

Tipping customers across the Internet chasm

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When does a website start to deliver business outcomes?

User engagement with online information and services indicates a potential return on online investments. But how much engagement is enough? Businesses can only achieve the profitable outcomes they seek if they engage the mainstream.

The challenge is to generate a viable, mainstream market from the enthusiastic group of early adopters of your online information and services.

Turning early adopters into customer majorities

Two books from the last decade of the 20th century have revolutionary ideas about growing a viable market share.

Crossing the Chasm

At the beginning of the decade, in 1991, Geoffrey Moore's *Crossing the Chasm* rejected the concept that the market for new technologies evolves gradually.

Instead, Moore proposed a "deep and dividing chasm" between the early adopter group and the target majority market. Crossing the chasm requires a complete rethink of the design and marketing strategies that achieve success with early adopters.

The Tipping Point

At the end of decade, in 2000, Malcolm Gladwell published *The Tipping Point* and documented the social dynamics that he believed came together to 'tip' mainstream market acceptance or to create what Gladwell called market 'epidemics'.

The 'moment' of engagement

So how do these authors and their books contribute to the challenge of 'tipping customers across the internet chasm'?

- They both identify the powerful influence of the 'moment' or context on user behaviour.
- They pose the question, can businesses 'tip' their online users by designing online experiences based on knowledge of the 'moment' of engagement?

One of the illustrations Gladwell used to describe "the power of context" was an experiment conducted at Princeton University by the research psychologists, Darley and Batson. The experiment touched on values that underpin the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Good Samaritan experiment

A group of seminarians completed a survey on why they joined the priesthood and were then asked to present a short talk on either the parable of the good Samaritan, or jobs that seminary students might pursue.

On the way to the presentation, "they ran into a man slumped in an alley, head down, eyes closed, coughing and groaning".

How would each seminarian respond to the man in need? Would their reasons for joining the priesthood influence their behaviour? Would those who prepared a talk on the Parable of the Good Samaritan be more likely to stop?

What influenced their behaviour was a wildcard introduced into their 'context' as they headed off to give their presentation: half of the seminarians were told they were late!

Of the seminarians who thought they were late, only 10% stopped to help. Of those who believed they were on time, 63% stopped to give assistance. The factors at play in the 'moment' were the overriding determinants of their behaviour.

The books

Crossing the Chasm, Marketing and Selling Technology Products to Mainstream Customers, Geoffrey A. Moore. HarperCollins Publishers. ISBN: 0060517123.

The Tipping Point, How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference, Malcolm Gladwell, Little, Brown and Company, ISBN: 0349113467.

Further online reading

[Robert Paterson's paraphrase of the Tipping point](#)

[Summary and commentary](#) on Crossing the chasm and Geoffrey Moore's latest book, Inside the Tornado

[Word Spy's history of the term 'tipping point'](#) from its first citation in 1977