

LEVEL

CREATING AND MARKETING CONNECTED EXPERIENCES
JANUARY 2010

| | |
|---|----|
| A Good Challenge | 02 |
| Two Guiding Principles | 02 |
| Creating a Desirable Product Experience | 03 |
| Improving the Product Setup Experience | 03 |
| Creating High-Quality Content Experiences | 03 |
| Making Content Accessible | 04 |
| Marketing the Product | 05 |
| Showing the Customer that the Product is Useful | 05 |
| Showing the Customer that the Product is Usable | 06 |
| Bringing It All Together | 07 |

A Good Challenge

It is an exciting but difficult time for manufacturers of connected devices. The unknowns associated with creating innovative customer experiences on new products have fueled a significant amount of research to better understand the product demand and the types of experiences customers expect from connected TVs, Blu-ray players, DVRs, set-top boxes and even video game consoles.

However, the research lacks details regarding how consumer electronics (CE) manufacturers can develop strategies to introduce a product that consumers will desire and evangelize. At LEVEL, we believe that various stages of the product lifecycle (research, purchase, setup, use) are closely connected – all impact the customer's total user experience. Applying to a wide range of brands and device types, this paper showcases the interdependent relationship between the product experience and product marketing as well as gives recommendations on how to build successful strategies that bring content to the television.

Two Guiding Principles

LEVEL uses a proven methodology to help CE manufacturers successfully launch products. This process is based on two guiding principles we developed over 15 years of creating product experiences and digital marketing strategies for major CE brands.

- A positive product experience is dependent upon the quality of informative, functional and entertaining content available and the ease of its accessibility.
- The optimal way to market a product is to demonstrate that the experience on the product is easy and applicable to customers' lives (usable and useful).

In other words, consumers want high quality content that is easily accessible and they are more likely to buy when they are clearly shown how they can interact with the content on their device. As technology paradigms shift, the way that users interact with products will continually change. However, in the foreseeable future these principles will hold true and can apply to even the most revolutionary devices.

Creating a Desirable Product Experience

While user experience considers every touch point with a brand, a product experience is comprised of each interaction that a particular user has with a product interface. If the entire product experience is not intuitive, successfully marketing the product will be nearly impossible in the long term. A positive experience generates word-of-mouth that spurs new customer adoption and greater loyalty among current customers. Closely tying the product experience to the marketing of a product is necessary for a unified total user experience.

Improving the Product Setup Experience

Product setup on a connected device dictates how the consumer will use their device and gives the manufacturers a tremendous amount of consumer/product information. Because device setup is crucial, we'll include setup recommendations before discussing ways to improve the experience for everyday product use.

Leverage user goals to achieve business goals.

In any setup process, users want to learn more about their product and start using it as quickly as possible. Manufacturers and partners are interested in things like improving completed product registration rates, getting higher partner opt-ins and users properly connecting the device. If presented logically with adequate descriptions, setup pages can be useful to users and help accomplish business goals. Including one extra sentence describing a step might improve the user's understanding of an offer enough for them to opt-in versus opting out of an offer. Predictive modeling, page flow analysis, user testing and information design can all be used to help adequately plan information flow and page content strategy.

Use tested iconography and verbiage to simplify task completion.

Words and images that allow users to instantly understand their task keep them from feeling overwhelmed and facilitate a quicker completion of the setup process.

Treat product setup like ecommerce checkout.

Show the users where they are in the setup process and why each screen is important. Connected device users will actively participate in setup pages that offer clear value. An engaged customer that knows the total number of setup pages is more likely to actually read opt-in offers, additional service promos and other setup information to get the most out of the process.

Introduce users to advanced device functionalities that are relevant to their desired usage.

Use details from the product setup process to give the user relevant promotions. Include product configuration and usage data as well as user registration information to generate the offers. For example, if a user has connected their product and indicated an interest in sharing content with friends, give that user an option to view a short demo on the social applications available on their device at the end of the setup process. Post setup is an opportune time to show the depth of content available and the process for searching for and interacting with that content.

Creating High-Quality Content Experiences

Content can come from traditional publishing companies, branded sponsors, formal partners or developers.

Start with an ecosystem that encourages continued content development.

Taking a lesson from manufacturers like Apple, the most successful products are supported by a substantial technical and human infrastructure that promotes ongoing content development. Early on, develop a business model that encourages the content creators to participate with the promise of profit or increased brand engagement. Manufacturers without a significant customer base may have to rely on the uniqueness of the product interface or advanced device functionality to attract content partners. Be ready for partners with an infrastructure that supports various ad models, content development guidelines, a content testing strategy and an application store. These provide more scalability than one-off content partnerships and can ultimately create a stream of revenue after product purchase.

Take advantage of “TV-only” content and device functionality.

Commanding a prominent place in most household living rooms and/or bedrooms, TVs provide most consumers with long-format media and social interactions with friends or family. Find partners that can leverage traditional TV consumption habits in unique ways. For example, families watching their favorite weekly TV show might want to follow the show with an interactive game that quizzes them on the show’s events. This incorporates new interactivity into long-format media viewing in a social environment.

Have a content strategy for all audiences.

Until now, TV has largely been a source for entertainment and information. With connectivity, it also becomes functional, allowing users to accomplish tasks (search, purchase, chat, etc.). Incorporate multiple levels of interaction into your device for consumers who will prefer varying degrees of advanced features. Identify things that all levels of users will want to do and what type of content partners can fulfill those needs. This helps in partner selection and helps identify gaps in content that users may desire.

Making Content Accessible

As you introduce new content and device functionality, users have to be able to find it and use it easily for it to be deemed valuable.

Follow the “three-click” rule.

If a user decides to do something else on their device, make sure that within three clicks they can access their desired content. For example, if a user is watching a movie on a connected TV and wants to see other movies by the same director, the viewer should be able to reach the search box (or whatever in-context functionality is available) within three clicks. From there, other action may be necessary before they fulfill their goal, but they did not have to go deep into another interface to begin their search.

Assume the user knows what they want to watch.

Don’t inundate the user with a clutter-filled interface. Manufacturers cannot impose on the viewing experience by assuming that customers need to have every content option displayed at all times. Instead, provide the viewer with the flexibility to modify the screen and content settings to their liking and easily access content.

Make personalization easy with smart technologies.

To keep the interface simple despite a variety of content options, allow consumers to customize everything from widgets to updates on new online content (think Google News updates announcing weekly top 10 viral videos). Users are generally accustomed to opting in for content (through iGoogle, RSS, email newsletters, etc.), and the ability of connected devices to do the work of finding good content for the consumer is a primary differentiator. Content recommendations and customized widget displays can be integrated into existing guide formats or showcased in personalized interfaces set up by families or individuals.

Consider future content distribution methods.

It’s very feasible that in the near future a broad base of consumers will be willing to purchase pieces of content on an individual basis. As the TV business model emulates paid versus free models on the PC and handset, device manufacturers can be prepared to integrate varying levels of content within the product interface, all of which needs to be accessible and clearly defined.

Marketing the Product

Historically, the most influential factor contributing to the widespread adoption of new products is a desirable experience on the product. As such, it makes sense to focus on the user experience when marketing the product. A positive user experience is both useful and usable.

Showing the Customer that the Product is Useful

A useful product improves the lives of the user by allowing them to complete a desired task, like checking the weather or entertaining themselves.

Focus on specific applications of use.

Users are more likely to comprehend something as part of a scenario taken from real life. For example, show users how they can answer questions about a particular show while watching it. Even if they never previously wished for that functionality, most would agree it could be useful when browsing for similar content.

Clearly articulate why features are most relevant on your device type.

Once users see how a particular feature might be useful to them, they need to understand why that feature is more useful on one device (like a TV) than another (e.g., a PC or handset). For handsets, the immediacy of information at any time became an ultimate differentiator that helped the broader public see the value in owning a smartphone. Because TVs are watched in the home, where a PC is usually available, immediacy is not necessarily as relevant. Instead, consumers will likely be more interested in a message of convenience, cost-savings, social interaction, personalization and relevance. Combining the best features of multiple devices and new TV experiences can offer on-demand content that is customizable (with widgets, recommendation engines, etc.) and may be cheaper than their current cable setup.

Place strong emphasis on features that the audience will understand.

Completely innovative experiences are sometimes difficult to understand for the general public. Reduce consumer skepticism by showing interface features inspired by a PC or other device whose interface viewers feel comfortable around. Also, show the user the simplicity of doing things that most users frequently do on the device (like streaming movies).

Reinforce that the product will continue to be useful.

Now that consumers see the current usefulness of the product, show them the product's ability to scale and remain useful. Because the connected device market is changing so quickly, with new devices and new content partnerships happening daily, customers worry about products becoming outdated quickly. Highlight recent content or retail partnerships to ensure customers that your device is leading edge and has strong interest from other players in the value chain. Also, show them specific technical abilities that your device may have, like automatic updates when new content becomes available.

Showing the Customer that the Product is Usable

One of consumers' greatest pain points is an inability to ever use the device to its full potential because of an overly complicated interface. The following suggestions will help users overcome that challenge, ensuring they see value in your product's features.

Show the steps required from setup to sitting back.

When consumers consider buying a product, they want to know if it will work with their current equipment and how difficult it will be to set up. The setup process is part of product usability. Show the consumer exactly what hardware and chord components are included in the box. Online, spell out the specific steps required to set up the product and get it working. Set expectations to minimize frustration associated with the unanswered setup questions that new buyers are sure to encounter.

Allow customers to experience the product before purchase.

In addition to generating awareness about the content available on your device, show customers how they will engage with it. For example, customers might like the ability to update a social profile to let friends know about the show they are watching. CE manufacturers need to show consumers the steps included, to ensure them it is not a clunky interface that makes the task cumbersome or ruins the TV-viewing experience. This also helps articulate the usefulness of the product by showing a real-world scenario. Perform this recommendation through a video demonstration, a 3-step visual breakdown or interactive product tour.

Highlight steps required for key tasks.

Using video or interactive product tours, show customers the number of steps required to perform the most frequent customer tasks. Break down each task by the number of clicks or steps required. The tasks that will be most commonly performed may be the same across many branded devices. Sometimes the experience while performing that task is a differentiator. However, don't place more importance on the feature that makes the task easier than the task itself, which is ultimately what the user cares about most.

Bringing It All Together

As we've shown throughout this paper, product experience and product marketing are crucial components of a desirable overall user experience. The final element necessary to create a total experience across all customer touch points is a scalable technology platform capable of housing, organizing and sharing content across devices and supporting an intuitive product interface. The technology drives the product experience and the product experience heavily impacts the product marketing. CE manufacturers that connect these three pieces position themselves well to meet consumers' expectations during product research, purchase, setup and use.

About LEVEL Studios

An independent digital agency, LEVEL is uniquely positioned to help you bring together product development and product marketing to deliver a total user experience across all brand touch points. Over the last 15 years, we have created and marketed product experiences for leading manufacturers of TVs, PCs, netbooks and handsets like Philips, RIM, Cisco, HP and Apple. Our service offering includes product strategy development, user experience and interface design, media services, technology planning, application development and integration and cloud computing architecture. Providing user-centric design, digital media and application development, LEVEL is connecting you.

To learn more about how LEVEL works with consumer electronics manufacturers, go to:
www.level-studios.com/connected