

Brand engagement: A three part series

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PART 1:

How to accelerate your sales through engagement: An introduction

Do you want to accelerate your sales? Do you want a larger share of your market? Of course you do!

My role at FMI is focused on achieving success for my clients and over the last 20 years, I have worked collaboratively in many verticals (Automotive, Technology, Finance, and Retail to name a few!) with a host of brands to really understand their challenges. This allows me to deliver a bespoke solution that results in a positive return on investments – something that's bred into the very core of why FMI exists.

Accelerating your sales

Throughout this three-part series of posts, I will share my knowledge on engaging your direct and non-direct channels, giving you insight which could help improve your sales performance. There are many ways to achieve engagement and no one solution is correct, as it depends on a variety of factors, including industry, route to market, geography, people and resources. One commonality we have identified however is that having an engaged workforce and channel is key to any successful business.

Many things can impact sales, but we can distil it down to three essential components: product/service, promotion/marketing and the salespeople/channel. Often a lot of time is spent on above the line and below the line activity, but less time is spent focusing on engaging the front-line salespeople. Even with the growth of the internet when it comes to sales, the concept that people buy people and brands definitely still stands.

It is also true that people sell what they know and are confident with, so overlooking the people aspect of sales can have a big impact. By creating a dedicated engagement programme, you can ensure that the key people in your route to market are both informed and performing.

Four years ago, we started working with global consumer electronics company, Huawei and they had a smartphone market share of 2.5% – which is now around 19%. We soon discovered the initial stumbling block for the front line teams was that they weren't confident on how to pronounce the brand name and therefore they would default to selling other brands.

Any engagement programme needs to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the audience, so throughout our relationship with Huawei, we've shifted focus from brand name, to product details, to the present where we are defining what it means to be Huawei.

When meeting with a client to discuss devising an engagement programme, I always start by asking three simple questions:

WHO are we targeting?

This question identifies the audience(s) and location(s) we are working with.

WHAT are we trying to achieve?

This question gives us a clear goal to work towards so we can define the ROI metric.

WHY are we doing it?

This is definitely the best question, because we uncover what the core business challenge is that we need to address. I cannot tell you how many times this question has completely changed the direction of a solution. It is common for people to come to FMI with a preconceived idea for a programme they would like to run, however, once the WHY question is asked you can see these programmes don't always address the original business challenge. Always keep in mind the WHY as it is easy to lose sight of once you begin to think of a solution.

Once the answers to the three key questions have been defined, we can ask some of the more practical questions like;

WHEN

Consider timings. Have you allowed enough time to scope, develop and launch the programme? Often there is a desire to launch programmes at a big event like an annual conference, but programmes need to have realistic timelines. Also, consider using a phased approach if you are rolling out to multiple countries.

WHERE

This question looks to determine whether programmes need to run online and/or offline. Launch events can have a great awareness impact but are relatively costly. Launch packs with posters and merchandise can be more cost effective, but there is a chance not everyone will receive a pack and like events, launch packs can have a short-term awareness impact. Using an online solution can take time to build, but it offers more chance for continuous communication directly with your audience, meaning the engagement and awareness continues to build.

HOW

Look at the detail of the programme. Amongst the HOW questions are things like; how will you communicate with your audience? How will you gather data? How will the programme work in different territories? How will you be compliant with GDPR and CCPA? How are you measuring success? How will you fund the programme?

There are a host of things to consider when it comes to designing engagement programmes for direct and non-direct channels, which is why at FMI we help our clients step through this process in a structured manner.

PART 2:

Engaging an audience

I mentioned in my introduction to this series that while above the line and below the line activity are very important, I strongly believe an engaged workforce is key to any successful business and that a dedicated engagement programme will help to increase your business performance.

It is important that you engage from Bottom to Top, and that everyone takes responsibility to create a positive engaging environment. As well as demonstrating the desired behaviours, a lot of this can be reinforced through communications.

Communicating to your own employees is fairly straightforward as you know who they are and their contact details, but what if your route to market is through non-direct channels and it is those people who are the face of your brand? This is a challenge I face on a daily basis as an engagement consultant working at FMI.

Non-direct channel engagement

Let's start by clarifying what I mean by a non-direct channel. Essentially, this is any third party who is selling your product/service. For example, in the automotive or agricultural industry, this might be franchised and independent dealerships, or for the mobile phone manufacturers, this might be retail and call centre employees from network operator companies (e.g. EE, Vodafone, or Hutchinson 3G).

How can you communicate with and transform the behaviour of someone else's employees, when you have no direct influence? Especially, if they are in different countries? How does GDPR impact on you engaging an audience?

These are some big questions and will involve working with multiple stakeholders from across different organisations, but the good news is that when you can succeed here, your direct employees will be straightforward.

Once the data processing agreements are in place, we follow a 4-step engagement process:



INFORM

The first step is to clearly communicate with your audience. Tell them what the objective of the engagement programme is and what is expected of them. Most importantly make sure they know why they should care – essentially, what is in it for them!

This initial dissemination of information might be from physical packs out into the field, digital communications, or at a face to face launch event, or a combination of all three.

TRANSFORM

You have communicated the goals with your audience, so now they will need to be provided with the skills and knowledge to accomplish the objectives – make sure your programme can train up the audience on how to do what they need to do.

There are many areas you may have to cover, perhaps including an induction into your brand, your products and services, key selling points, how you differentiate from rivals, your target audience profiles, and what it means to be associated with your brand.

By creating bite-size training, you can gradually take your audience on a journey to better understand your brand, be more confident talking about it, and ultimately sell more.

ASSESS

This really is the data science part of the business. Drilling down into the data to understand the specifics of what is happening – where has the performance improved, what areas still need improving, are there any new areas that need focus?

The real goal of this section is that all programmes should aim to give you actionable data that offers clear insight into what areas need improving. This allows us to constantly measure how your audience is performing against the desired target and react accordingly.

This is also the area where we can look at the return on investment (ROI) and return on objective (ROO). As long as clear metrics are defined and agreed at the beginning of a programme then the data can support the visibility.

RECOGNISE

No matter who you are, everyone wants to be told they are doing well and that is where recognition comes into play. Everybody demonstrating the desired behaviour should be recognised and rewarded to encourage others to follow suit.

The process of recognition can be as simple as a thank you or as extravagant as a new car. The point is to make sure the individual/team know they are doing the right things. If you then promote and celebrate that achievement, others will be able to see and learn from it.

PART 3:

Part 3: Going global

GOING GLOBAL

Throughout this blog series, we have looked at the basics of how to identify the correct approach to designing an engagement programme and then how to implement and measure it – simple!

In this third and final part, we are going to take a look at how we can roll your engagement programme out across the globe.

As any multinational corporation (MNC) will know, rolling anything out worldwide is rarely as straightforward as it might first appear. As an example, I was in discussion with a client about rolling a programme out in the Asia Pacific (APAC) region and, when talking about the data flow, they assured me it would be easy because there was one common system across all countries which should provide one consolidated report. As it turned out, that “one system” was configured in four different ways so we ended up with four separate feeds!

Bearing the previous conversation in mind, your engagement programme needs to be flexible enough to embrace the core global features but with the ability to have local nuances. Some of the biggest considerations need to be around data flows, languages, communications, time zone-based support, and rewards.

GLOBAL REWARDS

Rewards are one of the most difficult elements to accomplish for a global programme. While it is more straightforward to deliver rewards in the likes of North America and Western Europe, what about if your organisation has outlets in the less well-connected countries? Rewards that work in the UK are unlikely to resonate in India, Thailand or Brazil.

At FMI, we're fortunate that our global rewards store offers one of the best (if not the best!) global reward solutions available. This means we can be confident that no matter the continent or country we can deliver a truly global programme with locally engaging rewards.

When FMI supported an automotive dealer engagement programme in Eastern Europe the list of countries to be engaged was diverse and could have been challenging. We've also supported one of our telecoms clients with engaging non-direct call centres in India, South Africa and Ireland. Our global reward catalogue was up to the challenge though and was able to provide offerings in all the countries.

CORPORATE EVENTS

Sometimes you need more than just a reward catalogue to truly engage your audience and in that case, an event can work perfectly. Whether that is a training roadshow to launch a new product or an annual conference to bring everyone together, the impact of an event is very strong.

When FMI ran a sales incentive for one of our client's Indian call centres we combined multiple elements of our offering to ensure total engagement.

Initially, we had communications and merchandise land in the call centre to build awareness of the impending sales incentive and tell the audience how they could get involved and what was in it for them. Then we ran a training roadshow across the various sites to ensure they had the product knowledge to deliver sales. The training roadshow ensured 93% of the audience was trained with a pass rate of 98%.

We then ran a digital campaign, which was accompanied by a call centre take over to keep the campaign front of mind. Results were updated weekly through the website to highlight performance. There were multiple levels of the campaign that engaged a wider audience with prizes for any sale as well as an incentive trip for the overall sales winners. The success of the campaign was proven when we achieved an incredible sales uplift of 225%. The leading individuals from this campaign were then taken on a fantastic incentive trip to Bali to celebrate their achievements.

Huge thanks for hosting a fabulous trip for our team, we really enjoyed the itinerary and everyone had a fantastic few days with a lifetime of memories!

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

As you have probably gathered, planning is even more critical when rolling out a global programme. It is vital that in-country stakeholders (champions) are engaged at an early stage to ensure that local considerations are captured and, where possible and practical, incorporated. The more local buy-in you have, the greater the likelihood of a programme being a success.

Due to the flexibility required for a global programme, FMI would always recommend a bespoke engagement programme rather than a one size fits all solution. Engagement programmes should make your audience feel like they matter and are special, and not just a number in the masses.

While you have engaged local champions it is important to provide them with the tools to support the programme. With the likely time zone and language differences, it is best to create dedicated dashboards and reports so that local users have actionable insights to be able to review and manage the local programme themselves. This not only empowers the champions but also creates ownership and pride in their country/region.

PHASED APPROACH

The complexity of a global programme and the potential need to roll out multiple versions can create project delivery challenges. Trying to juggle the individual requirements for all the countries at the same time can become overwhelming. In this scenario, if possible, consider a phased launch approach.

Help yourself by initially identifying a smaller pilot group of countries which ideally are more straight forward in terms of requirements. Once you identify and iron out all the nuances for the pilot group you will then be in a much better place to tackle the more complex countries. Take the learnings from the pilot group and apply them to the wider audience to smooth the launch process.

ASSESS AND EVOLVE

Through this three-part blog, I have given you insight into how to implement an engagement programme. The work doesn't stop at the launch though. One of the key elements of any successful engagement programme is to assess its performance and evolve accordingly. What is working well? What is not? Are there any new business challenges that need to be addressed?

Your audience will also mature in their understanding of your brand so you need to take them on a journey of further discovery...but that is a blog for another time.

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