

The Commitment Model

Part Three of Four

Essence Communications

Strategy, Research and Stakeholder Engagement

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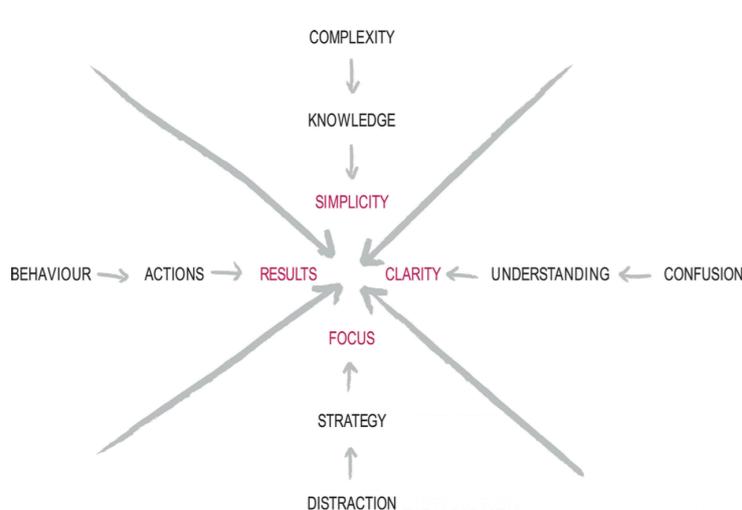
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This e-book is the third in a series that explain each quadrant of the Commitment Model demonstrated below:



The first e-book explains the first quadrant – from Complexity to Simplicity. The second one explains from Confusion to Clarity. If you do not have either one, please hop back onto the website at www.essencecomms.com.au and go to the Resources section.

So this e-book is looking at how to gain greater commitment by looking at the third quadrant, moving from Distraction to Focus.

So once you have worked out what people are buying and why they are buying it, the next step is about being true to it when you deliver. It is easy to get distracted, to sort of lose sight of the end game when you're immersed in something that is very close to you.

For example, when I wrote my first book, 'Forced Focus – the essence of attracting and retaining the best people', it was a big deal in our house. It is a big undertaking to write a book - I've got two young boys and everyone in the household had to be oriented around giving me the time I needed to write, so the whole family really ran around this book timetable for quite some time.

When the first printed copies were delivered to the house by a truck, it was a pretty exciting moment - this thing you have been working on for 12 months has finally arrived! So of course we open ten boxes of exactly the same thing, looking through each one exclaiming - Oh my goodness, isn't this wonderful, look at this! It was a Thursday, I recall exactly, because my son Darcy, (then five years old), had Show and Tell at school on a Friday. So in the middle of the book scrutiny, I

suddenly have an epiphany! And I say – ‘Darcy! I’ve got a great idea - you could take my book to Show and Tell tomorrow!!!’. Genius!

As I eagerly scan his face, he looks at me with complete disdain and says – ‘Mum, it is not all about you’.

God bless him. The pratt.

Once I had recovered myself, I reluctantly realized that he probably had a point. I mean fair enough, what do I truly expect him to say to the teacher?

‘What do you have there, Darcy?’

‘Oh it is a high level strategic marketing text about attraction and retention in the Australian workforce.....’

He’s 5 years old! So my point is this – it’s very easy to get immersed in something you are close to. It’s a classic ‘can’t see the wood for the trees’ moment. We really need to keep reminding ourselves that it is NOT all about us, that we must resist immersion in the detail of what we are selling. Don’t get immersed in the million dollar piece of equipment that you have just spent 12 months justifying to management why you need it. Don’t get immersed in the complexities of toilet paper weave. Don’t get immersed in forecasting and data, so your market just becomes a mass of demographics. And it’s the very process of perfecting the approach that makes us good at what we do; but it is also the thing that helps us lose perspective.

Here I was, a supposed marketing expert, running around the country telling people how to get people to commit - and I am saying to my own son ‘hey, why not take my text book to Show and Tell!’.

How ridiculous. He of course took a \$2.50 Hotwheels Mustang, so I was well and truly outdone and he (and his entire grade I assume) was very happy.

Now you may think how could this possibly happen in ‘big business’? Well it does, all the time. People get distracted by market factors and before they know it, lose track of their audience.

I worked with Lotto in one of the State jurisdictions for a while, and they were faced with the total number of people playing Lotto dropping significantly. The question was why is this so, and what could be done

to reverse the tide. One hypothesis was that maybe the reward value of winning Lotto was no longer tempting. After all, 20 years ago, winning a million dollars was a lot; but now - in Sydney for example - it probably wouldn't even pay off most people's mortgages! So what is the point in playing Lotto to win a million, particularly when you could play Powerball or other options and be in the running for \$25 or \$30 million?

So they asked me to do some research and establish what was happening with the engagement of customers. Lotto has a blue collar skew, and so instead of doing the sterile focus group thing in a formal group room environment, I hired a limo and took a group of people out to live the high life for a while. We did the limo thing, took them to a great hotel and laid on all the food and grog. The intention was to give them a taste that this is what it could be like, living the highlife were you to win Lotto. So to uncover their innermost feelings, now was the time we explored when they bought a lotto ticket, is this what they dreamt about? Was this what it is all about, what is driving them?

So we started talking about who did what with their Lotto and each person shared their Lotto habits. Most had played Lotto on and off for several years, many falling out of the regular habit. We worked our way around the group and eventually got to a conservative looking middle aged man named Vernon. Vernon really stood out in the group actually – he was an accountant, wearing a brown suit, been in the same job for 25 years and married to the same woman for 35 years. Vernon was very quietly spoken and when he did finally start speaking, he sounded even less likely to be the sort of guy who would play Lotto he was so straight!

Anyway, Vernon finally confessed to the group that he had been playing lotto every week for 27 years... and had NEVER had a collect. Not even the lowest win! None, nothing, zilch!!

Everyone in the group was amazed - you're joking they said, 27 years, Vernon! I am fascinated of course, here I am interested in commitment and this has to be the biggest commitment of all time! Here is Vernon, still playing lotto week in and week out having NEVER had a collect? Now what was that all about?

Any ideas people?

Well, it turned out that the difference between Vernon and all the

other people in the room was that Vernon was the only person in the room who still hand picked his numbers. He took the same numbers week in and week out. So Vernon was committed because of the fear of NOT continuing to play. Because the week he didn't put his numbers on – well, that would be the week those particular numbers came up!

So what was so interesting about this was the nature of the work that had been done to get us to this point. So somewhere along the line, someone had conducted some probably pretty average research aimed at testing the basic features of the product experience. They would have asked consumers the standard 'What's wrong with Lotto' and maybe some people said when pushed, 'Well, it's a bit inconvenient, having to go to the Newsagent and all that'. So someone decides, right, let's make it MORE convenient! Let's invent this natty little machine that makes Lotto more convenient - and call it a quick pick machine! So that way, people don't HAVE to choose their numbers at all - what a great idea! And the marketing team goes, yes, and the management goes yes, let's all invest millions of dollars in quick pick machines in every state.

And you know what? Effectively what a quick pick machine does is to 'decommit' an entire generation of people. Because suddenly, a person doesn't pick specific numbers, they just rock up and let the machine do it. They don't check their numbers, they don't win, nothing happens. And then the following week they get the quick pick again, they get run of the mill numbers, they don't win, they forget to check the numbers.... then the third week they don't quite get to the Newsagent and they think, ah well, what does it matter?

They effectively migrated people AWAY from Lotto, not towards it – all through Distraction from the core of the offer. I find Strategy to be so important in helping us navigate towards Focus. A good strategy is very simple, not long and convoluted, and remains firmly fixed on the main game. It is very easy to lose your way and get immersed in the everyday – but a good strategy helps you keep your audience in the front of your mind and move towards actions that are all about them, not about you.

There are a zillion books written on how to come up with good strategy, so I'm not about to deliver another sermon on how to do it. I am of course a firm believer in strong research guided with insight to deliver good strategy.

But there is a four step style of thinking I like to use to help guide some of my more creative thinking around strategy development. I call it forced focus thinking, and it comprises the following four steps;

1. Question 2. Disengage 3. Generate 4. Evaluate

1. Question

A key part of Forced Focus thinking is about asking the right questions of the right people to get the answers you really need. Information should be categorised into 'nice to know' and 'need to know'.

I once worked for a client who made bread and decided to conduct an enormous evaluation of the bread market. This client wanted to use the research to ask everything he had ever wanted to know about bread. My favourite question I tried repeatedly to delete was the percentage of people who cut their sandwich bread on the diagonal versus the vertical. Now, this is a clear example of a distraction and immersion that is increasing your chances of 'Decommitting' your audience. How could anyone possibly use that information to make any difference whatsoever? The fact we discover what percentage of Australians cut their sandwiches into squares versus triangles was what was occupying this client – whilst the bread market was slowly heading into a revolutionary par-baked model in retail, and the growth of GI, added fibres and other nutritional innovations threatened to change the bread market irrevocably. No wonder they were never able to focus!

It is harder to ask five great questions than ask twenty average ones. So I adopt a forced focus thinking approach, limit myself to five great questions that will truly set my future course and ask the right people.

2. Disengage

I think it is fantastic when clients are excited and passionate about their product. But as I said before, sometimes being immersed in your product and knowing too much (including having a predetermined and strongly held view of the world) can be a bad thing. This is when some serious disengagement is required.

The view from a distance is exactly what forced focus thinking requires. Good distance allows you to objectively determine three key issues - (1) what exactly the problem is (harder than it sounds), (2) why you

have the problem and (3) what outcome you want. Use 'force' to focus and disengage, to see enough to fall in love all over again – but not enough to pre-determine the course of the future. Only a disengaged eye can articulate a strategy that answers those three key questions and bring focus to the fore.

3. Generate

This is my favourite and most creative part of forced focus thinking. The group needs to brainstorm a list of alternative ideas to solve the problem you have identified. But no blue sky brainstorming – it has to be structured. For example, if you want ideas, each team must deliver three in fifteen minutes and provide a rationale for their choice. If you are concerned about what your competitors will do, then 'install' all participants as Board Members of that very competitor, and sketch out a plan of what the competitor would do if their sole objective was to ruin your company. If you want to solve a difficult staff issue, force the same team members to role play both sides of a planned interaction. My personal view is that generation of ideas works best under a time pressure, so force focus and get on with it.

4. Evaluate

Despite my somewhat pithy introduction, evaluation of programs and ideas is obviously of critical importance. But forced focus thinking ensures the right focus is applied in evaluating the right outcome to move forward. No strategy is complete without some form of benchmarking and evaluation to keep you honest and focussed. Focus on the desired outcome, force yourself to monitor it and most importantly, act accordingly!

In closing, if you have ever visited Rome, recall the art of crossing the road. If you wait for the traffic to stop, and for drivers to obey red traffic lights you will be there forever. Instead success lies with the people who amass themselves into groups and as one, they surge forward, forcing their way across the road, forcing the traffic to stop to allow them to pass. They avoid distraction, put a good strategy into place, gather a willing team around them, and force focus on the outcome.

These are the four steps I use to avoid immersion, avoid distraction and make sure my strategy stays in focus.