

*moving*  
**TARGETS**  
CREATING ENGAGING BRANDS IN AN ON-DEMAND WORLD

GABRIEL ALUISY



shake press

## **Moving Targets**

Creating Engaging Brands in an On-Demand World

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# INTRODUCTION

## OOPS, SOMETHING HAPPENED

**S**omething remarkable happened in 2006 that ushered in an age of change. Like most revolutions or coups it started quietly and unassumingly. For some it was a simple phrase. For others it became a mantra. In the end—whether consciously or unconsciously—it would shape the way consumers interacted and endeared themselves to the products they used daily. Who would have guessed that a simple phrase could launch sweeping changes to the way corporations and small businesses alike built and maintained their brand identity?

I was sitting at my desk in Delray Beach, Florida when I noticed it for the first time. A few days prior, a co-worker had given me a gift. It was a

virtual gift: one of his ten precious Gmail invites. At the time, Gmail was an invite-only service for techies and people in-the-know. I never would have guessed that invitation would launch my own passion for connecting brands to consumers.

I was pretty satisfied with my Hotmail account that I had used since 1999, as well as my company-provided Horde account. They were both a means to an end. Like most, I had never thought of email as anything more than a delivery system for electronic messages that had a finite limit to the information they could store.

Gmail was cool though. For one, it offered a limitless and constantly growing environment, where deleting emails was a thing of the past. I could save everything, until the end of time, on Google's dime! It also sported some great sorting options and had a built in chat system. I liked the way you could preview attachments without the need to download them and fish them out of a folder on your hard drive. Lastly, it was just an intuitive piece of software that worked nearly flawlessly.

It's that "nearly" bit that did it. Since it was so new, they were still working out some kinks. On that day I had just wanted to stop an outgoing email so I could edit a few lines of text. I hit the BACK button on my browser after I had hit SEND, but before I got the confirmation message that my email had gone through. That's when something came alive inside Gmail.

It felt like a scene out of *The Matrix* when I looked up to find that the system was speaking to me. Yes, the computer was talking back to me!

A little yellow box appeared on my screen telling me:

"Oops. Something went wrong."

Now, I wish I could tell you that at that moment I came to a great realization, trumpets sounded from heaven and my life was forever altered. The truth is, I muttered something under my breath like, "Damn it." I smirked at the quirkiness of that line, and went back to what I was doing. I re-wrote the email, more eloquently than the first draft (which is so often the case) and re-sent it.

I would see that message pop up from time to time in the next few days and weeks and slowly it began to take hold. I know I wasn't the only one that it affected. Since then, I have begun to see similar signs and messages from companies and brands that are on the cutting edge.

It seems ironic that a system flaw could signal such sweeping change to the thinking and philosophy of so many brands to come. But it did. This one little phrase would forever change "company speak".



# CHAPTER 1

## ON-DEMAND, ALL THE TIME

**W**e live in an increasingly on-demand world where nearly everything is at our fingertips at the very instant we wish. We are consuming media at an exponentially faster clip, devouring music, books, DVDs, television, movies and more with ferocious hunger. As society's pace quickens, your brand must match it step-for-step.

Gone are the days of waiting for your favorite television show to air or re-run when you've missed it. Just use your DVR or a service like Hulu. Why bother calling into a radio request line when you can "YouTube it" and hear it right away? Better yet, services like Pandora or Spotify let you listen to it and then explore similar artists matched to your specific taste.

The album is officially dead and we've become a singles driven society where B-sides are replaced by the next big hit. There's never a need to wait for your local bookshop to open, because you can download a book straight to your Kindle or tablet in the time it would have taken you to brush your teeth and put your clothes on. Movies are just a few Netflix taps away—or if you're daring enough, you could download current releases over the internet. Just about every major network offers an app that lets you stream their content at your convenience.

This on-demand world is not limited to media outlets. Every business must learn to feed the ever-increasing need of instant gratification. Business-to-consumer brands feel the pressure of the pace most, but business-to-business companies are affected as well, because this is a worldwide psyche shift.

Since the gates of the information age opened, people have stampeded through like a herd of buffalo, squashing out brands that refuse to adapt—just ask Blockbuster or AltaVista. It's relentless too; they're not going to slow down. The pace only grows more furious.

The average consumer is developing a “give it to me now” mentality, and not just for their dry-cleaning. If you want your brand to succeed you had better be prepared to deliver instantly. People increasingly want an immediate solution to their problem. If your brand can solve that problem or answer a question quicker than the next, you've taken the first steps to success and will gain a valuable leg up on your competition.

It's not enough to be better than the next guy—your brand or product has to be better *and* faster. In 1993, the internet was running over telephone lines at 56k speed. Not even a decade passed before 50mb speeds and faster were available to households over fiber optic lines. That's about 200 times faster! Is your business 200 times faster than it was 10 years ago? Can you imagine a world where you're moving 200 times as fast as you are today? You had better, because in 5 years, you will probably need to be there. Busi-

nesses, therefore, need to make decisions, provide information, answers, and product at exponentially increasing speed.

I can tell you from experience building my brand that being faster is one of the most valuable currencies you can offer. With design schools pumping out new graduates each year, it has become a very crowded space for our core business of graphic and web design services. Everyone has an uncle, cousin, former classmate or friend who is a designer. The problem with graphic designers is they are notoriously poor at responding. I've heard countless clients tell me that they constantly wait weeks or even months to hear back from their designers, or get simple updates made to their websites.

My firm solves that problem and has become successful by having industry-leading turnaround times. Most projects are drafted by our artists and delivered electronically within 24 hours of receipt. This is a nearly unheard of practice, but we have become known for it and my team takes pride in it. We are heroes to new clients and valuable partners to existing clients and we have no fear of competition, because we have spoiled them for anyone else. In that way we monopolized speed.

Our second largest revenue stream is printing. If you've ever had the pleasure of walking into your local print shop, only to be told your job was delayed or misprinted I can feel your pain. That's why I decided I would only use local vendors that gave me the fastest turnaround times. My company, in turn, passes along that efficient service to our clients. We deliver their printing straight to their door, and in many cases, as quickly as that same day. Larger jobs might take 2 or 3 days, whereas my competitors take weeks. It's a differentiator that is tough to beat, and my clients don't mind paying a few dollars extra to get that.

Our profits have doubled year over year for the past four years mostly due to the fact that we are quicker. Notice I didn't say better (though I truly believe we are). It's my belief that being better in today's world is second to being quicker and more responsive. If you don't believe me, ask Apple's iPhone team. They built the best phone. It was better than all the rest,

and they were top dog. Five years removed from building the best phone, their sales lag Samsung's. They didn't keep pace, so their market share got swallowed up by a hungry, faster beast. What they had was better, but they weren't quick enough to stay better. The point is, it's great to be the best, but don't expect to sit back and relax once you're on top. You had better keep setting the pace.

### **Some Tips for Getting Faster:**

- Invest in a CRM or Project Management Software and use it religiously.
- Find vendors you can rely on who won't slow you down and will limit errors.
- Think 3 months ahead for promotions, sales and events.
- Incentivize your staff and reward quickness (without compromising quality).
- Cheaper solutions are usually just that—cheap. I've found cheaper to coincide with slower.
- Systemize your process and workflow.
- Write down instructions for tasks as they are created so staff has a set of clear steps to follow.

Today's brands must not only be faster in their delivery of service, but in delivery of relevant and useful information. Consumers connect with brands that open their warehouses of knowledge and ideas.

Often, brands are fearful to share their intellectual property. They think that by doing so, there will be no reason for customers to use their products or services. In reality, it's just the opposite. Sure, there are do-it-yourselfers out there, but the vast majority of people want on-demand service without any of the work. And trust me, you wouldn't want to do business with the

do-it-yourselfers anyhow. They're often the ones that nickel and dime you, second guess your processes and are quickest to complain.

Take restaurants for example. It's nice to know the secret ingredients of your favorite restaurant's recipes, but cooking is time consuming and such a mess. I think most people will agree it's a lot easier to have a trained chef prepare it for you, along with a competent staff that will clean up when you've finished eating. Knowing how intricate the recipe is, and the exotic ingredients they used, makes us appreciate the meal that much more. But that doesn't necessarily mean we want to cook it every time we're craving it. And even when we try, it never looks or tastes quite the same, does it?

Along with this new speed of information another phenomenon has occurred. We now live in the age of the savvy shopper. With endless information freely available online about your product or service, managing your reputation can be a full time task. In fact, online brand reputation firms have begun to spring up everywhere.

Clients have expectations and preconceptions of you and your business before they pick up the phone, fill out a contact form, or buy your product. They know just about everything there is to know about you. They have read reviews, talked to friends and they have done their research. This puts brands in an interesting position which can be to their advantage or to their detriment.

An AOL / InsightsNow 2014 study found that "For 54% of planned purchases and 50% of impulse purchases, buyers knew the brand they would buy before they shopped." The study, aptly named "Buying at Speed", found "always-on shopping creates preferences that carry over into the active shopping period. While in-market targeting is important, brands must also consider having consistent ad/brand presence to ensure that once an individual enters the active shopping window, they'll convert."

To put it plainly, the majority of consumers make up their minds in advance. It's your job to make sure there is a wealth of information out there

in front of them in the form of press, advertisements, facts, figures, studies, FAQs, testimonials and the like.

### **Your Brand Must Take a Service-Centric Approach to Compete in the On-Demand World**

In addition to research, customers are also demanding better service from brands. I recently attended a conference where the speaker asked the audience for a show of hands if they were more savvy and demanding now than they were five years ago. Just about everyone in attendance raised their hand. I'll wager you are a tougher nut to crack these days as well. And, guess what? Five years from now you'll be that much more difficult to please.

It used to be that you could get by just being the best. Those days are gone. You not only have to have the best product or service, you have to have the best customer service experience. Consumers aren't judging your service in relation to your direct competition; they're judging you by the likes of Mercedes, Bose, Disney and other exceptional brands they come into contact with. Those are the expectations you have to live up to when dealing with the on-demand buyer.

### **Tips for Successfully Feeding the Information Age Appetite**

Most likely, you have a wealth of information you can share that's right under your fingertips. Here are some things you should do:

- Post daily messages across the major social networks
- Start a blog or knowledge base and post articles weekly or monthly
- Write a press release and share it on the major PR sites
- Post your PowerPoint presentations on slideshare.com

- Host teleconferences and webinars over Google Hangouts
- Live Tweet over Twitter to engage and answer customer questions
- Create informative videos and post those to YouTube and Vimeo
- Create a newsletter or whitepaper and send via email as well as post to online magazine sites like [issuu.com](http://issuu.com)

### **That's the Power of Free**

Supplying valuable information for free can be a powerful way to maximize your brand's exposure. Valuable is the key word here. As I'm writing this, there are currently 2 million blog posts written each day. There are 144 billion email messages sent each day (of which nearly 70% are spam by the way). There are 175 million tweets sent each day. There are 40 million photos taken on Instagram. And there are 133 million hours of video watched on YouTube alone.<sup>1</sup> With all this and much more going on, it's increasingly harder for your brand's message to get through. The fact is, a very large portion of this information is garbage.

Content Marketing has become a buzzword in recent years and has quickly become a must-use internet marketing method because it offers a direct bridge between customer and brand. Content Marketing is simply providing information or images such as blog posts, infographics, memes, etc. in hopes of drawing the search engine spiders—and ultimately the consumer—to your site where you can then sell them your product or service. The problem is, most brands don't know how to harness it properly. They have a proverbial bridge to nowhere. In most cases, they are concerned only with the endgame - the sale. They have forgotten, or never taken the time to learn, the most sustainable means to that end- the loyal repeat customer

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<sup>1</sup> Source - Sean Valant, [Hostgator.com](http://Hostgator.com)

who is captured by solid gold content and valuable information that can stand the test of time.

Brands that supply new research or insights, provide useful tips, teach lessons through inspirational stories, or communicate relevant news create more loyal customers and brand champions. Brands that stuff keywords into blog posts, tweet about whatever is trending, or send out memes about current events unrelated to their brand or brand story, get what they deserve: fans and followers with no loyalty who come and go and do nothing for their bottom line. They are just useless stats on an analytics report.

It's important to make sure your communication and service continues to meet expectations. Once you've begun the process of creating great content, it's all too easy to sit back and wait for results. Fight through it, and pick up your pace. Remember, you'll need to be 200% as efficient in your delivery in a few years time. Once you've over delivered or gone above and beyond with your service, it's easy to assume customers will remember that and cut you some slack the next time around. That couldn't be further from the truth! In fact, they'll come to expect and even demand it of you. It's hard to swallow, but what you created or did for them yesterday doesn't matter. There are no plateaus in the on-demand world for brands that want to succeed.

**Tweet the Deets:**

There are no plateaus in the on-demand world for brands that want to succeed. #MovingTargets



# CHAPTER 2

## LET'S GET PERSONAL

*“Don’t let anybody kid you. It’s all personal, every bit of business...they call it business. OK. But it’s personal as hell.” -from **The Godfather***

I’m not saying you should take ALL your business tips from gangsters in movies, but the above line is as true today as it was when Mario Puzo penned it, and perhaps even more applicable.

We live in an increasingly impersonal world. One only has to sit on a bench in any shopping mall and look around for five minutes to prove my point. Children, teenagers and adults that walk by aren’t conversing, they’re

surfing. There's less and less conversation or debate at the food court tables, and many more heads bowed low squinting at a smartphone, tablet or personal gaming system. The only people trying to engage are the kiosk clerks, and they're generally dodged like lepers by grim-faced patrons shuffling to their next destination. That's not just life in your local shopping mall, that's life everywhere.

Often I wonder if people enjoy the moment anymore, or if they're just too busy trying to capture it for Facebook or Instagram. Waxing philosophically, I ask myself, "Are we really there if we're just snapping selfies and looking through a lens on a smartphone?" But that's another conversation altogether. The point is, we're shutting others out more.

Just the other day I walked into my local bagel shop for breakfast with my wife. It's known in our neighborhood as a family friendly spot, and there were families there that morning all right. The table to our left had a couple both reading books on their separate iPads, and the table to my right had a dad sipping his coffee and checking his mail while the kids pushed buttons furiously on their Nintendo DS systems. In the half hour that I was there, the couple didn't speak to each other one time, and the Dad only looked up twice to ask the kids a question, for which he received a one word answer each time.

Here's the good news: you can make this work to your advantage. Our impersonal world offers brands an amazing chance to capture these conversation-starved consumers. Your target market is literally craving a personal touch. They're getting it less and less from their family, friends and certainly the companies they deal with. By simply having a human being answer your phone instead of voice prompts from a computer, you can take a giant leap forward from your competition.

The famous radio broadcaster Arthur Godfrey knew that words could create a dynamically different response if they could be directed at *someone*, instead of at *everyone*. Godfrey had been working as radio announcer in Baltimore, Maryland when a severe car crash confined him to his home for

a time. During those days he had little else to do than listen to the radio. He noticed that most radio talent would use sweeping generalities and spoke to no one in particular. Radio announcers and hosts of the day would start broadcasts with, "Hello out there in radioland," or "Good evening ladies and gentlemen." Godfrey concluded that a more personal approach would be much more effective.

Godfrey decided to use a simple phrase to start his broadcast. Each time he began his show he would ask his audience, "How are you?" By using the word "you" he was talking to someone directly, and listeners felt as if he was speaking to them, right there in their home. He amassed fans and followers because he spoke on their level.

The reaction that a brand can achieve by simply talking to their audience, instead of at them, in a personal way is compounded in today's on-demand and impersonal world. Where there is lack there is opportunity; seize it. That's what the best brands are doing today and it's the easiest and most cost-effective way to stand out from your competition.

Remember my Gmail story? They used a silly word, "Oops," for an error message. The way they used it wasn't silly at all, however. What Google did in that moment was make the mundane personal. What I thought of as just a cold piece of software had a layer of depth I wasn't expecting. It didn't set in right away. That's because it crept in the back door, past the logical side of my brain (like most good branding does). Today's strong brands are personal and target the emotional side of the brain. They find ways to communicate more intimately because that's what we lack. Google could have told me, "There was an error processing your request," with some code or number for reference. But they didn't, and that was genius.



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