



# HOW TO EMPLOY AGILE MARKETING

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In real life, conversation happens naturally. Nobody stops to dissect it. In forgetting that consumers are in a conversation with brands, brands can make the same mistake. Brands that aren't introspective can see themselves as one thing while consumers perceive them as something else entirely.

(<http://cdn.chiefmarketer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/agilemarketing175.jpg>) That wouldn't happen if brand managers were engaged "agilely." Agile marketing views the brand through two-way interaction with consumers. Agile brands talk about things consumers care about. In today's social world, agile marketing teaches that it's the conversation, which counts.

Agile marketing also teaches that for a brand to have staying power, ad agencies and brand managers need to check off all four boxes needed for real dialogue. Real world dialogue works like this: You (a) introduce yourself; (b) share your views on life (c) ask relevant questions; and (d) talk about shared interests. Online conversations should do the same.

## Agile principles reflect our increasingly digital culture.

Talking with people—not at them—is a fairly new and radical marketing phenomenon. In a two-way brand dialogue between brand and consumer, the whole notion of who you say you are can be challenged by digitally savvy consumers. That's unsettling in a world where marketers were once accustomed to much more control over content.

Agile brands recognize they can no longer just push "Hey, I have a new flavor" at consumers. Instead, brands need to talk with consumers about a shared interest—say, sports—and, for example, offering a brash opinion about a sports event. Agile marketing places a premium on this dialogue loop. Translation: Brands must be confident in their brand voice.

So, although the cardinal rule of brands once was avoidance, at all cost, of offending any potential consumer, today's agile reality is that the sharper your brand distinction, the more relevant it is. 'Edgy' is in. If some folks don't get it, so be it. They aren't your natural consumer.

Agile marketers need to ask themselves: Is my brand standoffish? Am I engaging my audience? Are competitors dominating the conversation? Your brand voice can become fuzzy when you have not 'dimensionalized' it. Sharply delineating who a brand is and what its brand attributes are is part and parcel of the agile philosophy.

Of course, no brand wants to be controversial. But agilely defining a brand in all three dimensions requires it. Authenticity demands it. Brand managers and ad agencies who practice agile marketing all the time recognize that brands can't be all things to all people.

## Brand disconnect is common.

Why do brands get disconnected in the first place? Brands morph as they age whether or not they realize it. Often brand managers inherit a brand and keep it chugging along without pausing to reassess. So the brand can naturally drift from what it thinks it is. Without agile marketing's rigorous reality checks, brand drift is actually likely.

For the brand marketer who wants to go agile to redefine a brand voice, there is a four-step process: (1) do a competitive analysis, i.e., What is the brand doing and saying and how are they positioning themselves (2) create a matrix of how the brand positions itself (3) examine consumer needs and talk to the brand owners and (4) conduct social listening to understand perceptions as well as likes and dislikes. Readily available social listening and brand sentiment tools will reveal what consumers are thinking. Then you need to measure it.

## Resisting agile.

It's not unusual to encounter resistance to agile methodologies in correcting a brand disconnect. Agile marketing calls for releasing content sooner than many companies are comfortable. That's because the agile process relies upon behavioral feedback rather than a brand manager's opinion.

Identifying your brand voice agilely means taking your freshest brand concepts and quickly putting them into the marketplace to validate which ones really work. An agile team identifies three or four intriguing concepts. Then they'll test messages in, for example, a Facebook post, or a Tweet, or a Pinterest board. What the team is looking for is what is clicking with consumers. That's the first indication your brand voice has resonance. The challenge then is scaling to the campaign level. If the campaign gets traction, the team creates more content around the idea—perhaps a YouTube video, or a microsite—to substantiate what the team is thinking, agilely, about the right direction for your brand voice.

