

Q4
2020

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STRATEGY
HQ

6 STEPS TO CUSTOMER COURTSHIP & COMMITMENT

WHO IS DRIVING
CONSUMER SALES?

BUILDING TRUST:
A MODERN MARKETING
CHALLENGE



Who Is Driving Consumer Sales?

by David Cooper

The customer is king. Sales professionals accepted that consumers are the center of sales activity all along the customer journey. However, now there's a new wrinkle, in which a new set of customers gets the last word in forming tastes and opinions.



Consumers turn a skeptical eye to brand messaging

Currently, the average U.S. citizen spends about two hours a day using social media. As user screen time increases, however, customer patience with traditional ads is falling. For example, a recent article that describes marketing to [Millennials](#) shows that of survey respondents:

- Seventy-nine percent who view ads recognize that brands have their own agenda and sometimes describe ads as “a necessary evil.”
- One of three use ad blockers on their desktop and mobile devices.
- Forty percent say that their favorite online influencer understands them better than their real-life friends.

Weak enthusiasm about traditional ads, consumers pushing back on aggressive ads, and buyers looking to personalities for buying guidance have become the new normal. These third parties—reviewers, influencers, and brand ambassadors—dominate decision making along each stage of the buyer’s journey.

What happened? Trust—or the loss of trust in brands—happened.

Say hello to product reviewers...

Not too long ago, brands used traditional image marketing to convince consumers that their products and services were desirable

and would perform as advertised. Now, consumers have handed their trust about branded products to two sets of relative newcomers.

One group—product reviewers—are important participants in the new e-commerce ecosystem. Once a helpful part of online sales, many reviews are now manipulated by sellers having to compete in an increasingly brutal marketplace. Galaxies of untrustworthy five-star reviews can be traced to shadow review factories, how-to-beat-the-system tutorials, and a [surge of illegal review practices](#).

Of course, legitimate reviews still occur, and most consumers still believe in the star rating system. However, the current situation requires high-quality ratings to swim against the current of junk reviews.

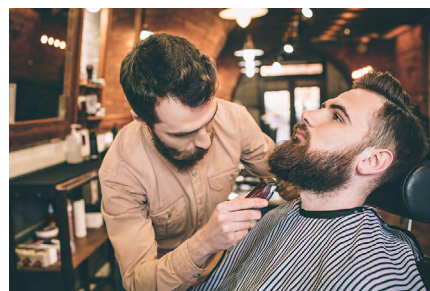
...and add influencers to the list of trustworthy parties

Influencers are an entirely different story. Remember the statistic about Millennials trusting peers rather than brands? Influencers work on this general principle. They can be celebrities, consumer friends and peers, or “just folks,” people who gather a following by appearing on attention-grabbing media bits on the internet. Being an influencer means using one’s authority, social position, knowledge, or relationship with an online audience to affect consumer buying decisions. Far more than merely marketing tools, these individuals are social relationship assets, people with whom brands can collaborate to achieve their business goals. (Of course, it would be dead wrong not to add cute pets and impossibly charming small children to the influencer category. They show how the qualities of mass appeal and relatability have become vital parts of consumer trustworthiness.)



Remember old-style celebrity endorsements? You know, messaging provided by stars of stage, screen, and sports. [Brand ambassadors](#) are a modern version of these influencers. These representatives consistently use their social media presence to boost awareness of and personify the values and mission of a brand. Their value lies in their ability to cut through the noise and commotion of an increasingly competitive marketplace. In a world driven by social media, brand ambassadors give businesses an efficient way to more effectively compete.

Brand ambassador programs are usually more than marketing campaigns. They are long-term, ongoing efforts meant to help representatives introduce a brand to their audience. Brands can have official ambassadors (they ask an influencer to represent their products). Or, people with an online presence can announce their interest in or engagement with a brand’s products—these are unofficial brand ambassadors. Either way, if the



influencer has credibility with the brand’s target audience, consumers are likely to listen up and pay attention.

Regaining consumer trust

These trends in consumer attention and trust are happening today. But, remember, brands can improve their Trust Quotient with B2C buyers.



6 Steps to Customer Courtship & Commitment

You know how to position your brand and where to be visible so that ideally suited candidates are most likely to see and interact with you. And it's working. Your music resonates and your dance card fills up, giving you opportunities to twirl new prospects into close encounters and hopefully, into your house of customers.

How often do you succeed? If results fall short of your goals, it might be that you are ambling through the dance of courtship with two left feet instead of magnetism and skill. I propose that if you court each prospect as you would a potential spouse, you will ignite and kindle more engagements. Symbolically, the footwork and finesse are much the same for capturing a prospect for life.

Here are the six stages of courtship and sure-footed steps you can master to create enviable and lasting customer journeys.

1 **See Introductions for What They Are**

People normally don't marry the day they become acquainted. A lot of learning, sharing, loving, and trusting are explored on the way to commitment. It is similar in business relationships.

Your marketing may turn heads and bring prospects knocking at your door. You may connect with promising referrals, or prospects may find you on their own, attracted by what they learn through a search or see in an

online review of your company or product. While these scenarios are what you hope for, each one is but an initial encounter. They know you exist. They even feel a spark that might lead somewhere special. But right now, everything important is going to happen after the introduction. Next, they want to know what's behind that dazzling appearance.

Don't count on everlasting love at first sight. Achieving real customer intimacy is a journey.

2 **Affirm Who You Are at Every Touch Point**

It is rare for a personal relationship to evolve to the status of significant other unless a suitor proves true to their



word. Customer courtship also has a proofing ground where meaningful and consistent messages are needed to form a foundation of trust for the relationship to grow.

Consider your brand's omnichannel strategy – your website, content marketing, social media, print, advertising, shopping platforms, video, apps – anywhere and everywhere prospects might encounter you. Is your brand messaging unified, cohesive, and strategic? Omnichannel is all about delivering seamless experiences, and this includes homogeneous communications. If messaging is inconsistent, sending mixed signals across channels, you will need to get your communications house in order so you can be successful in keeping and growing relationships.

3 Inspire Them to Consider a Relationship

Persuading a prospect to waltz with you to the next level – and the next – requires dexterity and the ability to encourage and inspire. Just like advancing a personal relationship, it's important to keep that spark alive. People gravitate toward relationships that are interesting and satisfying. While your goal is to reveal that the perceived value and benefits of your

brand are 'all that,' this is an early stage of courtship where opportunities to engage may be precious and few. Don't use every interaction to sell, sell, sell. Instead, nurture the progression by using time together to discover your prospect's professional aspirations and goals. Ask about their day-to-day struggles and the bigger challenges or competitive weaknesses that threaten their success.

Genuine interest and exchange deepen a relationship, build intimacy, increase reliance, and eventually open doors to the rewarding relationships you both seek.

4 While Dating, Focus on Getting to Commitment

There is a natural pace as two people glide from occasional to frequent dating and on to a committed relationship. Some rush to commitment and marriage while others are methodical. Human nature being what it is, speed is often influenced by one person more so than the other.

Similarly, at this point in your budding business relationship, what happens when can be determined by your prospect's wants and expectations – or by how enticing you make the experience. Make it personal and all about them. Use the insights you have gained to intimately speak to their needs. Share how your product or service and brand value will enrich their journey, solve challenges, one-up the competition, and make daily life easier and their world a better place.

And since great relationships are built on the ability to negotiate, find creative, appealing ways to package and price

your offerings to fit their unique needs and budget.

5 Keep Love Alive After Marriage

Marriage is not the final stage of a relationship, just as a purchase is not the end of your customer's journey with you – it is only the beginning!

Never neglect or take your customer for granted because there will always be suitors pursuing them. Use words and actions to reaffirm they are valued, always a priority, and appreciated. Most important, stay in touch, responsive, and accessible because their needs, opportunities, and challenges are sure to evolve. If you want your relationship to keep on flourishing, keep on dancing! Maintain the same genuine brand of interest and intrigue as you did during courtship.

6 Build Customer Advocacy

Loyalty and devotion are hard-won achievements in a relationship and even more difficult to sustain over time. Coveted expressions of love, intentional acts of kindness and affection, and a lot of ingenuity and work are required to keep the reservoir full and obstacles at bay.

Ensure customers remain happy, loyal, and ready to grow their business with you by delighting them with continuous innovation, new products or services, process improvements, or better ways to interact with you or their own customers through technology and service advancements.

If you monitor your market and continue to excel at and communicate what you do best, you will hold your customers on the proverbial dance floor for life.

by David Cooper



BUILDING TRUST

A MODERN MARKETING CHALLENGE

EATing Your Way to Better Customer Trust

One of the most effective ways to build brand value is to improve the trustworthiness of your website and its content. It's an effective tactic because your company's website might be the first time that consumers get to know your brand. A 2016 change to the Google search algorithm emphasized the E-A-T approach to measuring the value of websites to online visitors. Although this method is usually part of the SEO process, it also offers valuable hints to writing content that builds consumer trust.

The E-A-T approach describes three must-have elements:

- **Expertise**, which describes a brand's resources of skill and experience. Whether a brand sells art supplies or high-end ladies' handbags, consumers always want to know why they should buy at your business. They want to know, "Will these folks be able to deliver the goods, as they claim?" Content that's consistently truthful, engaging, and useful to your target audience can move consumers to reply, "Yes!"
- **Authority**, which describes a brand's standing within its industry, local community, or niche. Is your business known as an authority, thought leader, or the source of gotta-have-it-right-now products? If so, consumers are more likely to choose your offerings as they move along the buyer's journey.
- **Trustworthiness** gives site visitors reasons why they can trust website

The number of websites worldwide has grown into the billions. Given all the claims made from these sites, how can brands encourage customer trust?

content and the products and services that are described on the site.

But what can businesses do to encourage trust in their own customers? There are down-to-earth methods that any business can use.

Website Improvements That Make Your Brand More Trustworthy

Developing website content that uses E-A-T principles is important. If persuaded to trust in a brand's website content, consumers will transfer that trust to your products or services. Providing website visitors with E-A-T-based content shows that your brand pays attention to:

- Content that's accurate, useful, and relevant to a target audience
- Topics that matter most to visitors – especially important on high-value “Your money or your life” pages
- Visitor safety throughout the time of their website visit

But how can brands use E-A-T methods to enhance customer trust?

Communicating Expertise

To claim expertise in a convincing way, a brand must show its human face. It's the best way to show a brand's unique combination of experience, skills, and personality. When used effectively, [personal branding](#) can supplement your corporate marketing efforts. And, using customer reviews and testimonials on your landing pages or showcase videos of [your products](#) used by real people can [provide](#) persuasive examples of [social proof](#).

Promoting Authority

Communicating authority requires that brands nurture their reputations. Especially in today's peer-to-peer social economy, reputation building is an important part of business success.

You can develop authority by:

- Beefing up the author descriptions and social media profiles of your experts
- Contacting and working with influencers and members of your core audience
- Developing thought leadership with high-value content placed on trusted platforms



- Telling your brand's story to connect with your core audience, wherever they might be

Savvy internet searchers don't expect to find reputation information for smaller businesses. But they do expect it from large businesses, websites of large organizations, and well-known content creators.

Improving the Trustworthiness of Your Website

Website visitors will trust your brand, but only if you give them reasons to. That means taking website security seriously. The importance of onsite user safety has become a big part of customer trust. Ideally, site content, design, and processes will make visitors comfortable as they read, share, and recommend content via social media. Making visitors to your websites feel safe is a high-priority item of their

Provide a robust security infrastructure, which will tell visitors that you have their best interests in mind.

concerns. If you still need to get your SSL certificate, do it immediately. If you need to invest in other site-related security assets, such as a more effective firewall

or cybersecurity services, update them right away. And take consent data management practices seriously. Many consumers do. They view data privacy and safety as indicators of where brand priorities lie. Do you want your visitors to have a safe website experience as well as a pleasant one? Provide a robust security infrastructure, which will tell visitors that you have their best interests in mind.

[Recent updates](#) to the E-A-T guidelines reflect a greater concern about the usefulness and value of online content. This renewed emphasis on customer trust shows how online content can help to put your brand and its offerings in a more favorable light.



Calm in the storm.

the **cooper** group

The Cooper Group, Inc.
5 Concourse Parkway
Suite 3000
Atlanta, GA 30328
678-474-9678

To subscribe, e-mail us at
StrategyHQ@thecoopergroup.net

the **cooper** group

www.thecoopergroup.net

 @TCCInsights