

Loyalty is a dirty word

[BEHAVIOUR CHANGE](#) [CONTENT](#) [OPINION](#)

CHRIS BINNS, HEAD OF NEW BUSINESS STRATEGY 22 NOV 2016

Loyalty is a dirty word. That was the opening chart of a talk I did at a conference on Loyalty last week. Well, it was until the people running it suggested maybe there was another route into the same flow. Loyalty then became an opaque word. Personally I'm not sure which is better if you are in that industry . . .

Anyhow, I'd somehow ended up talking at this event as a favour for a very old business acquaintance of our MD. When I got to starting to write a piece I realised that a great swathe of marketing orthodoxy has more or less written off loyalty as an effective campaign strategy. The excellent work Binet and Field have recently updated in the IPA databank suggests that Penetration is three times more effective a strategy than loyalty (their words, not mind before someone jumps in), not to mention how many have interpreted Byron Sharpe's work.

Yet, when you look at the Harvard Business Review you find plenty of evidence that senior management at many client entities are being told Loyalty is critical. (There was a headline “Marketing is Dead and Loyalty has Killed It” in one of last year’s issues)

This raises two critical issues really.

The first the age old idea that it is a sign of intelligence to be able to hold two opposing thoughts in your head at once and reconcile them. That maybe these partisan views, whilst deeply and firmly held, and frankly well quantified are still simply that – views. The IPA databank, it could be argued generally looks at brands build by advertising and generally the way advertising works is by talking to large groups of people. As an industry, as agencies, as individuals we are much more fun and interesting to work with when we hold a view and the precision in the views of Binet & Field, Sharpe and even Prof. Ritson (at arguably the other end of the spectrum) are to be applauded, lauded and learnt from by an industry rife with obfuscation and opaque definitions.

Which brings me back to this point about Loyalty. Maybe it isn’t that it is the least effective strategy. Maybe it is just the wrong word. It has become a catch all for lots of marketing communications behaviours that don’t sit well anywhere else on a briefing form or an awards entry. Maybe as an industry we would be a lot better off banishing these words – the ones that have been malappropriated, over-used to the extent to which they become meaningless. We should concentrate on better describing what we are trying to achieve.

Generally this tends to start with a behaviour. Often we are either trying to change that behaviour or augment it. Many times this behaviour is a habit. Sometimes this habit is active, Sometimes (god forbid) people in Rotherham and Ramsgate aren’t even really thinking about the customer journey they are on and are half asleep, sleep walking into a decision at the fixture. Sometimes it is passive. Sometimes the behaviour is a gut feel, sometimes an emotional choice (these can be different), sometimes it is a rationalized decision that people make spreadsheets about and itemize pros and cons. Sometimes the purchase really matters, sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes it is once every 6 years, sometimes it is once every six days. These can’t all be the same. So lets stop using the

same words to describe them.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CONTENT OPINION