

Getting **Emotional**

is the most
rational thing
a marketer
can do.

THE PROBLEM WITH MOST PROBLEM SOLVING

Landmark books, like *How Customers Think* by Gerald Zaltman and *The Business of Choice* by Matthew Wilcox, share a notion common amongst today's behavioral psychologists: that the vast majority of consumer purchase decisions are made subconsciously through emotions and then rationalized after the fact. When we are being consumers ourselves, this idea makes perfect sense to us, and we recognize examples of it immediately in many of the daily decisions we all make.

Despite this, for many marketers and agency advisors—even those amongst us who embrace improving audience engagement as the first and most important domino for ultimate success—it’s rarely a starting point in the process of problem solving. It’s much more typical to start by confronting and dissecting the underperforming business metrics of the day (sales, foot traffic, cost per customer acquisition, etc.), identifying a “preferred reality” set of measurable brand goals for the future, and building a plan that maps the route to success in the most effective, efficient manner. A sensible, rational, thorough approach, with midpoint checks to confirm the route is on track to deliver the objectives.

What this approach fails to accomplish, however, is to view the problem—and ultimate success, through the eyes of the audience. To understand their attitudinal expectations of a mutually beneficial relationship. To uncover the subconscious triggers that will prompt them to strengthen their feelings and beliefs, drive their loyalty, inform their advocacy and compel their behavior. It looks at the path to the finish line only from the starting blocks, rather than the other way round, and misses the chance to reverse engineer a path to success that ignores obstacles you can’t help but see at the outset. It appreciates the success of the brand, company or organization before the satisfaction of the audience, and not at all in equal measure.

Because of this, marketers are ignoring the most impressionable and persuasive clues to build a meaningful relationship with their audiences. They’re scratching at the surface of research data, taking answers at face value that support intentional behaviors and rational facts, instead of probing deeper to uncover the subconscious and emotional instincts of the consumer to be predisposed to a particular brand in the first place. They miss opportunities to mine for what people reveal in the meaning of their answers, not simply state.

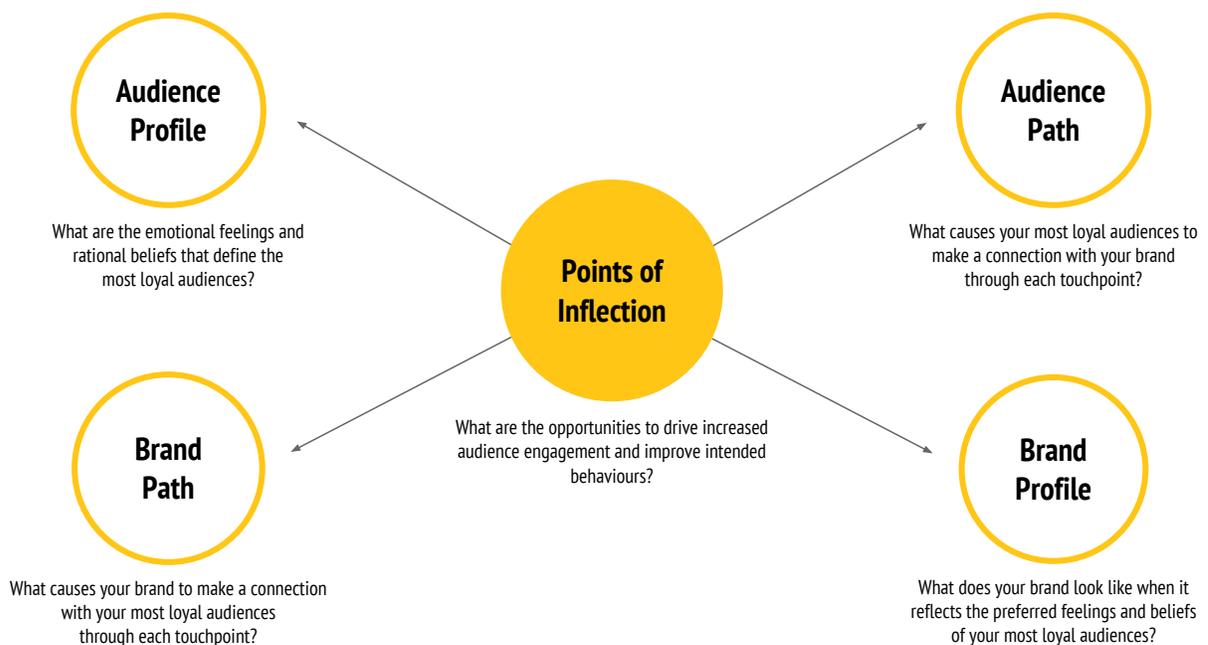
It’s time for a new way of problem solving, if building the cult-like following of an actively engaged audience is the North Star of success for you.

HAVE A FRESH LOOK THROUGH THE LENS OF THE AUDIENCE

Marketers who prize strong advocacy with customers; organizations who crave deeper loyalty with staff; not-for-profits who rely on improving relevance with donors, all need to start the process of problem solving with a different perspective and newer tools. Audience Intersection Mapping, otherwise known as AIM, is a strategic assessment process unique to Cult that accomplishes these goals and so much more.

AIM defines what optimal engagement looks like between a brand, company or organization and the audiences most critical to its long-term success. It also defines a roadmap to achieve it.

Audience Intersection Mapping Model



AIM lays the groundwork for a brand to deliver the optimal, mutually beneficial experience—both for the company and their most important audiences—to foster lasting engagement.

This is accomplished by intentionally juxtaposing the desires a specific audience group has of a brand, with the expectations a brand has of that audience. It studies the same contradictions between the audience path to brand engagement, and the brand's path to audience relevance and meaning. This process uncovers the intersections between these needs and intentions, and through a critical thinking process, surfaces opportunities to improve engagement for each.

AIM is a groundwork for discovery of the optimal, mutually beneficial experience for the brand and their most important audiences, to foster lasting engagement. It enables both parties to get what they want, rationally and emotionally from the relationship, because the process surfaces these intersections and provides the tools to explore points of inflection—a turning point towards a more positive and productive relationship. And in many cases it outlines a specific path towards expanding the expectations of the relationship into something much more meaningful.

As importantly, the research study that precedes and informs the AIM process uncovers information and insights of a more emotive nature, allowing participants to reveal their true feelings and beliefs about a brand, company or organization—something that's impossible for them to explain in response to a direct question in a direct manner.

HOW AIM WORKS

AIM was built from the ground up—not based on an existing methodology, with specific purposes in mind: to structure an exploratory and evaluative process that seeks to uncover the points where audience expectation and brand desire intersect, and to show promise to deepen a relationship that is mutually beneficial and full of respect with each other. It does so by leaning heavily on the attitudinal feelings and beliefs that underpin the most meaningful relationships. And it provides fuel for a deployable engagement plan that empowers thinking in a way that is both actionable and accountable.

There are four key evaluation components in AIM—two from the audience's perspective, two from the brand—that define and inform the process:

Audience Profile

The data we gather from a primary research study is initially subject to a cluster analysis that organizes prospects into two core persona groups based on a driver's analysis of their traits and preferences. The "Predominant" audience group is the cluster of people representing the most loyal of current audience members or, in the case of a start-up, the early adopters and strongest advocates to be expected at launch. The "Opportunity" audience is those who will be the keys to future growth. Our persona process is distinct from others because it intentionally delves much deeper than demographics and behaviors. We surface and codify the attitudinal drivers that define how these audience clusters want to feel, and what they want to believe, in order for them to engage.

Audience Path

Data from the same survey maps each point in the journey that current and prospective audience members take. This is more than a summary of the literal touch points along the journey, it is also an identification of their attitudinal expectations, and an understanding of the people and technology that will play the greatest influence at each stage. We do this to understand how they choose to engage, experience, bond, and advocate with brands and influencers along the journey; to know how your brand can best intersect and build a meaningful relationship with them.

Brand Profile

This step synthesizes the research data into a profile of the brand through the eyes of the audience personas, and is shared in the form of an audience engagement brief. Different from the more typical creative brief of an ad agency, our audience engagement brief is written by our strategic insights team. It is completely data-driven and helps define—well beyond messaging—product,

experience and operational priorities from the lens of the audience. It provides an overview of the brand platform and “purpose,” and ensures that all deployment activities are rooted firmly in addressing what is best not only for the brand but for the audience too, and what will achieve the goals for each.

Brand Path

In this step, we synthesize learnings and insights into a set of cogent go-to-market recommendations to bring the learnings to life, through all the key touch points we identified in the audience path. The go-to-market plan will have a detailed assessment of current and planned activities, with stated observations about what’s working and what’s not. The high-level strategy will also include start/stop/continue recommendations that address specific dollar allocations. A key outcome is a guide that is used to inform everything from product and service development, to experience improvement, to external messaging framework, to internal engagement metrics.

WHAT DEEPER KNOWLEDGE CAN UNCOVER

A top 40 university in the world

Drawing applicants from across the country and around the globe, a Canadian university wanted to build a more comprehensive understanding of their prospective students and turned to the benefits of AIM to accomplish this. Their goal was simple, to ensure those who apply can determine they are the best fit for the university through the exploration process, and vice versa.

AIM uncovered several key ingredients that led to a fresh approach. The “opportunity audience”—an international student—was more narrowly defined by several subconscious triggers including key “tribe” traits

driven through social media. The emotional expectations these students had of the university to make funding opportunities more clear was revealed. And several co-owned touch points along the student consideration path were highlighted as core opportunities to turn monologues into dialogues and an ongoing conversation.

Results not only delivered clues to build a more engaged first-year student relationship, but a stronger sense amongst faculty that the university had cracked the code to a future alumni that would advocate for it to attract more prospects just like them, doubling down on the initial challenge.

A venerable Canadian provincial bank

Rather than await a competitor to disrupt the marketplace and their own business success, a leading provincial banking institution decided they would do it themselves by hatching a startup and bringing it to market, and chose Cult and AIM to help them with this ambition.

AIM provided insights and critical thinking that impacts all parts of the business, not just brand and communication activities.

It enabled a unique perspective that synthesized what was three behaviorally-defined target audience profiles originally recommended by a global consultancy, into a single and compelling attitudinally-driven audience prospect recommended by Cult, providing a more focused approach to product and experience building. It prompted a fresh take on the company’s purpose statement, to build stronger meaning for the benefits customers will feel and believe in a relationship with this brand, and that staff need to deliver, distinct from all other financial institutions including the mother brand. Finally, AIM provided new



SCHEREVILLE, INDIANA - SEPTEMBER 23, 2015:
People eagerly await the opening of a new
40,000 square foot Whole Foods Market.



TORONTO, CANADA - NOVEMBER 3, 2017: People line up to buy new iPhone X at the Eaton Centre Apple store in downtown Toronto.

context for how to develop various community activations in a more strategic, less opportunistic manner, so that the brand promise would be reinforced with each activity.

WHY AIM DELIVERS

Classic economic theory, tracing all the way back to 1898, argues that consumers follow a formal process when they consider a purchase decision. This “purchase funnel” of sequential choices evolved into a list of four core decision filters better known, starting in the 1920s, by the acronym AIDA—Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action. AIDA theorized for decades that consumers moved deliberately and consciously forward towards a purchase decision, making choices after considering all relevant information. By the 1960s, studies of the brain and nervous system were reinforcing this thinking by popularizing how the Neocortex—the new, rational part of the brain—was playing a key role in the kind of decision making involved in purchase behavior.

While this thinking may hold some truth for high-involvement, large purchases—like buying a car or house—more recent research has helped debunk this myth. It is now believed that most purchase decisions are, in fact, made with the Reptilian brain—the old, sensory part of the brain.

Experts, like award-winning neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, strongly support this new thinking. LeDoux believes that our brain waves flow from old brain to new brain, meaning our decision-making processes are much less rational than many marketers would like to believe. In his 2015 book *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* he explains “...the wiring of the brain at this point in our evolutionary history is

such that connections from the emotional systems to the cognitive systems are stronger than connections from the cognitive systems to the emotional systems.”

In other words, feelings happen before thought and they happen far faster. This is exactly why AIM was developed, to uncover these subconscious, emotional triggers at the outset, and enable them to lead to more effective marketing and business strategies and activities.

IN SUMMARY

Preparing to solve marketing and business challenges often feels, at the outset, like you’re prepping to compete in the ultimate chess championship, or stepping into the cage for an ultimate fight, or readying for a winner-take-all playoff game. With AIM, you can look at this challenge with a fresh “everyone can win” perspective.

Audience Intersection Mapping helps marketers build knowledge-based respect for the relationship they desire with their most important and valuable audiences in new ways—by understanding it from the outside in. The “What” of AIM, is all about finding more productive relationship intersections. The “How” is about uncovering the subconscious, emotional drivers of these improved relationships.

Strategic problem solving approaches like AIM are the smartest investments marketers must make, to uncover the emotional consumer truths that will move the needle on engagement, and ultimately deliver the most important metrics of business success. ■



Marc Whitehead

Marc is Chief Engagement Officer with Cult Collective. His career has been inspired by new technologies, customer centric strategies and big ideas. Marc's entrepreneurial spirit launched a T-shirt printing business in high school, and continued on every scale, from multinational agencies like BBDO to independent and specialty communications firms. He's helped birth groundbreaking, human-centred innovations like Apple's Newton handheld computer (predecessor to the iPhone), low-carb/high-protein Noodi pasta, and a new kind of VTOL personal transportation vehicle called Blackfly. Marc is a regular panelist on Bob Knorpp's acclaimed BeanCast marketing podcast, and speaks on a variety of research, strategy and audience engagement topics around the world.

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THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENED MARKETING STARTS HERE.

Cult Collective helps brands win a sustainable competitive advantage by focusing on proven platforms that drive customer and employee engagement, and forge fanatical loyalty.

Learn how we keep brands relevant and remarkable by visiting us at cultideas.com or email us at enlightenme@cultideas.com