

ELLE - It's not just about the dress

Leveraging online community for engaging customer experiences

With 46 international editions, ELLE is the world's largest fashion magazine. In its 30+ year history in the US, ELLE has excelled at creating authentic and engaging experiences for what the brand calls the "ELLE woman." For ELLE it's not just about the dress, it's about the woman in the dress.

One of the ways ELLE taps into the mindset of the ELLE woman is by leveraging their online community, the ELLE Inner Circle, to maintain a regular dialogue with ELLE brand enthusiasts. The insights gleaned from this community not only help ELLE better understand their consumer and inspire initiatives, but also allows them to generate meaningful data for advertisers.

Lauren Muehlethaler, Senior Director, Brand Development explains, "We think of this group as our most trusted advisors. We rely on them to share their opinions on everything from new brand initiatives, to what they think about our advertiser's ad campaigns before they launch. In exchange, we share exclusive information with them, and reward them with great prizes for their time. It's a true give and take relationship, that results in a very active and ongoing dialogue."

The Challenge

ELLE has always been a first-mover – and seeks out partners that embrace the same mentality. But in 2014, ELLE found its online community vendor limiting. As Lauren puts it, ***"we simply couldn't optimize the interactions we were having with our community members. It was an analog solution to a digital problem; and we needed a vendor who could take us to the next level with a seamless, mobile responsive platform."***

Knowing the growing importance of data and how much ELLE's advertisers rely on it, Lauren and her team knew that they needed to find a solution that provided real-time insights, was easy to manage, mobile-focused and flexible – all while creating a meaningful experience for ELLE Inner Circle Members.

Lauren explains, "At ELLE, the consumer we reach across the brand's many touchpoints is at the center of everything we do. So, in addition to supplying the critical data that helps move our advertisers' business forward, we really needed a community engine that would give us the tools to make our member's experience easy, engaging, and fun.

The Solution

As ELLE looked for a new online community vendor, it was unable to find a vendor who brought together the ease of use, number of tools, and member-first approach into a single solution like Fuel Cycle's platform. After using Fuel Cycle, Lauren explains, "Fuel Cycle is fantastic in that it is an all-in-one solution. The analytics through Tableau, the survey programming via the Qualtrics integration, email distribution... it's really a one-stop destination for us to go to get everything done."

ELLE runs their community largely on their own, or in a "self-service" method. The flexibility means they have an all-access pass to the backend of the platform, and ability to launch content and pull data at will. Rather than a few limited activities, with FUEL, the ELLE team is able to post live chats, discussions, and surveys via the Qualtrics integration. From those activities, they are able to pull real-time reports and heat maps for insights.

The Results

- Data-driven metrics to grow advertising revenue
- Real time insights for fast distribution to ad partners Cloud based, always-on platform
- Mobile optimized solution has improved membership Increased engagement via social sharing
- Robust insights reports via Tableau
- Seamless integration with Qualtrics

5000
total members

12
programs in 6 months

25-35
average age

46%
email open rate

50-90%
engagement rate

5 min
average spent on site

The impact to ELLE's bottom line has been a major plus. As Lauren puts it now, "Having a smart, innovative community solution that helps us to have a direct dialogue with consumers has definitely added to ELLE's bottom line." But that's not the only advantage. She continues, "If we go out into the marketplace saying 'ELLE's not just about the dress, it's about the woman in the dress', it's imperative that we have a relationship and dialogue with the real ELLE woman. Fuel Cycle allows us to do that in a really exciting way."

ELLE plans to continue to grow the nearly 5,000-member community well beyond it's current size. "With the sustained success of our community", explains Lauren, "We hope to continue grow to over 10,000 members and we look forward to having Fuel Cycle as our platform of choice."