

Rise of the Engagement Agency

Recently, there have been reported sightings of a new species of agency walking nearly upright on the advertising landscape. These new entities follow a different creed, and have mastered new tools and techniques, like [social media management](#), inbound marketing, [content marketing](#), mobile and [location-based media](#), digital [influencer marketing](#), and [customer journey modeling](#).

Unlike typical advertising agencies (which primarily help brands deliver mass messages to mass audiences through mass media), these new firms don't share the belief that a business's core consumer will A) Receive the message, or B) Feel compelled to act on it. That's because there is simply too much noise, and consumers have lost their appetite for sporadic, one-way, "interruptive" ads that suit the advertiser's timing more than the theirs.

Only the biggest brands with the deepest pockets and the least interest in quantifiable ROI should ever attempt to bully their way to top-of-mind awareness by shouting louder than smaller competitors. Who knows how this group justifies paying top dollar to creatively wrap mass messages into compelling soundbites designed to stand out from the dozens (or hundreds) of similar messages their target audience is bombarded with? But as PR 20/20's Paul Roetzer writes in [The Marketing Agency Blueprint](#), "The old guard, rooted in tradition and resistant to change, will fall and new leaders will emerge."

From Advertising to Affinity; Impressions to Engagement

Forrester Research defines engagement as: "The level of involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence an individual has with a brand over time." Forrester's model sees the consumer progressing sequentially through these four stages, increasing their level of engagement at each step. The four I's of Forrester's engagement levels align nicely to the customer buying process.

To us, engagement is really about brands having meaningful interactions or connections with individual consumers –

– a relationship even – to stimulate an affinity and allegiance to that brand over alternatives. Effective engagement enrolls consumers in a noble brand ideal and in an ongoing dialogue on their terms, rooted in relevance and value exchange, so a brand doesn't have to fight and spend for top-of-mind awareness and recall – it's embedded into the lives of individuals who share an affinity and allegiance for the brand. Engagement denotes dialogue. It's about conversations not campaigns. Brand [expressions instead of impressions](#).

So, what the heck is an engagement agency?

An Engagement agency seeks to connect media touch points to consumer decision points along a customer journey that, over a period of time, motivates movement [along a path](#) towards a destination of loyalty and brand advocacy. Engagement agencies combine technology, analytics, strategy, creative execution and real people to enable conversations that forge more meaningful relationships between brands and customers over time. Conversations that are highly relevant and compelling because they take place when and how the audience chooses. And relationships that nurture a stronger [brand affinity](#) and motivate word-of-mouth brand advocacy. The result of which is ultimately measurable.

"An Engagement Agency identifies where and why media investments are made, and will identify alternative media, and investment strategies based on holistic multichannel empirical measurement disciplines," explained [Alterian's](#) Mike Fisher.

Anatomically, engagement agencies combine the technical expertise to deliver messages through multiple channels and the mandatory creative chops to produce persuasive content. Those skills, combined with, as Fisher puts it, strategic "...data-driven intelligence... enabling positive financial impact through the proper selection of the right message for the right audience at the right time," is what sets engagement agencies apart.

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That's why we created Cult.

Cult is Canada's first Engagement agency. We're completely devoted to turning ordinary customers into brand evangelists. We believe that creating, cultivating and catering to raving fans is the only way for brands to sustainably dominate amidst the chaos of today's consumer marketplace.

We help brands remain relevant in a world where consumers have too many choices, too little time, and believe each other more than them. We create irrational loyalty, so customers transact without need of incentive, forgive you when you screw up and always shop you first.

We do this by merging old world marketing truths with new age gadgets. Colliding left and right brain ideas. Marrying analytics with experience and gut instinct. Helping brands listen for a change. And by creating remarkable interactions that reinforce their ideals at every step. We give customers something meaningful to talk about.

Join us on the journey. This will be exciting!

This article has been summarized from the original version, published at:
<http://www.cult.ca/blog/customer-journey/rise-of-the-engagement-agency>

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For the past 16 years, I've worked with consumer, b-to-b and nonprofit brands to strategize and execute effective marketing communications that get results. Now, I help organizations find, acquire and serve customers in new ways that foster deep brand affinity and loyalty, and in ways that deliver measurable results and return on engagement.

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The path to enlightened marketing starts here.

Cult is a leading engagement agency for consumer-facing brands. We help companies dominate their markets by winning fanatical loyalty and word-of-mouth advocacy for their brands.

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