

Dharma Marketing



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STOP MARKETING. START ENGAGING.

Have you ever heard of Scott Stratten and Alison Kramer? They are the brains behind this formidable and titillating motto '*Stop marketing, start engaging*'. They aren't yoga teachers but authors and influential keynote speakers from Canada who travel the world to present and share their views on all things marketing. With a blunt, hilarious and deeply passionate approach, they break down generational cohort theories and trendy marketing concepts to remind us to see beyond the veil of marketing buzzwords and focus our energy on one essential factor: the ultimate customer experience.

The power of attention and intention

In the yoga industry, it all comes down to one key question: Are we, teachers and staff, giving our close attention to our students not only on the mat but also off the mat? Some might say yes, naturally, and other will be completely candid and state the obvious: We would love to, but we don't always have time... and that is what mailing lists, newsletters and Facebook posts are for. One push to all by the click of a button. It is definitely a good start. However, in the process of being social-media savvy, our intention sometimes overtakes our attention, and we forget two key elements: to listen and be aligned with what our students/customers need.

Inclinations

We hear from marketing experts that the "new" generation, also known as millennials, is different from other customers, that "*millennials want something that engages with them and makes them feel something, even if it's something that's getting them to buy or try something. They don't want to be advertised to; they want you to engage with them.*" (source: Michael Africk, Forbes Council).

Aren't we all millennials after all? Don't we all want that? No matter our background, our generations, our values, attitudes, beliefs and inclinations, we don't want to be numbers any more than our students do.

Which areas should we focus on to better engage with our students?

1. Think in terms of brand

Whether we have a small or large customer base, our brand is the personality of our business. We are a representation of our brand, even if the term sounds very marketing and business-like. Our yoga school, our yoga studio, our staff, ourselves--we offer a service with which our students have an emotional and psychological relationship. Anything we do or say or don't do is something our students will identify with or move away from. This is true for any business and not just in the business of yoga and well-being. What makes a brand a great brand is not the mission or goals we set. It is the EXPERIENCE our customers--our students--get from our service.

2. Don't simply "process" customers/students through systems. Develop a mindset and culture of service instead.

We need to think in terms of cultivating the ultimate customer experience. This story is real; I experienced it. It is about a marketing faux-pas.

Imagine yourself as a yoga practitioner registering for an Anusara yoga workshop in your own region months in advance, paying right away online with your debit card. Weeks prior to the start of the workshop, you inform the teacher and the administrative assistant at the studio that you have to cancel your participation. You are aware of a processing fee associated with a refund. In return you expect a quick resolution and refund of your debit card.

After sending several reminders, you get the promised refund except that it comes in the form of a bank check that has crossed oceans. It is true that the smartest Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) would not know that it is extremely complicated to cash checks from other regions and/or currencies. However, yoga teachers and yoga staff should remember that the customer experience starts prior to the student being "on the mat" and ends after.

Delivering beautiful classes is a goal, but "serving" our students is a mindset. It is important that we make sure that we, as teachers, do not only embrace this concept but also share it at all levels, staff included. A marketing faux-pas is when a teacher or a member of the staff does not pay

close attention to the student. It is when they give yoga practitioners reasons to attend workshops elsewhere next time because administrative interactions were thoughtless and gave them the feeling of being just a number.

3. Seek windows of opportunities

The web is filled with ways and tips for fostering loyalty. We can easily pick and mix, but it won't work if we don't recognize that windows of opportunities are there in front of us to tap. Attendees' cancellations for events and workshops, for instance, are part of our business. What about turning them into future opportunities rather than into dormant customers? By tracking those who have cancelled, when and for which event, we can follow up after the event and personalize our messages when we offer a similar event. The window of opportunity in this example is about creating emotional connections by making it more personal. It is the difference between pushing versus pulling for an event.

4. Dust off your customer list by using segmentation

A lot can be found on the Internet on the technicalities of effective segmentation (segmenting email contacts into specific groups/interests). What is important to remember is that it is not about our preferred means of communication anymore. Rather it is about how our customers/yoga students want to connect, what they are interested in, what they want to read.

I happened to start receiving regular communications on yoga, weight loss and how to eat better. The topic did not interest me so I finally sent a reply saying that even though some of my students may have been interested, they were in a different time zone and did not speak English to be able to participate. I continued receiving emails, and then one day all communications stopped. There was a window of opportunity there to connect and use advanced segmentation or by personally inviting me to use a self-segmentation function on the web page through a tool like business management/online scheduling software. There is nothing wrong in letting our students do the segmentation for us. They know what they want, and they will be more apt to open emails, click through them and attend events.

Segmentation is like an upside-down pyramid structure, with the entire customer list at the top. From there, segments can be created. There could be a "Dormant customer" segment for those that never open email links, have not attended events in a long time and for whom very specific communications and tests will be needed. A "Yogini list" for female specific

events could be a segment. Even a segment within a segment could be created, like a "Great Yogini list" for those women practitioners who join regularly, open emails and click through and for whom you want to organize/offer something special.

There is a lot of power behind segmentation, creating relevant messages and engaging. It is time-consuming, but there are lots of resources and tools to support our efforts.

5. Infuse your marketing with Grace

In his bestseller **Unmarketing**, Scott Stratten wrote: *"Marketing is not a task, it is a VERB, (...) it is not a campaign, it is everyday, it is organic, it is moving, it is changing depending on interactions"*. I would personally add to this: It is infused with grace and sensitivity.

We look forward to hearing from you. Any topic you would like to write about or would like us to further develop, we are all ears. Om Shanti, shanti, shanti.