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Lessons Learned
in Igniting
Word of Mouth Movements
Brains on Fire

It's official: the word "campaign" is becoming more and more scarce as it relates to the new world of marketing. And rightly so. People want to be engaged with a company, organization or cause beyond a short-term gimmick. So we're starting to see the emergence of the term "movement," which makes a lot more sense.

Let's compare the two:

Campaigns have a beginning and an end.

Movements go on as long as kindred spirits are involved.

Campaigns are part of the war vocabulary. (target, launch, dominate markets...)

Movements are part of the evangelist vocabulary. (evangelize, passion, love...)

Campaigns are dry and emotionally detached.

Movements are organic and rooted in passion.

Campaigns rely on traditional mediums.

Movements rely on word of mouth, where the people are the medium.

Campaigns are part of the creationist theory—we're going to create something cool and people will talk about it.

Movements are part of the evolutionist theory—whatever we co-create with the fans they can own and run with it, which will evolve over time.

Campaigns are you talking about yourself.

Movements are others talking about you.

Campaigns are an ON/OFF switch.

Movements are a volume dial—and there's no zero.

Campaigns add to awareness.

Movements add to credibility.

Campaigns are “you vs. us.”

Movements are “let's do this together.”

We're in the business of creating movements. It really came about years ago when a client was faced with a tiny budget compared to the giant they had to slay, which literally outspent them millions of times to one. So building a peer-to-peer word of mouth movement was the way to go. We learned a lot, and since then have ignited movements for non-profits and Fortune 500s alike. And especially after watching the latest presidential election unfold in front of our faces, we realized that all the movements we've been involved in—or studied—have several common elements.

1. Movements are about the Passion Conversation. Not the Product Conversation.

So many companies are jumping on the social media bandwagon and using these shiny new tools but, instead of trying to connect with their customers on a level of shared passion, are basically saying, “Yes, let’s talk. But let’s talk all about us.” We must approach our fans—our friends—on a level that gets to the root of shared passion. It’s not about the product—it’s what the product allows your customers to do. How it enhances their lives. You have to put them first, and you (your company, product or service) second. It’s hard to do—especially if you’re wired in the advertising 1.0 school of the 4 Ps and pushing out messages. Putting the Passion Conversation front and center will open the doors for your fans to communicate with you and one another. And guess what? Your company, product or service will become part of that conversation—NATURALLY.

2. Movements begin with the first conversation.

Movements don’t start when you “pull the trigger” and execute tactics. They start long before that. Movements start with a small group of deeply passionate and deeply dedicated people who believe. And plan. And pour blood, sweat and tears into going out, finding kindred spirits, looking them in the eye and talking. Talking with them about how they would shape this thing. Asking them questions about engagement and participation. Planting seeds. Igniting excitement. And the great thing about this laborious process is that it gets people talking in their own language with their friends about what they’re helping start.

3. Movements have inspirational leadership.

Did you notice that I didn't say that movements have influential leadership? That was on purpose. The rage today is for brands to go out and find the "influencers." Those people that have huge blog followings or tens of thousands of followers on Twitter. We buck that theory and have proved that you should find those people that are deeply passionate about your brand or category first and engage them to become the leaders of your movement. Why? Because influence can be made—passion can't. And when you raise someone up with recognition and empower them with the tools they need to pass on the word, they will be much, much more loyal to you than the mommy blogger who is basically renting her influence out to the highest bidder, and next month will be talking about something that's not you.

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4. Movements have a barrier of entry.

I don't know about you, but I "belong" to about 20 different social community sites. And I only use two. The others? I could probably tell you the names of five of them and I've forgotten the rest. Why would you want your movement to be just another one of these places where someone creates a profile, signs up, looks around and then never comes back? When you place a barrier of entry, you're asking the person on the other side to put some skin in the game. Maybe it's a little bit of time and effort, but it's something. And it helps you identify those that are really there to be engaged and contribute.

Yes, putting a barrier of entry in place is going to deter a lot of people from joining in the first place. And you know what? That's awesome. Because would you rather have 500,000 people that have very low engagement, or 50,000 that are your loud and proud evangelists?

5. Movements empower people with knowledge.

Your fans want to know everything about you and your industry. The good stuff and especially the bad stuff. We all know that knowledge is power and people love to let other people know that they have a secret to share. The inside scoop. The bumps and bruises. They want you to open the kimono and expose yourself—put it all out there for the world to see. Sure, this scares the hell outta most companies, because they don't want people to know about their screw-ups and mistakes. But that's reality. Companies are made up of people. And people are fallible. The ones that admit this win.

Knowledge spreads. Organically and naturally. And inside knowledge spreads even quicker. It can create a bond and provide common ground. It's an entry point and a chance to go deeper into a relationship. And sharing it is key in creating a movement.

6. Movements have shared ownership.

Yes, this is a scary one. “What do you mean that I have to give up ownership? Why?” Because that’s the only way your movement will grow. Because you can’t own a movement. Nobody can, because it belongs to everybody. But when you bring those kindred spirits into the fold and let them know that, really and truly, you’re all in this thing together, then a light switch gets turned on. The people are empowered to take the ball and run with it—without any fear or trepidation. That’s freedom. And that is a key to success.

So many companies are terrified to give up what they never had in the first place: control—especially control of the message. It baffles me. “What if someone says something bad about us?” GREAT! It’s an opportunity to learn, to engage and make yourself better. Co-creation is what’s next. It’s either that or your customers creating content without you. Which would you prefer?

7. Movements have powerful identities.

We are hard-wired as humans to have innate desires to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. Religion, sports teams—even brands. We’re always on the look out for things we can self-identify with and bring into the fold of our own identity. Why? Because it creates a sense of belonging. And we all want to belong to something.

Case-in-point: there’s a guy at our office that loves, loves, LOVES one of the local college football teams. And let’s make clear the fact that, not only did he never play for that football team, but he didn’t even go to school in this state. But you know what? After the football game on Saturday, he comes into the office on Monday and talks about how “great WE played” or how “WE really screwed up that big play.” Do you catch the vocabulary he’s using? We. He believes in something bigger than himself to the point that he is tied to success and failures of that team. That person. That brand.

Powerful identities help draw kindred spirits to you. It gives them a badge of honor to wear. To recognize others in the movement. To be able to share their stories and connect with like-minded people. It's a hugely powerful tool.

8. Movements live both online and offline.

Listen closely to what I'm about to say: Ninety percent of word of mouth happens offline. Yes, you read that right. Nine. Zero. Percent. The kids over at The Keller Fay group have done the homework and it's no joke.

Look, social media is great. And the Internet allows ideas to travel very quickly and connect with one another. But as great as all the Twitters and Facebooks and MySpaces and blogs and messageboards and digital do-dads are, they will never, ever replace the power of shaking someone's hand, looking them in the eye, getting kindred spirits in the room (or better yet, at your brand's Mecca), laughing together, getting a drink, sitting at the dinner table—whatever. The point is that many companies are getting caught up in the tactics of social media/word of mouth. They jump right in and very quickly get bogged down in the tactics. So here's a thought: engage PEOPLE first. And then after you talk with them and observe how they communicate and connect, the tools and tactics will be as plain as the nose on your face. No guessing. No needing to have re-dos. Nothing except forward momentum.

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9. Movements make advocates feel like rock stars.

We're not talking about champagne wishes and caviar dreams or private jets and penthouse suites. Yes, those things are nice. But you're not going to have a movement if you try to "reward" people with sweepstakes and contests. That's part of a campaign. And that's never going to make people feel appreciated.

Instead, reward people with recognition. And don't just shine a light on the overachievers. Love on the ones that hardly have any time to give to the movement, but give anyway. Listen to the haters. Listen to the lovers. Listen. And then engage. Again, it's not about giving people SWAG or money or any of those material things. When you make someone feel like a rockstar, You—the brand—are becoming a fan of theirs. We hear about all these companies out there that want to find or create fans of their brand. We're here to tell you that it should be the other way around. Don't find people to lift you up—you need to lift them up first. As Greg Cordell, one of the principals at Brains on Fire likes to say, "Be famous for the people who love you, for the way you love them." Love and recognition is a circular transaction—if you give it out, it'll always come back to you.

10. Movements get results.

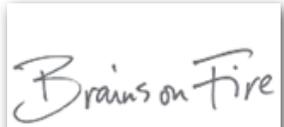
Okay cynics, I know what you're thinking: All this "movement" stuff is nice and squishy, but it doesn't matter if it doesn't move the needle for my company/organization. So true. And that's the last point: a movement isn't a movement unless you accomplish your goals. That's why, in the very beginning—way back before number one on this list, you need to set your goals and ask yourself what success looks like? And it's not ALWAYS sales. Yes, that's a component of it—an important one. To be honest, an increase in sales is a byproduct of a movement. Sentiment, conversations about you, connecting like-minded people and you being a part of that relationship—now you're talking. The greatest thing you can hope to be is a conduit for a conversation—not the conversation itself.

Movements get results. Like waking up the zombies in the cubical farms of your office and opening their eyes to the fact that what they do matters. Like energizing your sales force. Like your fans putting out PR nightmares before you even have time to react. Like your fans creating their own marketing messages and gear. Coming to your defense. Helping you through the hard times. Co-creating new products. The list goes on and on. And the truth is that you'll see results in ways you can't even imagine when you help ignite that movement.

The beginning of this manifesto started out by stating how marketers are beginning to shy away from the term "campaign." There are several new terms popping up, including "movements." But take heed in this warning: if it doesn't have all of the ten elements above, then it's not a movement. It's a campaign in sheep's clothing. And you might be able to fool a lot of the people out there, but you can't fool those who are already drawn to you. So don't try to.

Now is the time to build something that will last as long as your customers want it to. And the only way to do that is involve them from the beginning. Movements move people to action. Movements transform companies. Movements change lives. If you're a company who's sole reason for existence is to make money, I'm sad for you. Why not change your corner of the world for the better? Why not save the day for your fans? Why not start a movement and be a part of something bigger than yourself? **Now all you have to do is roll up your sleeves and get to work.** 📌

info



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brains on Fire is part identity company, part word of mouth marketing company, and all Brains on Fire. Spike Jones is the guy who decided to put these learnings down on paper, but the thoughts here represent a collaboration including Geno Church, Robbin Phillips (who came up with the idea), Heather Hough, Greg Cordell and Justine Foo. Brains on Fire's clients range from Best Buy to BMW to Fiskars Brands. Highlights include being featured as a "best in class" example in eight books (including *Groundswell* and the *Anatomy of Buzz*), *Fast Company* and a receiving a gold EFFIE for a WOM movement. They're the company based in Greenville, SC. Find out more at www.brainsonfire.com or contact firestarter@brainsonfire.com for more info.

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