



Kieran Hannon

VP of Marketing at Belkin

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Q+A on Storytelling 101 with Belkin's Kieran Hannon

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I didn't think anyone could get me excited about a story featuring the "Linksys WRT1900AC" until I met VP of Marketing at Belkin, Kieran Hannon. But it's true: even for some of the most tech-heavy companies out there, storytelling has become the de facto way to engage audiences and ultimately enhance the customer experience.

In the interview below, we weave a tale of our own about rewarding customers for engaging with Belkin, tips for whipping up a delicious dinner, and, like all good stories, a genie shows up at the end. Oh, and before I forget, congratulations to Kiernan for his recent Customer Experience Award win at The CMO Club's CMO Awards.

Drew: Customer experience does not always come under the control of the CMO yet can have a dramatic impact on the brand and ultimately the believability of your marketing initiatives. How have you been able to impact the customer experience in your current role?

Kieran: Using a 360 degree customer view and incorporating that into the company planning process, the voice of the customer is always front and center spanning marketing, product, sales and customer care. Not only do we have our own focus group facility onsite for in-depth customer engagement, we spend a lot of time actively listening to customers across social media and through our customer advocacy (care) teams. We also have communities providing ongoing feedback while highlighting new product features/needs. This is all part of our comprehensive planning process for product development. Recent impacts of this approach include the highly regarded and reviewed Linksys WRT1900AC router supporting the Performance Perfected brand positioning; the Belkin QODE keyboards and the WeMo Maker launch.

Drew: What advice do you have for other senior marketers who want to impact the customer experience but aren't necessarily responsible for it from end to end?

Kieran: You must have total empathy for your customers, understand their needs and wants and how your brand(s) fit into their worlds. More importantly, engage with them in multiple ways for a better rounded experience. Whether in-store, online or via other research methods, keeping constant tabs on the sentiment is a must. I personally enjoy engaging with customers on Twitter. I encourage all to be very active on one of the social media channels.

Drew: Home automation appears to be hot new category. With so much competition, how do envision WeMo setting itself apart and holding its own in the market?

Kieran: WEMO is setting itself apart by again, understanding how the brand benefits people lives today and in the future. Technology has disconnected people but in our case we use it to allow people to "be in the moment, enjoy what they're doing". Let serendipity come back into their lives. Why should you be worrying about dinner when still at lunch with your friends? Well, WEMO has taken care of that with the Crockpot. Dinner – WEMO That!

Drew: You were recently named one of the most influential CMOs on Twitter by Forbes. What are your motivations for being on social media, and how large a role does social media play in Belkin's marketing efforts

Kieran: Social media lets you be front and center – with customers, partners and other industry peers. I love it. For instance Hudson News is a big partner and we have done some interesting promotions together amplified via social media. But all of their team, from the CEO across

the board, are completely engaged. It's allows for that real time feedback loop. I get such a kick out of it. Can't believe more CMOs aren't on Twitter.

Drew: Marketing budgets are getting increasingly complex as new options and tools become available. How as CMO are you staying on top of budget allocation and optimization?

Kieran: It's a constant, something we pay attention to all the time. We use various tools to optimize such allocations and exploring some recent new products in this area to fully realize the power of data and insights for such allocations.

Drew: Have you leveraged any new technologies or platforms in the last 12 months and if so what were the results relative to your expectations?

Kieran: We have, particularly in the social media and customer care areas. Our CIO Deanna Johnston is a brilliant partner here. For instance we have a very large Salesforce implementation with communities integrated. That is a big asset. For WeMo people are submitting products ideas and making suggestions for other community members.

Drew: Storytelling is a big buzzword right now. Is your brand a good storyteller and if so, can you provide an example of how you are telling that story?

Kieran: Finally, storytelling is back. Hallelujah! That is the power of a brand – how it's story resonates and shared amongst it's customers. We are telling stories with WeMo in how people can use the products in ways they never even thought possible. There's such a joy in illuminating how technology can help make people's lives better and more engaging.

Drew: Finally, if it's not too early to ask, what marketing "nut" would you like to crack in 2015?

Kieran: Ah, if I had the genie it would have to be around data. There's so much but what is meaningful. Many

people use different methodologies so what are the best practices and what is real/works. I think that's going to be the nut in 2015!

About the author

Drew Neisser is the CEO and founder of Renegade, the NYC-based social media and marketing agency that helps inspired CMOs cut through. He is the champion of Marketing as Service, a philosophy he espouses in his writings on [FastCompany.com](#), PSFK, TheDrewBlog and The Cut, a much-appreciated monthly newsletter. If you have a CMO success story to tell, let Drew know at dneisser@renegade.com.

