



What's Real Brand Engagement?

*"A brand for a company is like a reputation for a person.
You earn reputation by trying to do hard things well."
—JEFF BEZOS, founder of Amazon and owner of the
Washington Post*

Imagine this.

You're going about your day, scanning through the online news site, your feeds on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Some things you like, some things you share, you might comment here and there, some things you just scroll past, others you click through. This is what we call engagement. And this is great for brands. Right?

But fast-forward ten minutes. Twenty minutes. An hour. Maybe you remember one or two bits of content you saw today, but only because you're thinking about it.

Come dinner time, you've completely forgotten that you really loved the Papa John's heart-shaped pizza post on Facebook today, because you feel like tacos for dinner and barely remember you even saw it. **Do you really have any idea which brands engaged you today?**

It's estimated that people see five thousand brand messages a day, according to CMO.com. How do you break through the noise? How do you create real perception and behavior change? The first step is to remove the clutter and **focus on what really matters.**

Did You Know?

- In the United States alone it's estimated that businesses spend **\$155 billion annually on advertising and PR** to get a brand into the public eye (Galant 2012).
- Research shows that marketers are getting worse, not better, at directing their dollars, with **a whopping 40 percent of marketing dollars being wasted each year** (Neff 2012).
- That means **\$62 billion is misused** on content that is not relevant or producing ROI.

Tens of billions in wasted marketing every year. It's not smart. It's not strategic. Yet as evidenced by these alarming statistics, that's what many companies are doing. What if there were a better way? What if you could focus your energy and resources and money only when you are truly top of mind? What if you could have a higher spend-to-impact ratio? That is what *SPIKE Your Brand ROI* will teach you.

If you know how to prepare for, spot, and capitalize on a SPIKE—a Sudden Point of Interest that Kick-starts Exposure—you will learn how to:

- Mitigate the damage or maximize the benefits by anticipating when you or your company, association, or nonprofit is going to be of interest
- Decrease your marketing spend while increasing your bottom-line benefits
- Prevent a public perception of catastrophe that damages the goodwill you spent years creating

Some experts tell you that it's vital for your organization to drop everything you are doing to respond to every comment or issue within your bailiwick. The truth is that your executives want—and need—some level of planning, ideation, and strategy before they commit to a position. The way to do that is to understand when your audience has the highest point of interest, a SPIKE. While it may sound impossible to make predictions about a brand's relevance, the truth is that brands have discernible patterns. Those patterns are driven by audience interests and outside events that require some real-time nimbleness.

The Consumer Electronics Association experiences a positive SPIKE every year with its world-renowned International Consumer Electronics Show—a technology smorgasbord of the goodies early adopters will be drooling over next year. More than 150,000 people flock to it from a variety of industries to see what's next or what's garnering buzz in consumer electronics.

General Motors experiences a negative SPIKE when it recalls millions of cars.

But what if you had more control, more ability to influence these SPIKEs?

You can.

People are interested in hearing from a brand when that brand has something to say that pertains to their lives—everything else you do in between is just a buildup or build down to major brand opportunities or crises. You might be thinking, “I’m not Consumer Electronics Association or General Motors, so how can I relate to such big-brand examples?” The process is the same for any entity handling issues or opportunities. You can learn from some of the big guys’ mistakes.

We’re flipping the traditional business communication model on its head. For decades, companies have been able to dictate when they are relevant to mainstream media. Now the audience dictates when they will care. It isn’t just engagement for engagement’s sake. It is about timing and knowing when your audience wants to hear from you.

What Exactly Is a SPIKE?

William Jennings Bryan once said, “Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.” That is SPIKE—not something to wait around for, but something that you, your organization, and your marketing/PR team can achieve with the right tools and knowledge.

A SPIKE is a *Sudden Point of Interest that Kick-starts Exposure*. It is the opportunity to make or break you and your organization. It is a point in time when your industry, profession, or members are thrust into the public eye ... for better or for worse.

4 SPIKE YOUR BRAND ROI

S – Stands for Sudden

Communication that suddenly pops up doesn't qualify as a SPIKE unless it clearly meets two criteria: the opportunity that arises is central to your brand's message and the communication can be relayed to your audience within a finite, specific period of time.

P – Stands for Point

There is a point, a single shining point in time, when you have the opportunity to change the conversation. To capitalize on the SPIKE you have to be nimble. You must react quickly and effectively to get the optimum benefit from sudden attention, a time when all eyes are on you, your company, or your cause. If you are quick and you have the right message, you can provide a solution, reaction, or point of view that is uniquely yours. If you're really good, you can even come to own a topic, and that can be a gold mine for months or years.

I – Stands for Interest

The word *interest*, as a verb, means to excite curiosity or attention. Your audience, not your executive staff or board, must be interested in the topic. Too many times, organizations forget that in this decade, the audience is in control of when they will tune you out or sing your praises.

K – Stands for Kick-starts

To kick-start something is to cause it to catch on or take off. In a SPIKE, you can kick-start attention by being the first and best to respond in real time to an evolving issue in the media, your industry, or your profession.

E – Stands for Exposure

Exposure can be a positive or negative in marketing. If you don't control a SPIKE, if you do not have a plan of attack and excellent operational timing, you can leave your organization exposed to a negative SPIKE and create significant vulnerabilities. However, if applied correctly, you can anticipate those vulnerabilities and perhaps even benefit from them with strategic positioning and perfectly timed messages.

Relevance and Timing

Here's the bad news. Any company, cause, or creation, regardless of scope or scale, is only truly relevant to its audience a few times a year. That's it.

I am not talking about basic marketing and PR; that's what we marketers are paid to do at the most elementary level. I am not even talking about the marketing opportunities through the year with small to medium impact; those aren't SPIKES.

I am talking about the moments when what you say and what you do has a major impact on your customers' business, behavior, and market—those select moments that transform campaigns, initiatives, and ideas into a remarkable shift in perception. That doesn't happen every day, and it shouldn't.

A SPIKE isn't like accounting or other orderly business functions that follow a specific pattern year in and year out. SPIKES don't happen on a neat timetable such as quarterly, seasonally, or when your marketing team has time. They happen based on seemingly spontaneous market or media demands.

Now, I know you don't want a mediocre organization, or you'd have put this book down several pages ago. You don't want average results. You know you can't just keep doing what you are doing. But there's more to riding a SPIKE than that. It's a terrifying experience.

If you follow the advice I'm presenting in this book, it can go so right that you create game-changing wins that will elevate your career. It's not completely predictable, but if you seek epic results, read on.

