

The Unique Selling Point  
The Emotional Selling Point  
and the *true*  
**Point of Engagement**

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## **Your Favourite Advert and Your Favourite Product: shouldn't there be some connection?**

Which advertisement or promotion have you seen recently that actually made you purchase the product?

And no, I don't mean *feel good* about the product – I mean actually go out there and *buy* it.

Was it the Unique Selling Point, the rational benefit of the product, that impressed you?

Or was it the Emotional Selling Point? - the modern replacement for the USP, working directly on the level of identity and desire, and based on the fact that humans are controlled far more by their emotions than mere rationality.

If you think carefully about how the advert affected you, you'll realise the motivating factor was neither purely a USP nor the ESP: rather, there was some element of the advert that subtly *engaged* your interest.

And, surprisingly, more often than not this all-important element of *engagement* is arrived at by chance as opposed to being deliberately and knowledgeably determined.

Psychologists speak of the *Point of Engagement*<sup>1</sup> as being that moment when a speaker finally interacts and makes contact with the person they are speaking to.

Until then, everything said has been virtually unheard and unregistered by the other person, let alone acted upon.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, it is neither a Unique nor an Emotional Selling Point you should be searching for but an *Engaging* Selling Point (EnSP) – the attribute of your product or service that triggers in the customer a sense of *involvement* and a need for *further participation*.

Moreover, unlike either a USP or an ESP, an EnSP can be utilised on all levels of marketing – even down to motivating a workforce.

## **So many Marketing Promotions, so many that don't work**

You engage someone in a conversation.

A professional telemarketer – perhaps the nearest modern equivalent to the old foot-in-the-door salesman – will wax-lyrically on the need to *engage* a customer before you even begin to try and sell them anything.

And, indeed, any marketer will say they already understand the importance of engagement – that's the very reason why they conduct so much consumer research to discover what moves and shakes them.

Yet this, ironically, is precisely where they're going wrong.

Utilising the very latest forms of marketing research (ethnographic research, when people are actually followed as they go about their everyday life), it was revealed that the typical Miller Lite drinker was comfortable expressing affection for his friends, whereas the more bullish Bud Lite consumers were into impressing each other.

The subsequent marketing campaign, featuring Miller drinkers regaling friends with tales of weird experiences, was rated highly for both entertainment value and powerful, emotional resonance. Customers completely identified with the realistic characters and situations portrayed.

The sales, however, were unimpressive.

Everyone realised, all too late, that the emotional appeal wasn't linked to a compelling product message.

## The Product as Bit-Part-Player in its Own Promotions

As in so many promotions, **Miller Lite had become nothing but a bit-part-player** in a beautifully written, well-observed miniature drama.

But there is a deeper, more fundamental problem with this type of emotionally driven advertising.

If the customers can **completely** identify with the advert's characters, their life is **complete** without the product.

The customer's lifestyle has all been so incredibly well researched, it's almost as if the customer himself is on screen!

*It's all so embedded in real life or attitudes it doesn't demand or even expect any change or action in the customer!*

The customer realises that, yes, that's just like me, I've been in exactly that situation – but then I obviously don't need the product. (I, too, have wonderful times with my friends – but it would be even better with *my* favourite drink!)

**The emotional value is no different from anything the viewer already receives from another product.**

The campaign gains **Attention**, it might even elicit a lower form of **Interest** – but how can you **Desire** something you already have? How can you **Act** on it?

## Engaging: the difference between *charming* and *involvement*

Surprisingly, psychological studies<sup>3</sup> conducted on the best ways of motivating people demonstrate that it isn't *contentment* (tranquillity or serenity) that should be promoted but feelings of joy (happiness, amusement, elation), love (emotions felt toward specific individuals) and *interest* (curiosity, intrigue, excitement, or wonder).

It would seem that people actually require some element of *challenge* to be fully engaged. Otherwise, they don't experience any sense of *development* – which, of course, is the very thing marketers should be promoting as a product *benefit*.

Engagement is about *motivation*, but there are different kinds of motivation: for instance, amongst students there are external, *extrinsic* motivators (pleasing parents with good grades, seeking a job after graduation, or higher status among peers<sup>4</sup>) but these rarely deepen engagement,<sup>5</sup> while intrinsic motivation (a sense of achievement, experiencing of skills, control, and activity<sup>6</sup>) leads to higher concentration, interest, attention, enjoyment and esteem.<sup>7</sup>

How is such an element of challenge introduced into marketing?

Do you remember the questions asked earlier, about your favourite advertisement?

A question gets people *thinking*, doesn't it?

## So is Engagement always linked to a Question?

No.

Naturally, every product is different and thereby obviously has a different Engaging Selling Point.

For instance, whereas the problem with the Miller campaign was that it was so embedded in real life viewers felt no need to take-up the product, it doesn't simply follow that a futuristic campaign will engage them: on the contrary, it is highly likely that the viewer fails to feel *any* sense of identification with the campaign's characters.

Similarly, a viewer will fail to identify with a family shown enjoying the rides at a theme park unless they are placed in a *particular* situation recognised by the viewer.

So yes, *emotional involvement* is a requirement of the Engaging Selling Point.

But it is something more than that.

It is the equivalent of the way someone wanting to sell a house helps conjure up *tangible* images of an aspirational lifestyle by placing wine glasses on a table, or ensuring a kitchen smells of coffee.

The layout of the house should conjure up such images by itself of course – but it doesn't.

It needs the help of an *Engaging Selling Point*.

**RED**

**BLUE**

**YELLOW**

**ORANGE**

## The Left Brain, the Right Brain, and the Confused Brain

Now, without looking back over the last four pages (oh ok, you can take a quick peek), what was the colour of the word on the first page?

And on the fourth page?

Chances are, your answers were red and orange: yet the actual colours are blue and green. The *words* are red and orange.

The rational part of your brain is overruling the emotional element of your brain.

On the other hand, it has been found in legal cases accusing doctors of providing substandard medical advice that it is not actually the level of advice offered that drives a patient to sue but the way in which a doctor talks to the patient.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, doctors who spend longer with their patients, both actively listening and carefully explaining their own actions, avoid the courts no matter the standard of their advice.

The patients suing for malpractice are actually rationalising an emotional motive.

Emotions and rationality aren't separated but are indelibly linked and confused.

There is no left brain, right brain separation: rather, an integrated system of emotional and rational processing occurs at the same time.

The same set of systems responsible for reasoning and rational thought are also involved in emotion, feeling and even processing body signals.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, it isn't true that cars are now sold purely through emotional values, such as safety for Volvo and success and masculinity for BMW. They can only make such claims because of their equally well promoted technical attributes.

And who buys a car without a test drive?<sup>10</sup>

## **‘I Do and I Understand’**

‘I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.’<sup>11</sup>

It has been found that students are far more engaged if lessons involve actual hands-on demonstrations or experiments or, better still, ways in which they can demonstrate their own skills: it evokes sensory, personal experiences, and intrinsically motivated behaviours.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, it is not always possible to involve someone in this way – but think how the great novelists invoke as many senses as possible to conjure up a scene. They describe not only what can be seen, but also sounds and smells; they even elicit ideas of time and distance by speaking of evening skies and late trains.

Similarly, TV programmes involve the viewer as much as possible, building tension in thrillers and even game shows such as *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, making you ‘Guess Who Did It?’, or galvanising you into voting for the star with *The X Factor*.

Engagement is a merger of multiple qualities, such as seeking to understand, believing in one’s own capability, and having and maintaining a purpose.<sup>13</sup>

This shouldn’t be confused with *multiple* messages, which only cause greater confusion to the poor, befuddled brain. On the contrary, the message should be single minded – yet at the same time capable of lighting up *multiple areas of the brain*.<sup>14</sup>

‘Say after me’ is one of the great, tried and tested methods of aiding both memory and even understanding. So is writing something down. Other parts of the brain are instantly brought into play through even the simplest of actions.

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If someone has to work out something for themselves, even if you provide them with all the clues to the solution, they will naturally recall it far easier than if they'd simply been told the answer.

(In a series of classic experiments,<sup>15</sup> it was shown that when people were subtly given the answer to tests they'd struggled over by themselves, most later believed they had solved the puzzle through their own reasoning and insight.)

In most of the psychological studies already referred to, it was concluded that the best way to engage people was to identify and announce a goal or vision – that is, to clearly understand what you're expecting of someone – and then to provide a brief, real-world experience related to that vision – that is, paint a picture for them, demonstrating their role in the achievement of that vision.

What people tend to forget about products is that ultimately they are an *experience* – just think about that for a moment, and you'll realise that there are few if any exceptions to this maxim.

## Engagement and its Application in Marketing.

What's to stop a commercial for a wildlife park asking the viewer to stroke their cat and imagine touching an animal fifteen times that size? Or asking them to crane their neck back, telling them that's what they'll have to do to see the head of a giraffe?

People can be asked to feel their clothes or their carpets, look out at their garden, smell their partner's neck, stretch their toes in their shoes, check their bills, taste the back of their hand, or 'Pinch an Inch'.

They can even be asked if they're capable of taking this sharp curve in their car, or striking someone in the face with a violent weapon – which is the equivalent of the damage suffered in a crash.

But as we've seen, involvement can be invoked through other ways than action.

It can be a question. It can be an undemanding puzzle, or an intriguing line. It can even be as simple as a word.

In his presidential campaign, Bush talked not of Tax *Cuts* but Tax *Relief* – and the voters immediately felt they needed to be relieved of something onerous.

An incredibly successful press campaign for Amnesty International highlighted passages from letters written by grateful political prisoners – an amazing demonstration of the power of writing that persuaded people of the importance of writing to Amnesty with a donation.

A Cancer Research campaign revolved around a graphic of nine cells, eight perfect, having been cured, one still cancerous, in need of eradication – and people knew what was expected of them, knew too that there was hope when so many forms of cancer had already been cured.

In each case, there is an emotional and a rational element, plus an *involving factor*, a **demonstration of the importance of the action expected of the reader**, coming from each charity's *core purpose* – the campaigns couldn't be from anyone else.

In other campaigns a similar effect can be achieved through a form of mirroring.

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Mirroring, of course, is the term used to describe the way people can be made to feel at ease through a replication of their body language, vocal style and attire. It helps create a sense of *identification* yet, just as importantly, this isn't achieved through a sacrifice of the speaker's own qualities – rather, the listener can still aspire to be like the speaker.

For years, Southern Comfort suffered declining sales despite expensive campaigns portraying its provenance of highly spirited, party-inclined New Orleans.

The problem was that Southern Comfort's target market was young drinkers – none of whom wanted or needed to be told what made a great party!

The answer for Southern Comfort was to portray not jazz singers but the highly rebellious individuals populating the southern states. They were people the target market could *identify* with while also *aspiring* to be like them; the real, supreme form of the nonconforming rebel.

Of course, in many areas of marketing it is even easier to involve a number of the potential customer's senses.<sup>16</sup>

At events, the EnSP should be used not only to persuade people to touch and feel, but also to *question* what they are doing.

With Direct Mail and Fliers, you generally want the customer to do something anyway – to fill in the coupon, or call. The EnSP is tied in with these or some other action, in a similar way to the Amnesty campaign above.

Engagement, of course, is a principle need of Telemarketing, but with an Engaging Selling Point it is so much easier to keep the customer interested and involved.

You engage someone by being interested in them, not just by showing them how interesting you are.

The most amazing thing about 'Engagement' is that it makes people feel good about themselves.

## **Engaging Your Workforce: The Phenomenon of 'Flow'**

Although employees become more cognitively and emotionally engaged when their basic needs are met,<sup>17</sup> an even more important element of employee engagement is a sense of belonging to something beyond oneself.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, if your expectations of your employees are made clear, with comprehensible goals and feedback on progress, and you can connect their work to a larger, meaningful mission or purpose of the overall organisation – such that they are made to feel that they are contributing to the organisation – they will have higher levels of interest and motivation.<sup>19</sup>

As opposed to feeling separate from the organisation, you make them feel a part of the vision and – in a process psychologists call 'flow', a state of deep and meaningful engagement<sup>20</sup> – energy, thought, and creativity become focused on a project or goal.

'Flow' is an engrossing experience brought on by intense involvement in an activity in which individuals meet increasingly complex challenges by developing their skills.<sup>21</sup>

What more could anyone expect of their workforce?

## The Rules Of Engagement

There are no rules.

You often hear people speaking of things like 'The 9 Golden Rules of Marketing', as if they were mystical secrets, known only to a chosen few.

The fact is if they were really so wonderful everyone would know them by now, and we'd all be back on a level playing field anyhow.

The second fact is that most of these rules only work for someone who's doing everything so incredibly badly that anything would help – like telling teenagers they'd be more successful with the opposite sex if they managed to brush their teeth now and again.

Visit the website of a famous research company and you'll see the promotions supposedly helped by such rules are so dire *anything* would have improved them.

It is far better, of course, to make sure the promotions aren't so dire in the first place.

The problem with rules is that they can only be applied on a general basis.

Products, however, are individual and thereby in *some ways* unique.

Each product demands its *own* set of rules. The customers they're trying to attract have their own set of rules.

Each product demands – and *possesses* – its own **Engaging Selling Point**.

- 1 For instance, Csikszentmihalyi (various publications), or Kahn (1990)
- 2 Indeed, some psychologists, such as Skinner, Wellbom, & Connell (1990), have even suggested that engagement is a basic human need
- 3 Fredrickson 1998
- 4 According to Transactional Analysis, we all respond to different drivers
- 5 For instance, as seen in studies by John Guthrie, professor in the Department of Human Development, University of Maryland
- 6 Of course, when assessing this we have to take into account the updated versions of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which states that some needs take precedence over others. Thus in the original hierarchy, Biological and Physiological needs – air, food, drink, etc – naturally come first, followed by Safety needs – security, order, protection from elements, etc – Belongingness and Love needs – family, relationships, work group, etc – Esteem needs – independence, achievement, status, dominance, prestige, etc – and Self-Actualization needs – self-fulfilment, realising personal potential
- 7 See also the findings of the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2006
- 8 Ross Cogan – *Law in Business: In the Psychologist's Chair*
- 9 Antonio R. Damasio, Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Southern California – *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain. The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness. Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*
- 10 Yes, there are cars that people buy without a test drive – but they tend to be makes of cars that the purchaser has previously owned, or already holds in high esteem. BMWs, for instance, are amongst the least test driven of cars simply because of the outstanding reputation they have built up over the years
- 11 Chinese proverb
- 12 Bergin 1999
- 13 Cambourne 1995
- 14 Csikszentmihalyi 1991 Bergin 1999
- 15 Norman Maier
- 16 You've probably heard of neuro-linguistic programming: whereas some people are motivated visually, others react better to auditory or kinaesthetic stimuli. In actual fact, of course, this doesn't mean that they *only* react to such stimuli, but that their *spectrum* of sensory motivators works in a different way to others.
- 17 Kahn 1990
- 18 Baumeister & Leary 1995; once again, they also state that such a form of engagement is a basic human need
- 19 Wrzesniewski 1997
- 20 For instance, Csikszentmihalyi 1991
- 21 Csikszentmihalyi 1991



**believe**

**If you would like help in assessing your own Engaging Selling Point  
or would simply  
like to see examples of the Amnesty, Cancer Research  
and Southern Comfort  
campaigns, together with other promotions possessing an EnSP  
please call us on 01296 730230**

**Shouldn't everyone believe in your product as much as you do?**

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