



Steve Fuller

CMO at L.L. Bean

PROGRAMMATIC MARKETING AWARD

Q+A on Digital Marketing with LL Bean CMO Steve Fuller

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L.L. Bean has been in the direct marketing game for over 100 years having issued its first mail order catalog way back in 1912. Since then it has learned a thing or two about customer acquisition, building loyalty and marketing mix optimization. In that context, it wasn't too surprising that current L.L. Bean CMO Steve Fuller talked about getting the "basics right" while simultaneously capitalizing on the latest digital marketing techniques like programmatic.

In our conversation below, Steve is refreshingly honest, sharing accomplishments and missteps in an understated manner that seems entirely consistent with the L.L. Bean brand itself. For example, though he was a recent winner of The CMO Club's award for Programmatic Marketing, he is also quick to point out his organization is still in the early stages of applying all of this technology to its fullest advantage. This is not a case of a New Englander saying "you can't get theya from heya" but simply a recognition that patience and in Dave's words not "expecting too much too soon" from new tech platforms can be a virtue even in the fast paced world of digital marketing.

Drew: Drew: You have been at the forefront of ecommerce for a while. What did you try in 2014 from a digital marketing standpoint that worked particularly well?

Steve: In our case, it was better execution of the "basics." Our search programs – paid, natural, etc. – have been lacking in recent years and we definitely got those programs back on track in 2014. And after testing nearly every alternative available, it appears we might have finally beaten the in-house product recommendation engine that we built waaaaay back in 2005.

Drew: Did you try some things that didn't work as well as you hoped?

Steve: A few. We have a fairly robust analytics cloud in development. We like the overall direction of the project, but it's progressing slower than we would have hoped. L.L.Bean also moved to a new chat/social media tracking platform that has been a disappointment.

Drew: If you could wave a magic wand, what is the one thing you'd like to see fixed about digital marketing and why?

Steve: I'm not sure the right word is "fixed," but demand/investment attribution is still an undeveloped area. There are a lot of people doing interesting things, but the methodologies – and results – vary wildly. And while I understand the desire to protect proprietary research, the "black box" approach of many companies makes them a challenge to evaluate.

Drew: When bringing on new tech/platforms what are some of the pitfalls to be avoided?

Steve: Expecting too much too soon. These are incredibly complex systems both from a production and analytics perspective. Implementation "sequencing" is also something to watch. Too many changes at once makes it almost impossible to isolate performance.

Drew: How has programmatic marketing helped you reach your overall marketing objectives?

Steve: I want to be the first to say that we've got a long way to go with programmatic. We learn something each and every day. But we're especially pleased with its ability to help bring "scale" to those programs in an efficient way – both from a presentation and an analytics perspective.

Drew: What were some of the challenges of adopting pro-

grammatic and what advice would you give to another marketer who is just getting started?

Steve: The easiest thing to overlook is the amount of production work required to do it right. Ads need to be created, they need to be trafficked, etc., etc.

Drew: Do you have a marketing dashboard? What advice would you give to a CMO who was looking to develop a dashboard?

Steve: We have a series of metrics that drive the organization. My advice is easy — keep it connected to the customer and keep it simple. The amount of data flowing through the typical marketing organization now can lead to overly complex measures. You want to keep your organization focused on the activities that drive measures — not trying to interpret them.

Drew: How important is it to you and your company to have a strong Corporate Social Responsibility program?

Steve: L.L.Bean has operated on the stakeholder concept for over 100 years. It is embedded into our culture with responsibilities shared throughout our organization.

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.

