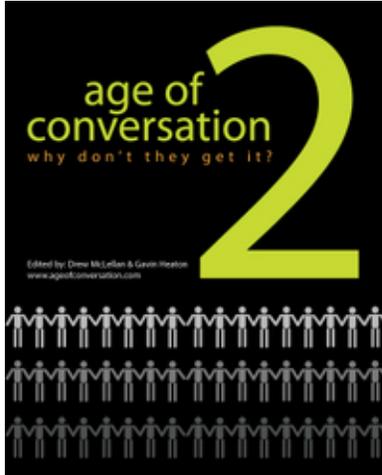


# Answers To The Questions You Didn't Ask

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When was the last time you talked, listened, laughed and learned with .. not *From* .. but *With* your customers or clients? Marketing teaches us the more we know about our target audience the better we can service them.

*"The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself." - Peter Drucker.*

When Peter Drucker wrote that statement, over fifty years ago, formal market research was how most marketers obtained insights about their customers. Marketers asked the questions and customers gave their opinions. Marketers listened and learned.

Flash into the 21<sup>st</sup> century ... technology has changed global communication and that influenced business communications. An internet playground developed that toppled the walls of culture and geographical distance. Conversations exploded.

Social media *people-to-people talk* often includes discussions about experiences with specific brands. In unfiltered, non-directed discussions on blogs, in communities, on review sites, in videos and through photos the good, bad and ugly are now in full Google view for all. An informal consumer review network is being created that often influences, not only brand perception, but purchase decisions.

For the first time, our customers are providing *answers to questions that were never asked* in formal research studies. We now have additional, valuable insights that can supplement traditional research. However, some marketers dismiss this online chat as irrelevant. Others listen in frozen fascination. A few companies are doing something radical that marketers never had the opportunity to do before: talking *with* their customers in their worlds.

Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, is active on Twitter - a micro blogging community. His advice to CEOs who want to bring social media to their companies - "I think if the CEO

Age of Conversation Book 2

starts using Twitter on his/her own and is actually passionate about it, then that passion will eventually rub off on the rest of the organization.”

Dell is also changing its business model by engaging with its customers. According to Richard Binhammer, “Social media helps us: learn from conversations with customers every day. That has influenced internal processes as we have identified issues sooner than we might otherwise have, learned to respond faster and generally listen and be in touch.”

Understanding your customer and knowing what she wants is like finding the holy grail of marketing. Adopting your business model to include engaging with your customers can help make that happen.

*The Age of Conversation 2 book brought together nearly 300 of the world’s leading marketers, writers, thinkers and creative innovators for a global collaboration where the impact of digital conversations was explored.*