

Managing your brand in a web-centric world.



## Today's web enables even greater opportunities for building brands.

The web offers marketers a variety of new opportunities to get our brands in front of prospects and customers. In addition to your own web presence, you can now leverage an ever-growing list of channels including blogs, social networks, wikis, and social bookmarking.

The exponential growth of these channels can make us salivate with glee over the opportunity to be seen and heard. But, with all these new opportunities, how do you manage and grow a successful brand in a web-centric world? Stay calm...remain focused.

## Brand basics still apply.

The web hasn't changed brand basics. You still need a clear understanding of your audience, your market, and your goals, as well as the ability to clearly articulate your brand promise. What has changed is that today you also have to consider how your audience wants to engage with your brand.

Are they online or do they prefer traditional media? Do they read blogs? Which ones? Are they actively engaging in conversations online, or are they just spectators?

More often than not, most audiences are participating in only a small slice of the online media spectrum. But, a good portion of them are listening to what others are saying and, most importantly, it's influencing their decisions.

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“Consumers are in the midst of a conversation that isn't ours. The race is on to grow ears to learn what they are saying.”

John Hayes, CMO, American Express

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## How people engage with our brands has changed.

At a fundamental level, how people engage with our brands has changed. And with so many third party conversations, it's easy for our brand to get away from us. So what's really changed? Here's our take:

### 1. What others say matters more than what you say.

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“Brands are no longer what we as marketers tell people they are – brands are what people's friends tell them they are.”

Michael Nutley, New Media Age

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- » Your customers are spending more time digesting third party information about your brand than information directly created by you. Through blogs, social networks, and other sources of user generated content, your story is getting promoted and passed along. Having a clearly focused brand will get your message off to the right start.
- » It's important to monitor these conversations so you know what others are saying (both your customers and your competitors). Monitoring lets you identify trends, changes in attitudes, and competitor involvement as it happens.
- » If you're aware of what people are saying about your brand, you'll be in a better position to clarify or expand on what they're talking about.
- » Spend time identifying the influencers (or A-listers) in your industry and begin to build relationships with them. You probably do this already at a traditional level. In this context, you need to expand those relationships to online influencers. Join in their conversation and share ideas – expert to expert.

## 2. Selling is over. Information is key.

- » The web is where our buyers and customers go to look for answers and solutions to their problems – they don't want to be sold. Companies who provide answers freely will establish brands that are associated with relevant and useful content. And in this ultra-connected world, brands that are seen as sources of useful content will win out over those that don't.
- » Push your content out to the sites your buyers and customers visit, and make it easy for them to push it out to others.

## 3. The experience you provide on the web shapes opinions.

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“Online voices in the form of ratings, reviews, blogs, social networks, and user-generated content are morphing into connected consumers who are collectively shaping your brand. The use of social networking technologies expands the reach of your brand and connects it into existing and developing social graphs.”

Jeff Lanctot, Senior Vice President, Avenue A | Razorfish

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- » On the web, customers form opinions about your products or services – even before they've tested or used them.
- » Transparency and honesty are critical. If you appear to be holding back, unwilling to listen, or to have a hidden agenda, your brand will be associated with those attributes. If you're open, helpful and willing to listen and act on the input of others, people will trust in and be willing to engage in a dialog with your brand.

- » Experience is also about how you serve up your content. It can't be a static, one-way experience. Leverage video, audio, and multimedia to create a more engaging experience. Tell a story and get customers engaged in that story.

## 4. Your employees will spread the word too.

- » Remember that many of your employees may be out there blogging, commenting, and joining in the conversation.
- » Ensure they all clearly understand your message, your brand promise, and why you're different. That way when they spread the word (offline and online) you'll be more likely to have a consistent message.

## The medium is the message.

The web-centric world is changing everyday, and how you manage your brand in this new communications landscape must evolve too. The scary part is we've lost some control over the message. The message is no longer the medium – the medium is becoming the message.

For B2B marketers to successfully manage their brand, they need to embrace the voice of their customer as an integral part of their brand. It won't happen overnight and we need to be deliberate in our actions, but we need to start the journey.

### About Erickson Barnett.

It's a web-centric world. At Erickson Barnett we leverage this new landscape to create smart marketing programs that drive measurable results. Our clients depend on us to create:

- » Clear Messaging
- » Remarkable Identities
- » Unique Campaigns
- » Engaging Web Sites
- » Influential Rich Media

The world has changed. Get results.

Erickson Barnett  
12120 Sunset Hills Road  
Suite 100  
Reston, Virginia 20190

703.834.1250  
[info@ericksonbarnett.com](mailto:info@ericksonbarnett.com)  
[www.ericksonbarnett.com](http://www.ericksonbarnett.com)