



Deloitte CMO on the value of a Facebook 'like'

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[Jonathan Copulsky](#) is the chief marketing officer for Deloitte Consulting, an adjunct instructor in Medill's Integrated Marketing Communications program at Northwestern University, and a member of Medill's Spiegel Digital & Database Research Center's Advisory Board. He chatted with IMC online student Bridget Thoreson about the best ways to engage customers in the digital age:

As you know Spiegel's work is around understanding patterns of customer engagement that drive financial impact. How do you counsel your clients on the best ways to create customer engagement?

Copulsky: The counsel that we provide to clients when it comes to customer engagement is that interactions need the ring of authenticity. Whenever a brand reaches out to a customer, the mode, the tone, and the nature of the contact need to be completely aligned with the brand's essence. Contacts from a luxury producer must reflect that organization's high-touch brand, while contacts from a leading-edge technology company should exude that brand's focus on innovation. If you have customer engagement that's inconsistent with the brand promise

that's inconsistent with the brand promise, then it's not going to work. Or worse, you wind up alienating your most valuable customers.

Why did you accept the invitation to be on the advisory board?

Copulsky: I joined because of Spiegel's research focus on quantifying the relationship between customer engagement and the economic impact on a brand. The center's research goes beyond the descriptive and qualitative to help marketers understand the true return on marketing investments, particularly in the increasingly important digital space.

As Spiegel research has shown, social media can be an engagement gold mine for brands, but as your book "[Brand Resilience](#)" notes, it is also a fertile ground for brand sabotage. How can marketers best balance the opportunities and pitfalls presented by social media?

Copulsky: I agree. Social media creates wonderful opportunities for brands to amplify the impact of marketing and communications activities. Social media provide brands with a terrific platform for leveraging the goodwill of others. If somebody recommends my brand on social media, I'm able to take advantage of the trust that they have built with the people who follow them. But, trust can be very fragile and if you don't manage their trust carefully you can cause customers and brand advocates to become disaffected. When they become disaffected, they can turn against you. Social media amplifies negative word-of-mouth, just as it does for positive word-of-mouth. At Spiegel, we're researching both aspects of social media amplification. Social media also provides a wonderful opportunity to collect information on how customers are

talking about the brand. If you listen carefully to social media conversations, you're able to learn a tremendous amount about what customers are thinking.

In a piece for Advertising Age, you advised CMOs to take some lessons from the "Counterinsurgency" military field manual for when bad things happen to good brands. [The SRC has found](#) that although spending goes down from those who view negative word-of-mouth, it actually increases for those who post negative word-of-mouth and then experience the value of the brand (through loyalty points, gift cards, and so on). In light of these findings, do you believe a brand's emphasis should be on minimizing the number of people who are exposed to negative word-of-mouth about a brand, or responding to those who post negative items?

Copulsky: Brands can certainly take steps to limit negative word-of-mouth. That's why it's so important for every brand to establish listening posts so that they can easily track the tone of social media conversations. The ability to listen, hear and respond can be a very powerful mechanism for engendering greater levels of loyalty than brands might otherwise enjoy. Customers appreciate attention. Negative comments can be gifts, because they give you a chance to "get it right" for a customer. Research shows that people will spread the word about positive service recovery experiences. Great companies have mastered the art of service recovery and make it a core capability.

Given that the SRC has found that there is a segment of customers who, when they [disengage from a branded app](#) [actually disengage from a brand completely](#), do you see this struggle to build quickly to stay innovative vs. test

**an app thoroughly play out with clients?
What advice would you give them?**

Copulsky: Being fast to market with an app that is not up to snuff may do significant harm to your brand. People love to see how apps evolve, but the initial release needs to be something that gives users a reason to return. Think about opening night of a new (and highly touted) play. It's ok to flub lines or miss cues during previews, but when you go live, it had better be great. There are no "do overs" for an opening night and I think that the same applies to the first release of an app.

Consumers are more likely to use mobile devices for routine/habitual purchases, the SRC has found, and more likely to use desktop computers for purchases that require research or consideration. How does this impact the advice you'd give to clients in brand awareness or advertising spend?

Copulsky: I agree. I use my laptop for researching expensive products that I purchase occasionally much more frequently than my mobile handset or tablet. Often this research takes place over a period of days and involves visits to a store or dealer, in addition to web-based research. Advertising can be extremely effective in building awareness for a brand and helping to get the brand into a user's consideration set. If my research turns up an unfamiliar brand, I am more likely to consider the brand if I've had some exposure to its marketing efforts. While these ads may pop up on a mobile device (e.g., when a user does a LinkedIn search on a mobile device), we look at mobile devices as a delivery platform for marketing our content, as opposed to popping up an ad for our consulting services because a user is walking by a Deloitte office.

What Spiegel findings, such as the benefits of responding to unhappy customers on social media or the best ways to engage with customers on mobile platforms, do you think marketing professionals would find the most surprising, and why?

Copulsky: I think what people find surprising is not that there's a relationship between the two, but the magnitude of the relationship. The Spiegel research has quantified these relationships using behavioral data, not just survey or attitudinal data. The research has taken what has been anecdotal or casual observations and has allowed us to talk about these things with a degree of specificity. It's actually nice to know the true value of a Facebook like.

The SRC Marketing Leader Series is an occasional series exploring customer engagement in the digital age with marketing thought leaders. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.