

## EngageSimply Envisions Omnichannel as a Way of Targeting Small Subcultures



**AN INTERVIEW WITH:**

**Judy Shapiro**  
**Founder and CEO, engageSimply**  
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As an engagement marketing company, engageSimply uses data analytics to serve ads and cultivate customer interests. Judy Shapiro, engageSimply's founder and CEO, spoke with eMarketer's Yory Wurmser about how omnichannel marketing is moving toward quality interactions based on context.

eMarketer: How do you see engageSimply's role within an omnichannel ecosystem?

Judy Shapiro: I started this company because my friends with the big agencies were getting these big data reports from the tech guys. And they were saying, "Judy, what does this mean?"

So there was a collision of tech meets marketing. And in the collision, what got lost was what I call the human element. How do we recreate a situation in the digital landscape where we can truly make advertising welcome and not just tolerated?

Our products are all around context. Our definition of context is around subcultures. So we talk to people who love women's football—not people who love football. We talk to people who love unexplained archeology—not archeology. And so we scale subcultures, which is how we get to contextual relevance. We then create shops on these properties, on these communities around the topic. And that's where the ecommerce engagement hub kicks into gear.

eMarketer: You have an unusual perspective in that you serve both brands and retailers. Are you seeing competition in the way that they are going about their advertising, or are they still working cooperatively?

Shapiro: I am finding not only more cooperation, I am finding an acceleration of channel strategies. So packaged goods are looking for channel partners.

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The biggest mistake, I humbly believe, is that digital became a TV alternative. That was a mistake made eight years ago. Digital is intimate. I focus on the intimate web—not the macrobillion impression web. Because the internet is the best communication- and content-serving engine.

Conversations are shifting in digital from billions of impressions to thousands of quality impressions. That is probably the most challenging part of what agencies are dealing with now: How do they balance digital scale with quality digital scale?

eMarketer: Does the shift to mobile affect how hard it is to deliver quality display ads?

Shapiro: So the big answer is yes. You know what the problem with mobile is? They are pushing rich media through a smartphone, and the user experience sucks. Mobile is critical real-time information, connectivity and help. Use it for that. Don't try and shove a rich media ad through it, which is unpleasant. I don't care how good the little viewer is—it's just unpleasant. Will people watch it? Of course. There's stuff on the train, there's stuff at the airport, whatever. But this doesn't make it a welcome user experience.

The point is these impressions are out of context. So even if that person was interested in those pair of shoes or the software or whatever you're pitching, you are showing that ad in a way that is completely disruptive of what they intended to do. And so again, it's a wasted impression.

Julie Fleischer, one of the top media people at Kraft, said at an Ad Age conference that she now rejects 75% to 80% of digital impressions delivered. Rejects. The house is on fire and everybody is sitting there talking about even more impressions. I mean truly, the house is on fire!

**“What I really believe is going to happen in the next two to three years—omnichannel is going to be managed by the consumer.”**

And the reason the house is on fire is because the agencies have no business model. How are they supposed to make a living today? They tried to merge their way into it. We know how that worked out. So they are playing the arbitrage game. The agencies have their hands dirty in this whole mess.

eMarketer: Do you see stores using your subcultures in the store?

Shapiro: Yes. I see an enormous amount of what I call proximity marketing that's now gone to the next level. So if you say OK, Foursquare was version 1.0 of proximity marketing, we are now in version 3.0. So for instance, based on preferences, if you go into a Gap, you can scan the tag and it will give you a very rich experience.

What I really believe is going to happen in the next two to three years—omnichannel is going to be managed by the consumer. So the consumer is going to take a much more active role in telling retailers and brands what they're interested in and when.

eMarketer: How do agencies fit into this?

Shapiro: The biggest opportunity for agencies is to get into the omnichannel game. Because the tech guys can't do it because they don't understand the marketing process, and they all tend to be one-trick ponies. So even an omnichannel tech platform is still taking the same ad and expressing it across channels. That's not what marketing is about. I believe omnichannel is the agency's biggest hope and it's their biggest vulnerability.

Interview conducted by Yory Wurmser on November 17, 2014.