

Cutting-Edge Community Engagement

Part I: 7 Key Ways to Deliver Better Loyalty Activities & Contests

More puppy love!

It ain't easy creating cutting-edge community engagement, especially with many dangerous pitfalls and potholes to avoid! Grab these tips and lessons to avoid some of the most common mistakes and create a friendlier community with more successful, measurable returns on your investment.

1. Know your expected outcomes

How do you measure success of an activity or campaign? How about start with establishing some key objectives and outcomes to provide a benchmark? These goals should combine empirical business requirements, qualitative community reaction, and a positive return on investment.

What's in a benchmark? Typically, metrics around:

1. AUDIENCE CAPTURE: Continue building the online community by extending ongoing campaigns designed to attract traffic and encourage “likes”
2. AUDIENCE RETENTION: Convert expressions of interest and inbound traffic into loyal visitors and paying customers
3. ENHANCED MARKETING IMPACT: Provide a rich and meaningful contesting activity that delivers excellent customer recognition, rewards, goodwill, and loyalty incentives—like a delicious milkbone!
4. ACTIVATED COMMUNITY CULTURE: Create an enhanced interactive online community culture that can be recognized and rewarded for ongoing loyalty and interactions
5. BIG DATA CAPTURED: Design interactive systems that capture valuable customer behaviours, preferences, and beliefs useful for targeting of future marketing messages

2. Multi-channel touchpoints

Most companies and brands have become pretty good at building discreet channels of inbound web and social media traffic and recording the initial audience's momentary interest. But does it provide a clear picture of the true size, hierarchy, and loyalty of the community? Not usually. What's needed is an **optimized community engagement campaign** that's accessible to the entire social online community across *all* available digital touch-points (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, web, and so on). Pugs want to know how other pugs got their milkbones. *This* is how you go about consolidating an audience, retaining them, and converting them into brand-loyal paying customers!

3. Develop an interaction strategy

The most successful activities and campaigns run over a longer period of time (weeks or even months) or operate continuously (like an ongoing loyalty activity/program). These longer time-frames make it necessary to construct a well thought-out interaction strategy. You want to create a plan that encourages participation regularly and evenly across various channels of brand and customer contact, such as

advertising, email lists, TV/radio broadcasts, social media, and late night backyard howling. Categorizing all these interactions provides a valuable way of tracking and consolidating the community and capturing data around which channels contain the most aware and interested pugs.

4. Balanced participation

And then you're done? You wish! Programs, activities, and contests need to be designed with safeguards to prevent high-frequency players from “running away” with the game (like Kobayashi at a hotdog eating contest) and demotivating the more casual players (infrequent hotdog eaters). Ideally, the most frequent players will gain only a slight advantage in the long run (aside from that feeling of having eaten too many hotdogs), preventing late-joining or less dedicated players from feeling a sense of hopelessness (or nausea).

5. Strong, clean, simple messaging

It's also about how you chitchat. When drumming up interest for activities and contests, the messaging has to be enticing, straightforward, and easy to follow (vs. convoluted, labyrinthine, impenetrable, anomalous, heteroclitite...you get the idea). Include a strong call-to-action that gets users instantly interested and excited in becoming engaged. DO IT! Include that strong call-to-action! (See what I did there?)

The primary messaging should always be very basic yet compelling, ideally communicating these 3 key elements:

Item	Details
1. Key Value Proposition	“Play HotdogCo’s Customer Loyalty Game. It’s fun! It’s free food! You can win stuff!”
2. Call To Action	“Visit HDogCrew.com to start playing today!”
3. ‘Act Now’ Bonus	“Enter code ‘DIGDOG’ for your first chance to win!”

Generally, you don't need to communicate anything more than these key elements. Though, including some compelling visuals showing interesting and colourful screenshots of the activity can go a long way.

Resist the temptation to “over-explain” the mechanics of the game itself in your outreach marketing. One woof is enough! Remember: the main purpose of marketing activities is *not* to give detailed instructions but to *promote the URL or website* and get players intrigued. Have faith that they will know how to swim, or at the very least, doggy-paddle!

6. Watch the data

Use tools and tracking features to monitor the woofs and paw-shakings of your community in real-time. Some key areas to watch:

1. Pay attention in particular to how the different “digital touch-points” create the highest response rates from the activity.
2. Watch for patterns of behavior over time, looking for peaks and troughs of user activity to determine which channels are the most effective.

3. Capture deep data activity logs to help uncover behavioural clustering, demographics, psychographics, and users who have spent time trying to gain an unfair advantage within the system.

7. Look out for cheaters

Know the difference between unfulfilled players & cheaters.

1. **Unfulfilled players** – Unfulfilled players are those who actively seek additional ways to interact with the activity, even if it means breaking the rules or gaming the system. For example, in an activity that uses a code-word entry to participate (such as “POODLE”), unfulfilled players will spend time trying to guess other code words—“SPANIEL”, “DACHSUND”, “LABRADOODLE”. In a well-designed system, this can be safeguarded, rendering guessers low threat to the integrity of the system. Wide-spread guessing may simply indicate that the community is hungry (and maybe even drooling) to participate more often in the activity!
2. **Active cheaters** – Contesting activities offering valuable prizes inevitably attract active cheaters who use sophisticated means and resources to try to uncover technical exploits or apply hacks in order to try to sneak the proverbial sausage off the dinner table. The best protection against such active cheaters is continuous vigilance of the reporting tools for suspicious behaviour coupled with a flexible Terms & Conditions policy.

[Hungry for more? Check out our case study: “Part II: Kotex (Mexico) Mis Momentos Loyalty Contesting Activity”]