
MARKETING ORIENTEERING IN A BRAND FORWARD WORLD

Tips for developing effective new product and marketing strategies for the uncharted (and unchartable) wilderness of today's constantly changing technology, trends and culture.



MECHANICA

Orienteering is a family of sports that requires navigational skills using a map and compass to navigate from point to point in diverse and usually unfamiliar terrain, and normally moving at speed. Participants are given a topographical map, usually a specially prepared orienteering map, which they use to find control points.

(source: Wikipedia)

This sport is a good analogy for how marketing strategists should approach branding positioning, product development, user experience and other challenges in an environment that's in a constant state of disruption driven by social and marketing technology innovation. *Branding Forward* is all about finding a uniquely efficient and effective way to reach your objective. It's like orienteering. Given the right tools—a map with some waypoints and a compass—people with the right kind of training can blaze an effective path through the wilderness and get to their destination before their competitors.

The trick, of course, is that instead of the appropriate waypoints being printed on the map already, it's up to today's marketer to decide what they should be before they get too far down the trail. Guessing incorrectly or falling back on traditional standards will lead to suboptimal results such as an undifferentiated brand positioning, a “me-too” product or a lost opportunity to redefine a category before the category redefines you.

Here is a methodology *Mechanica* uses to help brands lean forward as they chart paths through uncharted territory and do it as part of a rapid development process designed to shorten time to market and develop game-changing ideas.

Current contexts...
choosing waypoints

Context determines how we evaluate the relevancy and distinctiveness of any stimuli. Determining the dimensions that are driving category change is essential to mapping out leading edge branding and product development strategies. Trying to predict the future is a fruitless task, but identifying the current trends that are shaping it can be done relatively quickly by tapping into the debates about the future of categories that are constantly raging.

For example, we recently helped a magazine publisher developing a new offering for a business audience figure out what the new definition of “publishing” should be. They had come to the conclusion that publishing, as it exists today, has no future and that they would have to reinvent their business model to avoid becoming a victim of an industry in decline.

A review of blogosphere debates, some qualitative research conducted with industry luminaries and a survey of content delivery models in rapidly evolving categories such as music, video and news identified a number of trends that were pointing to radical new definitions of what publishing needed to become and how this client's prospective audience was increasingly choosing to consume content.

Some key drivers we identified included trends such as:

- Co-generated content
- Channel agnostic delivery
- Free
- On-demand
- Personalized curation
- Real world vs. academic or “expert” viewpoint
- Peer reviews
- Vertical integration from inspiration to information to application

These drivers helped us chart what the brand experience and product offerings needed to be in order to represent a truly new definition of what a publisher should be going forward. Conceptual waypoints on our map as it were. Without an understanding that these dimensions would be used by prospects as assessment criteria for the new brand, development efforts would have been governed by historical criteria rather than contemporary ones. Not a good start to the journey.

Knowing the waypoints is one thing, finding one’s way to the waypoints is quite another and requires some navigation tools.

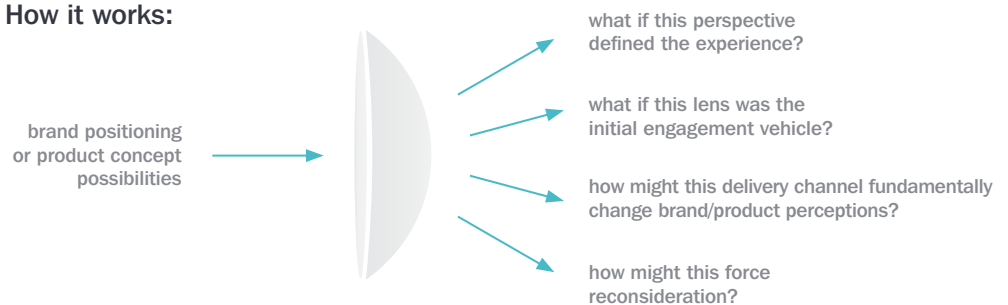
**Current contexts...
choosing waypoints**

To find our way in building new business models, propositions and brand experiences, we try to conceptualize what they might look like when viewed through a series of “lenses,” chosen because they represent the contemporary cultural, technological, political and economic drivers impacting a customer’s or prospect’s emotions and behaviors. It’s like looking through that machine at the optometrist where he flips through a series of lenses and asks if the eye chart is more or less readable for each one.



It’s an exercise that brings issues into focus and helps marketers more easily see possibilities that represent truly new thinking in terms of what their brand experience could be or what forms their new product might take to make it more relevant and distinctive.

How it works:



For example, what would a brand look like through the lens of starting an “app store,” or through the lens of engaging its audience initially through a series of Ted-like conferences and events? What would each of these incarnations look and feel like? Why might they force reconsideration of the category?

Going back to the example of our publishing client, we chose a number of lenses that would help them see more clearly a path to a new vision of what a publisher could be and do given today’s culture and technologies.

- An app store with a huge inventory of audience relevant business applications
- An inspirational conference series
- A new social media property designed exclusively for “subscribers”
- An on-demand mobile delivery channel
- A magazine

By definition, the lenses, and the perspectives they produce, are different for every brand. The exercise forces marketers to consider their brand at a higher level, freed from the functional fixation of traditional category definitions. For our magazine publisher, that freedom helped them redefine their new venture not as a magazine to be published, but as a “content collaboration platform,” much like an operating system for computers where they set the editorial agenda and “developers,” in the form of marketing partners, subscribers and communities, create the content that will be available via a variety of channels...print being only one.

*Network partners...
rapid developments*

What good is being able to read the map and navigate to the ultimate goal if others get there first? Rapid development and prototyping need to be part of any effort to create an original brand experience or significantly redefine an existing one. Once we start to see where a brand could — or should — go, we match these insights against the resources and business goals of our client and then identify from our global partner network the additional resources needed to move the brand forward towards that new, more relevant space as quickly as possible.

“Not invented here” is a real virtue because, by definition, most organizations have optimized their talent pool to operate within familiar boundaries and don’t do that well when dropped into uncharted territory.

Summary

In today’s Brand Forward world, Marketing Orienteering isn’t an extreme sport; it’s a life skill. The discipline to uncover the leading edge contexts by which brands and products will be evaluated for relevancy and distinctiveness, the flexibility to view your initiatives through a variety of non-traditional lenses and the openness to court and embrace outside talent to quickly move concepts into reality are tools just as necessary as a compass and a map to win the game.

We’d jump at the opportunity to share more with you and your team about our approach to creating actionable Brand Engagement Strategies. For more information, please call Ted Nelson, CEO and Strategy Director at 978-499-7871 x101 or email tnelson@mechanicausa.com