



Strategic Branding Agency Using Technology and Digital Solutions for Developing Authentic and Affectionate Interactive, Mobile Friendly Campaigns that Connect People with Brands



Dave Fletcher
CEO, Founder & Executive
Director
The Mechanism

CEOCFO: *Mr. Fletcher, front and center on your site is “We use technology to develop authentic and affectionate interactions between human beings.” What does that mean day-to-day? What are you doing at The Mechanism?*

Mr. Fletcher: I founded the company in 2001, and have worked in the digital design field since 1996. One thing I discovered early on is that many digital agencies were focused purely on technology and programmatic solutions, and less so on developing human-focused, branded interactions. After all, whether it's an app, a website or another hybrid interface, ultimately, there's a human being on the other side looking to build a relevant, enduring relationship with a brand or product. Since my background is in brand identity development, I still maintain an interest and enjoy working with tactile experiences and understanding what it means to interact with something; whether it is a brand or an experience. Therefore, The Mechanism strives to create affection for our client's brands by injecting organic, fluid and meaningful interactions into the digital solutions that we are creating.

CEOCFO: *Who is turning to you for services? What is the common thread?*

Mr. Fletcher: After you have been doing it for a while you tend to build a reputation based on work that you have done for other companies and individuals. Big Pharma is an example. There are many divisions within the pharmaceutical space; some are working directly with consumers, and some are working directly with sales teams in order to train them or explain their products or services in a very humanistic way. Therefore, they will come to us for a brand identity, and a requirement that it must be transcribed or translated into a digital experience, whether it be online or through training materials, on tablets or smart phones. We've also worked in the entertainment and publishing space. We worked with the digital extension of magazines before everything changed. We've been fortunate to work with beloved bands like Flight of the Concorde and My Morning Jacket. However, on the other side we have worked directly with the biggest real estate companies in New York City and elsewhere, to small tech startups, non-profits and financial firms. I suppose if there's a common thread, it's that our industry is a "word of mouth" industry now. You don't find many long-lasting clients who cold-call you with, "Hey, I was looking for a web designer or a web development firm or a digital services firm and I happened upon your website." It is usually, "I spoke with the CEO of this company" or "the CTO of this company who said you did a great job for them and we would like to hire with you for this project." Good companies and individuals never burn bridges and always engage each new project like it might be your last one.

CEOCFO: *When you are developing a concept for a client what might you take into consideration that less experienced people do not realize is important?*

Mr. Fletcher: The number one thing I explain to our clients is that no matter the size -- their audience is always the gauge -- the most important thing to focus on. What does your audience want? What does your audience expect? Not, what do "you" expect. It is a tough pill to swallow at times. This is because when you are working with large companies, there tends to be large egos involved at the top. There is nothing wrong with that, because I believe that it is definitely a part of how they achieved success. However, I also believe that one of the most important things is to help company leadership (and their marketing teams) understand as much as they can about the people they are reaching out to with their brand

identity. What do they expect? Where else do they go online? What are some of the apps they use? In knowing this, it helps us pull it back to a second tier, which is, "Let us look at what else is going on in your industry by examining trends and data, and let us look at all of those things that are a part of who you are as a brand or company." By looking at the audience first, we tend to find serviceable information.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example?*

Mr. Fletcher: We worked with a particular Pharma client who wanted to build a responsive online community for patients, caregivers and doctors for a type of cancer. That is a tough sell, because the audience would potentially believe that the pharmaceutical company might have an ulterior motive for building a community in the first place. You have to create an experience that focuses razor sharp on that audience to make sure that they realize you are not trying to sell them anything - but you are creating a digital destination where they can communicate and share with one another. Now, when you do that, you have to take another step back from whatever branding is going on within the corporate environment of that Pharma company. You have to look at the specifics of the audience. What do people go through on a day-to-day basis who have this disease? What sort of information are they specifically looking for at any given moment? Obviously, treatment is one of the things. A bigger draw to a community like this is empathy. You must design an environment where they are comfortable and comforted; they must feel it is a nurturing environment and know they are being heard; they are being listened to, they are being responded to. When you expand into research, you make sure the right people who are doing the research are engaging with that environment as well. It is a monumental thing to ask. Especially when we hear every day that corporations are looking at the bottom line and are determining how to sell a particular product to a particular person or particular audience.

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We explained to the client, "Folks, we are going to ask you *not* to think about selling your product to these people. We are going to ask you to envision ways that we can all help them, we can be authentic with their needs and we can develop true affection for the community; not for the product." Between HIPAA laws and other government regulations, now try to imagine trying to build a community for that same audience where the number one request from the community is rapid response; reaching out and receiving a response right away. When you are dealing with that type of industry, you cannot legally respond to someone right away, because there are multiple tiers of people who need to approve responses to make sure that it is (aside from not offending someone), a legal response. One of the ways that we dealt with that particular problem is that we suggested we design unique emoji for all communication within the community. Well-designed emoji can be targeted and quite nurturing. Since the emoji would be approved by the client and follow any Government regulations surrounding Pharma, the response can be instantaneous. If someone posts that they just need a hug today, it could be sent by someone without necessitating a review. The community can grow organically outside of the rules that would need to be followed when human language enters into the equation. Coming up with simple solutions like that are a testament to years of experience of doing this, as well as a result of being able to look at the technical limitations alongside empathy-driven human connectivity, and being able to merge those in a very meaningful way.

CEOCFO: *How do you deal with the disclaimers and how they are displayed?*

Mr. Fletcher: Privacy is a huge concern these days. People who are creating accounts and submitting their personal information, are definitely concerned that when their information goes into a large database – it might be stolen. The bigger the company the bigger the fears, because that is where the largest community of hackers (both government-sponsored and private), are focused. They are trying to make the biggest splash. How do you deal with it? I think being honest and up front with clients about those dangers and about those concerns is a good start.

CEOCFO: *On your website it indicates you do select projects on the basis of their challenges and opportunities. Do you know pretty quickly when you are first talking with someone if the project is right for you? How do you know?*

Mr. Fletcher: We look at projects that have a meaningful impact. I know that sounds like kind of a bogus response, but we really like working with clients that are either doing good for other people, helping people succeed, or helping people enjoy their lives or their work lives. It is funny, because when you focus on positivity, if someone contacts you and has a well funded, but personal project that may not have a positive impact on a larger scale, it is easier to turn them away. In rare cases, we will look at a project on the basis of what the long-term ramifications are. When we worked with Flight of the Concord, for example, we enjoyed the music, and they were nice guys. Over the years, we have gotten a lot of interest for potential employees and interns from that client. Was it a financial windfall because we worked with them?

Absolutely not. But that's ok, because from a business standpoint it was something that helped us to build reputation. Therefore, occasionally projects will come along that are reputation builders and not the most financially fantastic.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you as The Mechanism has grown and evolved as a company?*

Mr. Fletcher: I am of a generation where I grew up seeing my parents and their parents work in the same place for an entire career. They said, "I am in a great job (even if it wasn't) and I am going to retire there." There was an intense loyalty and nobility to being in the office, developing almost familial relationships with your coworkers and clients because you physically engaged with them 5 days a week from 9 to 5. I entered this industry with that belief. Before starting The Mechanism, I never wanted to leave the companies I worked for because I felt like I was making a mark there. Meetings occurred face-to-face, and a handshake or human interaction was tantamount to all business relationships. Due to global awareness, near ubiquity of broadband connectivity, and the ease of migration from place to place, a physical handshake is a dying interaction. Younger people now have the ability to carry their entire lives in a few well-organized crates and entrust the cloud to hold the important stuff. The limitations and financial barriers to some people, but also the limitations of educational and language barriers are changing, so that people who work within "Digital" do not necessarily need to be physically present in your office. Obviously, I am not talking about the outsourcing model, because it's much bigger than that concept. I am referencing a new paradigm of building teams, comfort ability and profound relationships between people who are not necessarily all sitting in the same room at the same time. One thing that I have seen is designers, developers, project managers and so on, not feeling the need to be huddled in a room together, but embracing the ability to huddle together on a global level through video chats, VR and texting. 9 to 5 has become a 24 hour day with globally connected teams. That is the one thing that I will say has surprised me as I look back to how I felt when I first started the business. It's a radical shift in being truly present *and* collaborative from anywhere. That is a pretty significant shift in the industry in general and in business that will only become more important and revolutionary as time goes on.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



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