

How to Make PR Campaigns Customer-Focused Instead of Company-Focused



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When I started out as a marketer of both people and places, I'd learn as much as I could about my clients and then create collateral that presented them in their best possible light – relaying how educated and experienced someone was, broadcasting loud and clear how financially successful a business had been, how they dominated their market share.

Nowadays, however, the very floor upon which I built my career and my business has been renovated. Nowadays, the public isn't so interested in hearing about what makes a company better than its competitors; their ears and eyes are more attuned to what the company can do to make their own lives better.

In other words, instead of a professional culture of “me, me, me,” we’re now in a culture of “you, you, you.” Instead of saying, “Look at how great our internal operations are,” corporate voices are telling their buying public, “We see you. We see your needs. You matter. You matter to us.” This has created some interesting developments in how we conduct business.

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The age of the customer-centric marketplace

Customer-centricity is a perspective that focuses on creating a positive experience for the consumer throughout all stages of your interaction with them. It’s a mindset, but it’s also a business strategy that informs an organization’s decision-making by cultivating a deep understanding of customer needs and then designing deliverables to meet those needs.

Though the model is not particularly new, the ways it’s being implemented in the marketplace are quite modern and pervasive, infiltrating all that businesses are advised to do. In ads, don’t blow your own horn, offer solutions to your market’s problems. In website copy, don’t tout your own merits, engage with the customer where they are. In sales decks, make it about the audience, not the presenters.

Putting the customer at the center of any type of business transaction has become SOP, both for brand reputation purposes and, of course, for earnings potential, with a white paper by Deloitte positing that “client-centric companies are 60% more profitable compared to companies not focused on the customer.”

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Examples of customer-centric PR

Here are a few ways my own business has embraced and leveraged this new normal.

Example #1: A restaurant. Traditionally, dining establishments pretty much always promoted themselves by sharing their menu, featuring photos of their ambiance, and sending invitations for special events. Since all that can easily be found online now, this client has pivoted to offering more immersive culinary experience to would-be diners – bringing the dining to them instead of vice versa. For instance, we're aggressively promoting the award-winning chef of the restaurant on TV and podcast segments, where he openly shares "secret family recipes" with viewers. A swanky new food truck can cater events on customers' premises, and private parties are also offered at the customers' chosen location.

We also talked them into a punch card: 5 visits get you a free appetizer or dessert the next time you're in. Rewards programs are in – people like to be acknowledged for their repeat patronage and appreciated for their loyalty.

Example #2: A cosmetics company. Instead of this year's marketing budget allocated primarily to photo shoots that spotlight the product line in magazines and digital ads, this customer has adopted the idea of turning the spotlight on the customer – one face at a time. Its newest PR campaign starts with an emailed invitation to take an online survey to win a free makeover. The survey is quite individualized, covering skin type, skin tone, daily facial routines, preferred color palette and so on. Based on replies, appointments are set at a local salon the company is partnering with, where the customer receives a complimentary consultation.

No unrelatable supermodels promising unattainable results, no expensive glossy brochures, no hard sell of the merchandise. The crux here is truly personalizing the customer experience,

which is key with today's savvy and time-pressed consumer.

Example #3: A pet store. Every pet owner needs to buy food and supplies, right regularly? So they either frequent your store or they don't – usually based on convenience of location and pricing. But what if you offered them more than just products to buy? What if you offered them "A Vet for a Day," an event we scheduled on a Saturday from 9 am to 6 pm? The store paid the vet, but the visitors didn't; each got up to 10 minutes with the veterinarian to ask questions, have their pet looked over and seek advice on concerns about their animal.

The goodwill this event generated cannot be overstated. Yes, sales increased and brand-new repeat clients were won, but the important thing to note is the absence of a direct sales pitch here. Rather, the essence of this campaign was identifying a customer pain point and offering a means to ease it.

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Guidelines for a customer-focused campaign

What do all of these projects have in common?

1. They all started with in-depth market research that zeroed in on learning about each business's customer base. You can't just assume you know what your customers value; you have to conduct surveys, garner direct input, investigate and really listen to what your market is saying on social platforms, and then monitor the outcomes of initiatives.
2. They put people in front of profits. An impactful customer-centric campaign shows that you genuinely care about your customers instead of showcasing your own superiority or excellence. You're allowed to be the best and encouraged to excel, but in today's climate, forming

meaningful and lasting bonds is valued more highly than purely transactional relationships.

3. The goal was to improve the customer experience at every point of contact. The more you can make each interaction customer-centric – whether that's a visit to your website, offering a free download or coming into your place of business and encountering something unexpected and delightful – the more you will stand out in the client's memory and thus sway their consumer habits.

Closing thoughts

There's always going to be a time and place for me to herald my clients' considerable qualifications, accomplishments and impacts. People will always want to be assured that they're in good hands and can place trust in reputable establishments.

Nevertheless, there's no denying that today's standard of practice is about making an impression on your customers instead of trying to impress them. Give it a shot. Design a customer-focused campaign (or hire a pro to do it for you) and see where it takes you. Chances are, you'll travel farther than you ever have before!

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