Build the framework for successful engagement

Jennifer Marlo

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Brian Solis is an author, speaker, and lead researcher for Altimeter Group. In his new book "X: The Experience When Business Meets Design," Solis reveals the importance of "experience architecture" -- the art of designing for the customer experience from the get-go. The book, which was carefully crafted to elevate the reader experience with eye-catching visuals and easy to digest chapters, came out in October 2015 and is already a hit among business professionals.

In this exclusive interview for iMedia, Solis reveals how he came up with the concept for "X: The Experience When Business Meets Design," what it means to be an "experience architect," and the brands that are getting it right.

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iMedia: You've been described as a futurist. How do you define that description?

Solis: (Laughs) That title was given to me -- Ray Kurtzweil and Mary Meeker are futurists. That being said, I do look at tech trends and play them out in different ways. I think about how tech will evolve and how the trends will affect business and society. I try to reverse engineer everything to look at how things could work three to five years in the future.

iMedia: Your new book highlights the importance of "experience architecture," asserting that design, storytelling, and the overall user experience is directly responsible for establishing and maintaining engagement. With this concept in mind, what are some examples of great human-centered experience architecture?

Solis: When I studied the role of experience architect I noticed that businesses tend to have a narrow focus -- but the experience is not every *one* thing. It's *everything*. We tend to look at aspects of engagement or aspects of transaction and we build around that moment. However, architecture is becoming more about how *everything* is supposed to work *together*. Today, when businesses invest in the culture of a brand, they do so from an ethos of cheerleading or marketing. What we should be thinking about is how we want someone to feel, think, sense, and share. How do we take that brand product and service and reinforce that service? We need to elevate the concept of business and force businesses to become more retrospective. Here's why: traditionally, departments compete against each other -- they don't work together to create a holistic experience. Yet we talk about this experience all

day long.

When looking at the customer experience, we look at overall customer satisfaction. But the customer experience is the sum of all moments, loyalty, CRM, and advocacy over time. Brands need to focus on rethinking the world of business. Part of that is also rethinking the employee journey.

Now, to answer your question -- many companies are doing a lot of amazing things in the moment. Sephora looked at the customer journey for what it could be. Sephora observed behaviors and values and totally redesigned the company infrastructure, thereby creating a much more valuable experience for employees and, in turn, customers.

Disney's magic band is another example. This billion dollar experience collects data on you while you're in the park. Sure, it can be argued as "creepy" but we give up this kind of data every day. Can you imagine the possibilities? The tracking could open new thoroughfares in the park, upgrade the dining experience at the onsite restaurants -- the possibilities are endless.

A lot of people can't agree on why Apple is so great -- I cover this in the chapter called "Apple Universe." From the website, to the messages, to the content, to the job descriptions -- every aspect of every moment has been carefully thought of. Apple in an example of a complete story arch and every experience is designed against the story arch.

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iMedia: Within a business, where or with whom does foundational change begin? What is the role of the marketer in experience architecture?

Solis: Experience architecture dictates that the role of engagement is more important than ever before. For marketers, that means becoming part of the internal community that is aspirational. But change can become incredibly political. If the leadership is not on board, if not everyone can agree on the change management, then you have a problem. You have to keep in mind that these are people that are protecting their jobs and that is quite a deterrent to change.

iMedia: Please talk about how you incorporated "experience architecture" into the design of your book. Did you begin writing the book with design in mind, or did the idea come later?

Solis: Well, I actually storyboarded my own book. Every page is broadening, and the idea is to change your perspective as you go along. I see where we are missing opportunities and I wanted to open your eyes to show progress or momentum.

"What's the Future of Business" (WTF) is a book was written after I started writing "X," yet it was published first. The reason why I went back to "WTF" is because my publisher thought it was too big of a mental leap to go straight into a book that highlights the end of business as usual. But, for me, there was an incredible sense of irony and guilt that business is changing and that people are reading it on paper.

"X" is was partially inspired by how younger people are using their electronics. The design of the book is supposed to emulate a mobile app on paper. So going from writing "X" to writing "WTF," I had to relearn how to put together sentences. It was debilitating as an author.

iMedia: In one of your interviews you mention that the biggest opportunity is in philosophy. You said "how do you look at the world, how is the world different, and how do you want to compete in the world differently?" You also mentioned that the biggest mistake we do in the digital world is talk about technology. Can you expand on that?

Solis: As an analyst I no longer cover tech beats as I used to. Tech is amazing -- but no one sits around talking about the tech of Uber, they talk about the experience. The real story is people. Tech is just the enabler.

Jennifer Marlo" < " attr(href) " > &quot is content director at iMedia Connection.

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Jennifer Marlo

Jennifer received her BFA from UC Santa Barbara and MFA from CALARTS in 2006. Post graduation, Jennifer segued into freelance writing, focusing on various topics such as arts, entertainment, travel, and tourism. Jennifer is a native Los Angelean...

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