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Going Face to Face with the Multi-Channel Experience

By Dan Ziman

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Last week I attended the [2009 Forrester Consumer Forum](#) (entitled “The Three-Dimensional Consumer: *Creating Breakthrough Multichannel Relationships*”) at the Fairmont Hotel, as Lithium was a Silver Sponsor. Two years ago at this conference (Fall 2007) – Josh Bernoff ([SVP, Idea Development at Forrester](#)) and Charlene Li ([founder of Altimeter Group](#)) announced *Groundswell* – the smash hit, best-selling book with over 80,000+ copies sold. The book was published in April 2008 and launched at the Web 2.0 Conference in San Francisco soon after.

As I attended Josh’s keynote on the Tuesday evening -- where this year’s Groundswell award finalists and winners were announced --it really hit me home how much the social media and community space has really evolved since Josh & Charlene first embarked on their vision of enterprise transformation and the emerging embracement of a new communication channel. For one thing, a social media strategy wasn’t a strategy for most companies. There was just a sprinkling of early adopters who were eager to experiment and were laying the tracks as they chugged forward. Even when comparing this year’s forum to 2008, there’s huge shift. In 2008, when I asked, “What is your company doing to engage with customers online,” the answer was generally, “Well, there’s some people looking into that”. Now, the answer is “Oh yea, we’re doing a ton and we want to get better”. It feels like there’s so much more commitment to the cause.

OK, so what about ROI?

Yes, the \$1M question. Or, is it? For those who now admit to and implement a social media strategy, there appears to be three camps:

Camp 1 – Sophisticated metric tracking and management. i.e. promoted URL in channel, followed by tracking conversion performance from channel to customer action.

Camp 2 – Tracking volume (# tweets, followers, web traffic, Facebook fans, time on site).

Camp 3 – Not concerned. Really? Yes! It was discussed repeatedly by attendees, panelists and speakers -- “if our customers are there, we need to be there and make it a rewarding & impactful customer experience”. Camp 3 was a revelation – it displays the early adopter, visionary mentality. What it really shows is that there’s still value in experimenting if you have a clear

business objective in mind. The objective being we appreciate hearing from our customers positive or negative.

That brought me to the next big question... Is there value in “transparency”? The answer...a resounding “Yes!” Transparency builds trust. Isn’t that what you want from your customers? Think about why you trust your best friend. Cause you are willing to hear them say anything. Do you get offended? Taken aback? Outraged or frustrated? Yes, perhaps, but you also feel better because you’ve heard your friend’s true feelings and you know what you must address and how to respond. The same applies to customer communities that will reside on your web domain. Much fear surrounds building community and “dealing with complaints”. But, as [Barry Judge, CMO of Best Buy](#) stated in his keynote about embracing the social customer, “...the brands that figure this out will be the brands that succeed (in this new engagement model).”

Executive Sponsorship

One of the final valuable pieces I learned last week is how our customers and prospects are trying to assess and sell to their executive sponsors to get funding for social media initiatives. As Harley Manning, [Vice President and Research Director at Forrester](#) eloquently stated today, you first need to know what type of executives you’re dealing with. He articulated three categories: passive, willing, and engaged. Sage advice for any project you’re trying to get funded. What category does your boss fall into? If you’re one of those exec sponsors, what category would you put yourself in?

Congrats again to all of the Groundswell Winners and Finalists for exemplifying leadership in social solutions and a particular shout-out to a few of our customers, [FICO, Lenovo and Juniper](#), for winning a category and being finalists, respectively. Kudos to the Forrester Event Team too - can’t wait to see what one year from now will bring.

About the Author:

Dan Ziman is the Director of Marketing Programs for Lithium Technologies, the leading provider of Social CRM solutions to power enterprise customer networks. Mr. Ziman works with large and medium-range enterprises to help them identify social networking strategies that will assist companies with increasing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. His responsibilities include marketing program strategies, analyst relations, PR, and direct marketing. Mr. Ziman is the creator of the award-winning B2B online campaign, "Greg the Architect", which earned the distinction of "Best Online Campaign (under \$200K)" from BtoB Magazine in 2007. Mr. Ziman was formerly a Director of Product Marketing at TIBCO Software, where he was responsible for sales enablement and global marketing programs. Mr. Ziman also led TIBCO's global direct marketing team, which included online marketing campaigns and lead management systems. Mr. Ziman's professional experience includes running his own business development consulting company and selling SOA, BPM, ERP/supply chain, and project management software applications and services to both enterprise and SMB markets. Mr. Ziman is also an advisory board member for the DemandGen Report.