improved cross-sell and up-sell activities as the most crucial benefit of customer engagement activities.

Aberdeen also reported that 56 percent of companies surveyed use at least five different channels to engage with clients. While this increases the ways that companies reach prospects, it also increases the number of customer touch points, making it more difficult to maintain high quality marketing interactions each and every time.

Ensuring consistency of a customer's experiences through multiple channels has a direct influence on creating successful business relationships.

FOR B2B MARKETERS and salespeople, the goal should be to turn every encounter with a prospect or client into an opportunity for an interactive experience.

Rather than use the iPad as a sales presentation device, for example, deliver the application to the prospect directly.

When users are engaged as they explore the iPad app that teaches them about how a new product can be used to solve an important problem, then there is an interactive path of dialogue and knowledge transfer: sensory, emotional and intellectual experiences driving results.

*Gavin Finn is president/CEO of [Kaon Interactive](http://Kaon Interactive), Maynard, MA. Reach him at [gfinn@kaon.com](mailto:gfinn@kaon.com).*