

perspectives

an artemis strategy group publication | JUNE 2009



This issue of **PERSPECTIVES** focuses on a challenge that is common to both marketing and public affairs communications: reaching people both supportive and likely to act.

talking to the right people:

HARNESSING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

MARKETING AND POLICY ADVOCACY EACH SEEK TO INCREASE INVOLVEMENT

As every marketer knows, consumers are not created equal, nor should they be treated equally. Stratifying people based upon how likely they are to engage with you—your product, company or cause—is perhaps the most effective way to organize the marketplace for success. Determining who is your most likely “buyer” or most easily persuaded prospect allows a marketer to efficiently target the low-hanging fruit and to studiously avoid the too distant, too costly yield.

The same is true for political and public affairs marketing. In fact, nowhere is the need for organizing the marketplace based on engagement

more important than in the realm of public policy advocacy. In this arena, marshalling your supporters and those who might reasonably be persuaded to support your side is the sine qua non of success. Policy debates typically end on a specified date in a final vote that determines the path forward for an extended period of time. Therefore, effectively segmenting the population to target those most likely to be on your side has both a time demand and an outcome gravity that consumer product choices rarely match.

Here’s an illustration of this marketing/policy difference: The Coca-Cola Company would love to motivate all the persuadable carbonated soft drink

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Artemis Strategy Group is a research-powered brand strategy and communications firm. We help you identify ideas that transform the relationship your audience has with your organization, product, or issue. We provide you with ideas that make sense. **PERSPECTIVES** is designed to offer insight, a point of view and ideas to help organizations with brand and communications needs. Like our business, the topics often relate to the intersection of policy and marketing. If we stimulate your thinking, we appreciate hearing your views.

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1025 vermont avenue, nw, suite 830, washington dc 20005 V 703.262.0550 F 703.262.0973

buyers to purchase a six-pack of Coke instead of a six-pack of Pepsi on their next shopping trip. But if they fail this week, the “loss” of some incremental fraction of all consumers is easily weathered. There will be other shopping trips in the near future when they can try again to persuade the same shoppers. Public policy debates, on the other hand, have fewer and more far-reaching decision points, raising the stakes for effective targeting.

Political affiliation and issue support have long been the default voter traits used in the political and public affairs arena as the basis of communications targeting strategy for those seeking to affect the outcome of elections and legislative battles. They explain a lot, especially when combined with demographic profiling. But they don’t fully take into account the propensity toward community engagement that turns out to be a force of potentially much greater significance for those who seek to win. Using some of the policy programs we’ve helped build as our guide, we discuss here some of the characteristics of this “engaged” population and how they can and do influence policy outcomes.

ENGAGEMENT: THE STEALTH INGREDIENT

Beyond demographics, past voting choices and current beliefs and positions, there is a set of behavior patterns that define the level and nature of a person’s involvement with the political process and public policy debates: engagement.

A number of people talk about the “engaged” population as a shorthand descriptor of this phenomenon. As is often the case, the shorthand hides the real complexity of engagement. People differ dramatically in their absolute levels of public engagement. They differ in their types of engagement. And the same person’s level of engagement can and usually does differ dramatically according to the specific issue, just as it can also vary within a single issue over time depending on the forces at work in their own lives and in the public policy context.

Artemis Strategy Group has been working for over a year with an exciting startup business—Resonate Networks—that, among other things, has developed some remarkable tools for reaching Americans who have different levels of engagement with the political and policy process.

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- **CONTRIBUTED** your thoughts about an issue online through comment boxes, blogs or chat rooms
- **COMMUNICATED** with a state, local or national politician about an issue
- **SPECIFICALLY BOUGHT** a product or service from a company whose involvement with an issue you approve of
- **BOUGHT** a product because of the company's involvement with a public issue, even if the product is more expensive than others
- **BOUGHT OR SOLD STOCK** in a company because of its position or involvement in a particular issue
- **JOINED** a group to advocate for an issue
- **CONTRIBUTED MONEY** to a group to advocate for an issue
- **CONTRIBUTED TO** a political candidate or party

While many policy initiatives focus on engaged populations, the Resonate emphasis provides an opportunity to take a more comprehensive look at the complex ecosystems of attitudes and behaviors that constitute engagement. Several of the observations below draw from this work.

There is no singular manner by which to measure engagement. But there is a relative convergence around the types of behaviors that constitute it. Here is a list of actions that we use regularly to help us track this phenomenon.

Measures of these activities help us sort out differing patterns of engagement on public policy issues. Drawing from the results of several policy studies, including our work with Resonate Networks and others, we can make some broad observations about this set of activities:

- Among voters, about three-quarters report that they have engaged in at least one of these behaviors.
- About half indicate that they have followed an issue with some intensity. For many, this relatively passive activity may be their only engagement with issues.

- It is encouraging in a representative democracy that approximately one-third of voters indicate that they have communicated directly with a political representative to express their views on an issue.
- Up to one-quarter have contributed their thoughts in public forums such as online chat rooms, newspaper editorial pages or public meetings.
- Voters join and contribute in lower proportions, in each case about one of six.
- Finally, between five and ten percent indicate that their policy views have influenced some product choices or investment decisions.

The range of answers makes it easy to envision the diversity of engagement patterns. Simply looking at the different types of activities in which people engage, we can see that our population divides roughly into four quadrants: one-quarter engages in none of these behaviors, a second quarter in just one, a third quarter in just two, and the final quarter in three or more of these behaviors. The truly engaged portion of the population, those who engage

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The more-engaged have and express stronger opinions about a broad range of political and social issues than the less-engaged, even when they are not particularly active on the issues.

in a range of listening, opining, joining, contributing and buying behaviors, is indeed small.

There is an interesting and not entirely predictable interaction between engagement and specific issue stances. It is intuitive that people engage differently depending on the issue — for example, those most engaged in education do not necessarily engage in the same way or at the same level with sustainability or financial services reform. But it is noteworthy that the engaged are more likely to take a stance on most issues, regardless of their level of engagement with those issues. The more-engaged have and express stronger opinions about a broad range of political and social issues than the less-engaged, even when they are not particularly active on the issues. Engagement also is not restricted to one side or another of the political spectrum. Ratios of engagement among pros/cons can vary tremendously for any given issue—those who are heavily engaged in opposition to limits on CEO compensation, for example, are a small club, while issues involving broader regulation and taxation show robustly engaged segments at each end of the spectrum.

One way to better understand these action categories is to examine demographic differences. To sample just some of these traits, we observe that men report greater engagement of virtually all kinds. Education level shows a substantial impact, much higher among those with college degrees. Age shows a somewhat different pattern. On most measures of engagement, middle-aged adults (ages 35-54) indicate significantly higher levels of engagement in most respects than either their younger or older cohorts; this is strikingly so when it comes to online communications. The oldest cohort is most likely to have offered opinion in a traditional format or to have contributed to a political candidate or party.

The overarching goal of any communications campaign is to create and sustain the best and highest relationship possible with each target audience member. Understanding how people express their support (voting versus contributing, contributing versus joining a group) enables the marketer to shape messages that include an appropriate call to action. For some, the best and highest will be getting them to support your cause at the

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ballot box. For others, it will be getting them to write a letter to the editor supporting your views.

And for some, contributing money to your campaign or cause will be the highest and best relationship. Knowing in advance who within your target audience has a propensity to act in certain ways will greatly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of your relationship-building efforts.

A CONTINUUM OF BEHAVIOR

Most public issue engagement is sequential rather than random. As with consumers in a buying situation, there is a clear pathway of behavior from the lowest level of affiliation to high degrees of loyalty. Let's draw this parallel.

For marketers, the heart and soul of communications strategy is to move groups of people along a continuum

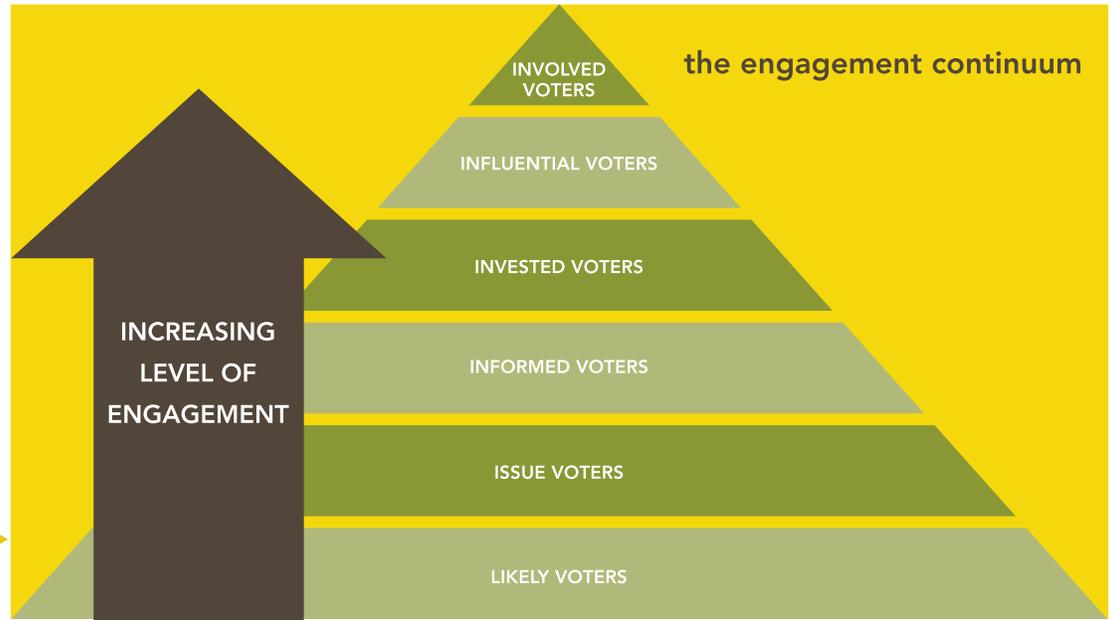
from awareness to willingness to re-purchase by giving them the essential information and motivation to move from one level to the next.

THE CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT/ PURCHASE CONTINUUM

The idea here is that certain knowledge and behavior are predicated on other knowledge and behavior. It would be hard, for example, to expect someone to have favorable perceptions of a product unless he/she first has some familiarity with the product. And we cannot expect someone to try a product for the first time until he/she has enough favorability toward the product to be willing to consider purchasing it.

The same ideas apply to public issue marketing. With Resonate Networks we





Affinity, as with consumer products, is built over time along a sequential continuum. Here is what the engagement continuum looks like for public policy issues.

have learned that for most people, willingness to write letters and speak out in support of an issue precedes their willingness to join an issue-oriented group or to contribute to that group.

As you would expect, there are fewer individuals willing to display the most active levels of engagement than those who are willing to display the easiest forms of engagement.

Managing the movement of groups along this continuum is what we mean by building the best and highest relationship with voter groups. Each stop along the continuum indicates a relationship status marker as well as what types of messages and calls to

action are most appropriate for those people. Baked into this philosophy of issue management is the notion that different segments need to hear different messages at different times. This is difficult as advertising and other communication channels are blunt instruments that thwart most efforts at targeted mass communications. It is hard to advertise three or four discrete messages intended for different types of people without all the others hearing and seeing those same messages, resulting in a hash of confusion. What is needed to bring this communications architecture to life is a way to segment advertising channels. Let's consider the approach discussed on the yellow sidebar, next page.

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resonate to motivate

Resonate Networks is a vertical online advertising network that has taken an approach highly attuned to these changes. This new company specializes in helping organizations with a stake in specific public policy debates to reach the people they most want to touch via online advertising. The unique proposition is that Resonate is able to help its clients target specific websites, both the usual suspects and the less likely ones, where people with specific political affiliations, demographics, policy views and patterns of engagement are more likely to congregate.

We're pleased to have been a part of this new policy targeting venture. It fits well with our own emphasis on the development of communications messages that are most likely to motivate voters to take action.

For more information on Resonate Networks, go to www.resonatenetworks.com.

CHANGE IS COMING

People with higher levels of engagement in public policy issues have different media habits than others. They are heavier media users and more inclined to seek out media that offer stronger opinions. Looking at differences in the media habits of engaged people, we can expect to see patterns of media use change as well. People report participating in online conversations about public issues at twice the frequency that they participate via offline channels, and younger people are at the front edge of that phenomenon. Even more important, as the last Presidential campaign showed, engagement itself can be impacted and built upon from one campaign to the next. These ongoing changes in the nature of engagement create opportunities for new kinds of services.

SUMMARY

Engagement is more than a simple and singular phenomenon:

- Engagement takes different forms, there are different patterns of engagement by issue, and individuals themselves manifest different engagement over time.
- There are at least half a dozen important levels of engagement, and the engaged population tends to progress

through these levels in a common sequence.

- The most highly engaged portion of the population cuts across the political and ideological spectrum.
- Engagement differs by issue, as does the specific segment of the population that is engaged on any one specific issue.
- People with different levels and types of engagement have different media and online use patterns, which means that reaching them requires specific types of understanding.
- And finally, change is coming. Aside from the oft-reported change in public orientation brought about by recent economic and political events, the online environment changes the amount and nature of involvement.

As policy campaigns turn from focusing on the most elite policymakers and influencers, it's important to understand possible ways to define and target the general population. Segmenting audiences based on the nature and level of their engagement in the policy process allows more personalized, relevant and actionable issue communications.