

Social media has made brands less relevant, not more

By [Estelle Nagel](#)

15 Jul 2019

When social media first hit the radar of marketers, the possibilities seemed endless. Finally, marketing would be a true two-way conversation.

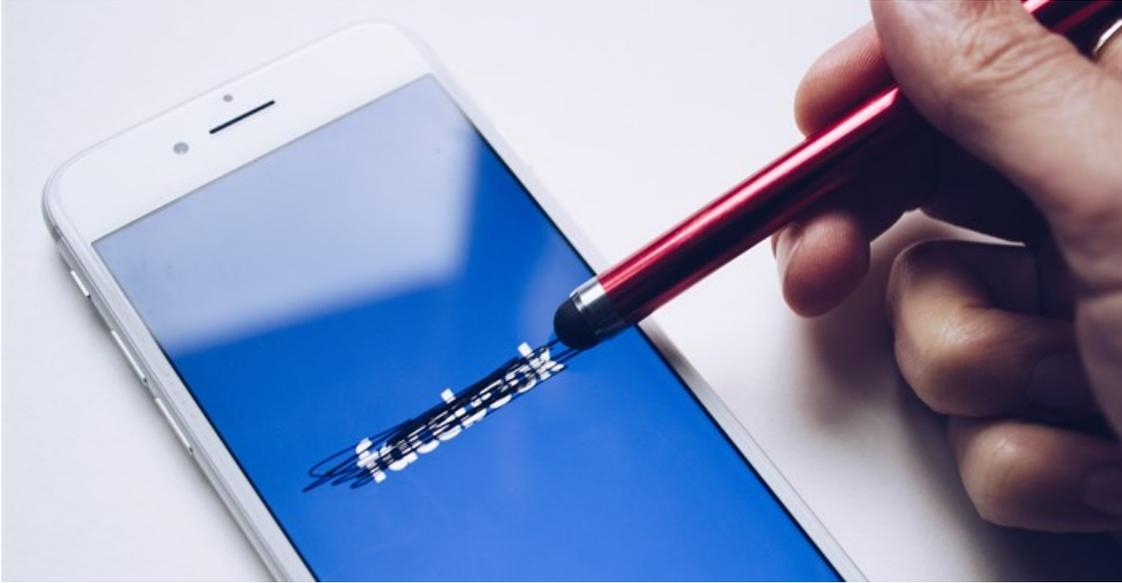


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Instead of speaking *at* consumers, we would speak *with* them. Advertisers praised the ability to narrowly target groups based on their interests and customer service embraced the new, instant channel (perhaps a little more grudgingly than the former).

But instead of improving brand relevance, social media is slowly decreasing it. Just look at the Top 500 accounts on social media today – only three belong to traditional brands. (Non-traditional brands like the Kardashians and other influencers are thriving, on the other hand.)



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Looking back

Examining how marketing has evolved over the years, it shouldn't be a surprise that brands have not quite resonated in the social sphere as they had hoped. In the 1920s, when modern marketing was born, there was little to do but raise brand and product awareness. New inventions – such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines – were promoted to a delighted new urban-based white-collar workforce.

In the 1950s, with steeper competition and more brand differentiation, the *Mad Men*-era scrambled for creative ways to reach consumers. Their task wasn't that difficult. In the US, there were three TV stations broadcasting original content for six months (and then repeats) for about 18 hours a day.



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Movies could only be seen in the theatre and magazines were bought off the rack. This trend continued well into the 1980s. Access to celebrities and sporting events were limited, so brands stepped up as sponsors – Benson & Hedges was synonymous with cricket, Rothmans with the July.

The truth is that social media and the proliferation of media have fundamentally changed culture. Brands were able to buy their way into consumers' attention spans with relative ease because attention was focused on single-cultural phenomena.

Do you remember going to school on Monday and everyone had watched the same Friday night television show or watch the latest movie release? That phenomenon might have died out with *Game of Thrones* – and only 10% of the population watched it.

Customer still comes first

Social media redefined what qualifies as a fast response from a company. Competition stepped up and consumers stopped comparing apples with apples when it came to brands. YouTube didn't consider launching a music channel that would let you listen to music after you close the app until Spotify arrived on the scene. Once a technology launches, consumers expect all brands to adopt its capabilities or they move on.



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So how do we win over customers in 2019? Good service, good products and good communication are key. Brand experience *is* the brand. Think of Apple. Every element – from its Twitter feed to its store – is customer-centric.

Walk into an Apple Store and every single device on the market is on display, tilted at 90° for optimal visibility and connected to the internet for you to use as long as you want. There are no products in the large-glass windows, resembling a PC screen for easy visual processing. Staff aren't paid commission. Performance is measured in retention, not sales. Their job is to ask questions, assess needs and meet them.

“ First look at the new Apple store at Jewel Changi Airport (via [#CNAlifestyle](https://t.co/nl3HwhPfdR)) <https://t.co/nl3HwhPfdR>

pic.twitter.com/ySsZj135up — CNA (@ChannelNewsAsia) [July 11, 2019](#) ”

Too often brands spend millions rebranding, rolling out impressive campaigns. Think of the large banking campaigns that have rolled out – imagine if they invested that money in queue-free banking trips? Or automakers that allow you to research, modify and purchase your car from your desk?



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There are simply too many brands with campaign messages that differ wildly from the service or product that they deliver. Promising a happy experience in your ad campaign – when customers are facing surly checkout staff, ill-stocked stores or broken booking systems – simply doesn't cut it anymore.

The fundamentals that were promised by the social media era are still true. We should be having that two-way conversation with our customers. Followed by putting our money where our mouths are when it comes to service.

ABOUT ESTELLE NAGEL

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