

A rectangular button with a printer icon and the text "Click to Print".

BrandAnimation: Changing the Rules of Engagement

By Erik Hauser



I just attended [Chaos 2006](#) (“New Agendas in Advertising”) at the University of Texas at Austin. Honestly, it was one of the best conferences I’ve experienced—and I’ve been to a lot. Many of the leaders who are guiding the course of the advertising industry were there, and it was great to hear them speak.

A couple of points were reiterated throughout all the speeches. The first was that all of these new advertising trends aren’t really new at all. “Product placement,” said [Keith Reinhard, DDB Worldwide](#) chairman emeritus, “used to actually take over the storylines of shows for up to two minutes.” Keith showed an example of “The Jack Benny Show” (I think) where they literally talked about State Farm Insurance for two minutes. They also held up cards, rolled out banners—it was amazing. The entire focus of the show shifted to simply promote a brand. Keith has a vast amount of knowledge and an amazing array of reference points that clearly illustrate his viewpoint.

Let’s shift ourselves, to the subject of customer control. Everyone is talking about it, but why does it suddenly seem as if it is an emerging trend whose thirst needs to be quenched immediately? What confluence of events led up to these insistent drumbeats about customer control, and why is it on everybody’s mind? After all, we’ve all been taught that the customer has always been in control.

The answer to “why now?” is actually quite simple. Customers have always asserted their control in the marketplace, whether they think about it or not, by choosing certain products over others. What customers have, until recently failed to realize is that their power could be exerted to go even further—to essentially control the way that brands communicate with them. With the continued adoption of emerging technologies leading to the rise of customer-generated content, for better or worse, customers have gotten clued into the fact that they control the entire marketplace—from product conception through purchase.

Customers, for the first time, are acutely aware that they control the way brands speak to them. They are now being empowered to generate a lot of advertising messages themselves. Empowered customers also figured out that they can further exert their control by completely changing the rules of communication between brands and the people who use their products and services.

Yes, customers were always in control, but now they have awakened to the enormity of that control and have subsequently lengthened their list of demands.

They’ve made it clear that they want to be provided with amazing experiences that allow them to interact with brands in ways they never could before. Consequently companies are busy crafting experiences that have a strong and connected meaning and relevance to their products/services as well as to their intended audience. This experiential approach helps ensure that people will recall which brand provided a delightful experience to win their almighty loyalty.

The burning question is: What will it take to keep customers happy as times change? And will there come a time when a great brand experience will not be enough? What then? [Bueller? Bueller?](#)

Erik Hauser is creative director/founder of San Francisco-based marketing firm [Swivel Media](#) and founder of [IXMA](#), the International Experiential Marketing Association. He also moderates the [Experiential Marketing Forum](#).

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