Devoted fans 101: How to build relationships with brand affinity

Category: Branding
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The modern business landscape is more engaging and fast-paced than ever, thanks to technological developments. In the past, retailers built relationships with their customers through the visits that they made to brick-and-mortar stores. Those were simpler times, where every shop owner knew his best clients by name, and could ask them personal questions about work and family life in a heartbeat. In this scenario, it was possible to build genuine brand affinity.

Of course, then the digital age arrived, and online websites started to cut down on the personalisation of sales. Today, customers are officially standing up and demanding a more "personal" experience from their brands. In a world where we're constantly connected to devices, people have a sort of nostalgic fondness for that "real" human experience. Many of us are now craving the brand affinity we enjoyed in the past.

Fortunately, although the digital era originally caused our problems with customisation, it also offers us countless opportunities to connect and build relationships with our audience on a deeper level. Now, we can find out more information than ever before about our target customers, without even having to speak to them!

With the right level of research and engagement, brands can forge that all-important personal connection with their consumers, building a powerful tool called "brand affinity". So, what is brand affinity? How can you make the most of it for your company, and what tips and tricks do you need to be

aware of?

We're going to answer all those questions for you, and more. Welcome to your brush-up lesson on brand affinity.

What is brand affinity?

Let's begin with the most obvious question: "What is brand affinity?"

A brand affinity definition can be tricky, as opinions vary from one expert to the next. Ultimately, brand affinity is considered the most valuable level of customer relationship, based around the mutual belief that the company, and the customer share a set of common values. Affinity is the most durable stage of customer loyalty, which boosts business by encouraging trust, helping consumers to buy more, and complain less often.

When it comes to retaining customers, brand affinity is a goldmine. Studies show that loyal customers are 10 times as valuable as their initial purchase. When a customer demonstrates brand affinity, companies can pinpoint a series of distinct benefits, including:

- A greater likelihood of continuing to shop with the brand, despite emerging offers, or better deals elsewhere.
- An increased chance that customers will continue to buy from their specific brand, when offered the choice between similar products.
- A high probability that customers will become brand advocates on social media and other public forums.
- A better chance that customers will make referrals on the behalf of the brand or company they enjoy.
- Greater overall customer satisfaction.



Brand affinity vs brand loyalty: What's the difference?

By this point, you're probably thinking that brand affinity sounds a lot like brand loyalty. When it comes to answering the question "What is brand affinity?" many companies make the mistake of using these two terms interchangeably. Though a brand affinity definition, and a definition for brand loyalty may be very similar, it's important to remember that they're not identical. Someone can be loyal to a brand without feeling affinity.

For instance, someone might be "brand-loyal", because they believe that the brand in question offers the best prices, or the best product. However, this doesn't indicate any emotional connection to the brand. Instead, it simply means that the customer is loyal because they perceive the brand offers them the highest value. If this level of value starts to change, then loyalty levels could change with it.

Basically, brand loyalty comes from rational decisions, not emotional ones. Loyalty can also be a behavioural decision. For instance, a customer continues to buy the same product because they're "used to" it, not because they believe it's the best choice.

The difference between a brand affinity definition, and brand loyalty can be tough for businesses to understand. The best way to tell the difference is this: If your customers are buying from you because of a deep emotional connection, or a link between your personal or brand manifestos, then you're looking at brand affinity. If your customer buys from you out of apathy, to get the best price, or because they appreciate the value of your product, you've got brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty can be used to improve brand affinity. After all, customers who are already loyal to your company for various reasons are more likely to look for emotional connections.

Brand affinity marketing: Tips for using brand affinity

The benefits of brand affinity are obvious: happier, more devoted clients and customers. So, how can you use brand affinity marketing to establish affinity? Just like any other marketing technique, affinity comes from a careful consideration of your tactics and strategies. Whether you're a new business, or an established company, affinity is something that should be considered carefully with any new marketing method.

Here are just some of the brand affinity marketing tips you can use to boost your customer relationships.



Brand affinity marketing tip 1: Know thy customer

Brand affinity marketing is all about delivering authentic, relevant, and personalised messages to your customers. That means expanding your understanding of what your customers need, want, and care about. Consider using interviews, surveys, and CRM data to build your background knowledge, and reach out to your customers through social media.

The more you can learn about your ideal customer, from their job title, to their demographics, and influencers, the more you can adapt your voice, and image accordingly. Ultimately, you should aim to create a comprehensive user persona, that can inform each level of your marketing strategy.

Brand affinity marketing tip 2: Stay connected

Getting to know the basics about your customers isn't enough

in today's digital world. Instead, you need to evolve with the ever-changing nature of your target market. Staying connected will help you to do this. For instance, think about building your email list so you can use it to communicate with customers, and keep them updated about the value you have to offer.

Remember, there are countless ways to stay connected, from printed media, to content marketing campaigns, social media, email marketing, and even direct phone calls.

Brand affinity marketing tip 3: Find your personality

Remember, customers only create emotional connections with brands that they can identify with. Since the average person doesn't relate to a building, or nameless corporation, that means that you're going to need to design a brand with "personality".

Your brand personality will be the thing that takes your customer loyalty to the next level, transforming your brand from just another company, into a real, living embodiment of various ideas. In other words, you need to make sure that your brand is being perceived as something that your customers can relate to, and engage with. Building a brand personality involves a complete consideration of your brand, from its visual image, to its message. Once you've found your voice, make sure you stick to it.

Brand affinity marketing tip 4: Show your values

If you want your customers to connect with your brand, then you can't just say you have the same values as them, you need to prove it. In other words, if you want to create brand affinity with people by showing that your company is generous

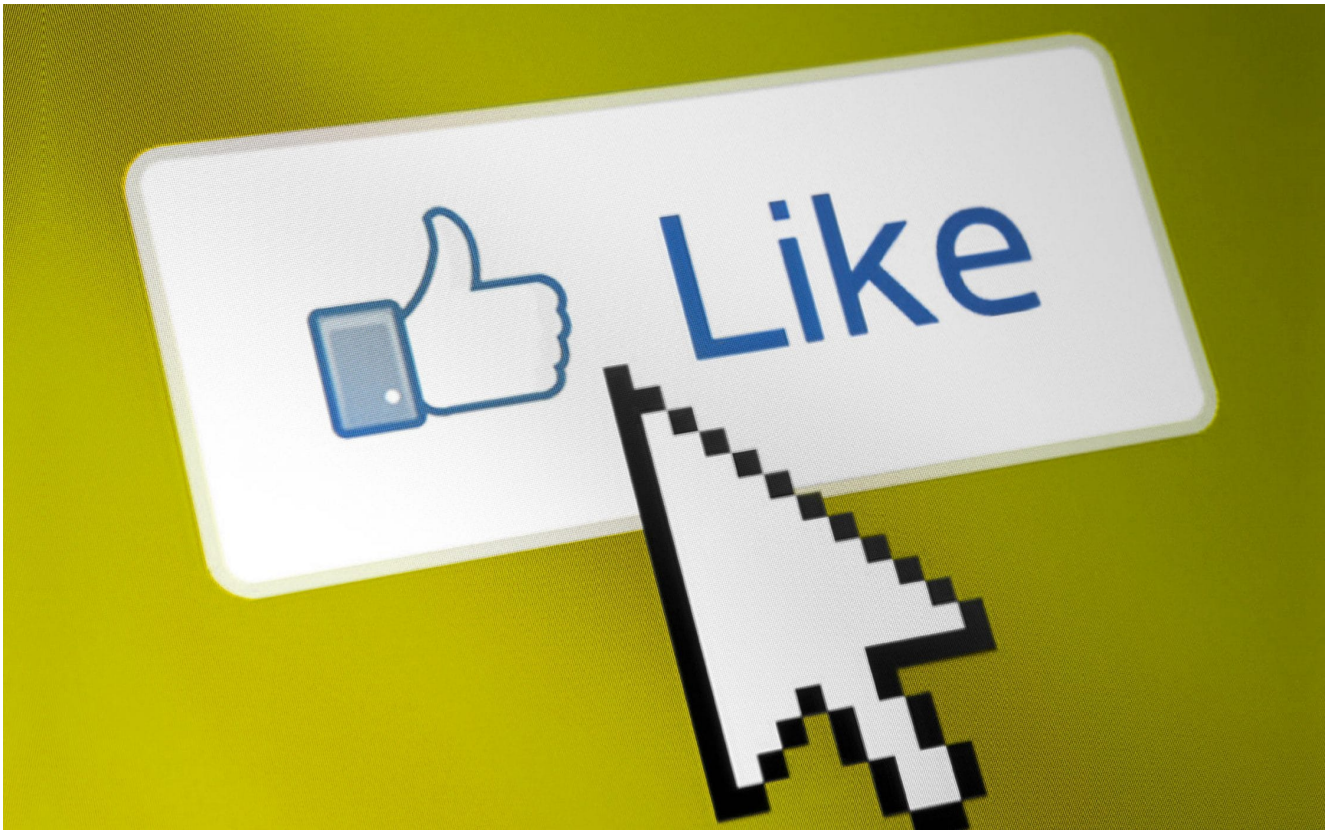
and ethical, then you'll need to take steps to define this in your brand personality, by getting involved with local charitable functions, and making donations to causes that resonate with your audience.

Consider Pedigree Dog food, for instance, it claims that the company believes every dog deserves a loving home, and the best food. It backs up this claim by sourcing specific ingredients that have been proven to support canine health. Don't just tell people your values, show them.

Brand affinity marketing tip 5: Keep customers informed

A great way to build a more powerful emotional connection with your audience, is to make them feel like they're part of the team. Whether you're making organisational changes, or launching a new product, inform your customers so that they feel valued and important. The more information you share, the more your customers will connect with your brand.

Being transparent with your business objectives, and carefully communicating changes will help to deliver a stronger relationship that boosts affinity and trust naturally.



Brand affinity marketing tip 6: Discover the power of social media

A lot of businesses interested in answering the question: "what is brand affinity?" begin with an evaluation of their social media strategies. Social media can offer companies a host of advantages when building relationships, including:

- The ability to monitor online communities and uncover what people are saying about your brand.
- The option to interact directly with customers, making developing and nurturing relationships simpler.
- The chance to offer a higher level of customer service (in a public format). Customers often have an improved perception of brands that deal with online issues quickly.
- A platform to share and supplement your content marketing efforts.

Social media can help you to establish stronger relationships

with your audience, which mean they're more likely to spread the word about your brand. According to the New York Times, 68% of people share social content to give people a better sense of what they care about, and who they are.

Examples of brands with great brand affinity

Brand affinity can be a complicated concept for companies to envision. To help you see what "affinity" is all about, we've put together a few examples of some of the most famous brands in the world, and what they've done to achieve brand affinity.

Starbucks

One of the most recognisable brands on earth, Starbucks is an interesting insight into customer affinity. After all, there are plenty of competing coffee brands with the same level of online and offline presence. Yet, Starbucks continues to remain ahead of its competitors, thanks to its unique personality.

While product quality is certainly a part of the equation when determining why people love Starbucks, it's also worth noting that Starbucks has come to be associated with "the" modern coffee shop, where customers can relax, unwind, or even get work done. In other words, people like the feeling they get from being at Starbucks.

Starbucks also "earns the right be part of your community" through ethical programmes that support social impact, the environment, youth skills and training, and wellbeing. For anyone with an interest in these areas, Starbucks will feel like good fit, they will achieve brand affinity.



Apple

Another company with one of the most loyal brand followings ever seen. 59% of iPhone users say that they purchase Apple devices out of "blind loyalty". But there's more to this brand than loyalty alone. Affinity has a part to play too.

The clearly defined mission statement issued by Apple, which talks about innovation, cutting-edge design, and product quality, appeals to the needs and desires of its target audience. By designing and displaying this crucial brand manifesto, Apple has created an emotional connection with its audience. Today, it's constantly pursued by customers who crave innovation.

Sam Adams

Everyone has a preferred beer, and as the craft revolution emerges, new and experimental tastes are appearing all the time. However, it seems that customers are more devoted to Sam Adams, than any of the other brewery titans in the market. Sam

Adams encourages an unusual level of engagement from its customers by building emotional attachments.

The entire marketing effort behind Sam Adams is all about encouraging customers to love their brand choice. For instance, campaigns like the “Take pride in your beer” series, introduce affinity as a key strategy for the brand.

Brand affinity: Why being likeable is crucial

Most brands crave popularity. That’s part of the reason why we’ve seen social media marketing take such a significant up-turn over the recent years. However, when it comes to brand affinity, you can’t just jump onto social media and expect to instantly create devoted fans.

Ultimately, if you want your brand affinity strategy to work, then you need to focus on making sure your brand is “likeable” in the eyes of your customers. As powerful as social media can be, it can’t convince your customers to form an emotional connection on its own. Before you begin rolling out your brand affinity marketing strategies, make sure that you’re likeable with the following tips:

1. Be real and authentic

Modern brands need to be authentic. If you want to create an emotional connection with your audience, then you need to make sure you don’t use hyperbole, or promise more than you can provide. Eventually, unrealistic claims will be seen for what they are: desperate pleas for revenue.

2. Leave the “tricks” behind

There are plenty of articles out there that claim to share tricks and tips for brand loyalty, and even brand affinity.

However, if you think about it, you'll realise that profound business/consumer relationships probably don't come from tricking or deceiving your customer base. Essentially, you should be focusing on offering value that your customers can't resist, along with personality traits that appeal to them.

3. Be different, but relatable

If you want to get ahead of your competitors, then you need to differentiate yourself with unique traits and characteristics. However, while it's important to be unique, you also need to ensure that you're not so different that your customers can't relate to you. Find out which personality traits define your ideal customers, then design your personality accordingly.

4. Take responsibility, be human

People typically don't form emotional connections with large, faceless corporations. We feel connections to other people, so it's important for your brand to appear as human as possible. When things go wrong, own up and say so. Update your customers regularly, and show them all the behind the scenes stuff that makes your business more 3-dimensional. The more you share, the more customers will trust you.

5. Be what your customers are looking for

A great way to make sure that your customers like you, is to be whatever they're looking for. Anticipate what your audience needs, and try to create solutions for their problems before they even have to ask you. The more valuable you are to your customers, the more loyal they become. The more loyal your customers are, the more likely they are to develop emotional connections.

6. Be consistent

Finally, make sure that you're consistent when it comes to

your tone of voice, brand identity, and personality. Branding is an essential part of making sure your voice is heard online today. However, you need to remain consistent if you want your customers to relate to you. It's hard to relate to a schizophrenic brand that changes its thoughts and ideas on a platform-to-platform basis.

How to measure brand affinity

Measuring brand affinity can be pretty tough. After all, it's hard to determine tangible levels of success for something that doesn't really generate figures or ROI.

Measuring emotional connections with your brand can seem like a guessing game, but there are a few metrics you can look at if you want to make sure your company is making a connection. Make sure that you stay away from vanity metrics like "page views", which make you feel good, but don't tell you much about what's happening. Instead, you'll need to figure out when, how, and why customers are interacting with your audience for a valuable insight. For instance:

Brand affinity metric 1: Time spent engaged with content

Page views mean very little if you have no idea how engaged your audience members are with your content. Measuring whether your content is connecting with your audience is all about tracking people who are actively viewing a page. Look for any interaction, from scrolling, to clicking, and downloading content. These engagement metrics show interest in your brand, and may indicate brand affinity.

Brand affinity metric 2: How many viewers finish reading your pages

Again, a great way to know whether your customers are really

engaged with your brand, is to determine whether they're reading all your content, or reading the first paragraph then hitting the back button. Measuring the "average finish" metric will help you to see how many people think your brand, and content is worth their time.

Keep in mind that the average finish metric can be tricky, as some people will just scroll through everything to see what's at the bottom of your page.

Brand affinity metric 3: Return viewers

If you're genuinely interested in something, then you'll probably want more of it. Customers with brand affinity will feel that way about your website and marketing efforts. The number of customers that keep coming back to your pages can help you to see how effective your campaigns are at building relationships and loyalty.

You can also look at the amount of people who consistently engage with your posts on social media, or click through to read your email marketing messages.

Brand affinity metric 4: The presence of brand advocates

One of the most effective ways to measure whether your brand is really making a connection with your audience, is to look at your social media interactions, and the conversations that are happening around your company. For instance, if your customers are constantly liking, and commenting on your posts, then you're on the right track. However, the best sign of affinity, is the appearance of brand advocates.

Brand advocates can begin by simply sharing your content with people in their social media networks, before going on to give your company shout-outs on other platforms.



Brand affinity definition: Relationships for your brand

Brand loyalty, a concept that comes from things like perceived value, a general appreciation of a brand, and other important elements, is important for building your competitive edge in the modern marketplace. However, as we learn that more customers make purchasing decisions based on emotion, than logic, it makes sense to consider an emotional approach to brand relationships.

Brand affinity goes beyond the basics of loyalty, and into a consideration of how specific characteristics shown by a brand can resonate with the personality traits of an entire consumer base or market.

Building brand affinity isn’t a simple process. Often, it’s something that can be achieved with careful branding, a distinct communication method that shares a specific voice across content marketing and social strategies, and an ongoing

commitment to representing customer ideals. However, if you can achieve brand affinity, then you can access a consumer base that’s totally devoted to your brand.

While those with brand loyalty could still lose their customers to sales, and better prices, businesses with brand affinity maintain their consumer base through strong, long-lasting emotional connections.

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