

How New England Biolabs Owns the Customer Journey

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

**Chris**: Hello everyone, welcome to Life Science Marketing Radio again. Today, my guest is Andy Bertera. Andy is the Executive Director of Marketing at New England Biolabs. And today, we're going to talk about owning the buyer's journey. So first of all, I found out recently - I didn't know this - many of you probably do, NEB is rated very highly for its customer experience. And before we get into the details about the customer journey, Andy, tell us briefly about the culture behind that achievement.

**Andy**: Well, firstly, before I answer your question, Chris, I want to congratulate you on Life Science Marketing Radio. I certainly get huge amounts of value and enjoyment listening to all the podcasts and the various guests that you've had on so far and feel honored to be asked to join that list of speakers.

To answer your question, the best way probably is to give a little bit of background to New England Biolabs. So any of the listeners who don't know, New England Biolabs is a 42-year-old private life science tools company. Our Research Director describes our product portfolio the best, particularly for non-scientists, as he describes this as the Staples of Life Science Research. What he means by that is we sell the scissors, the restriction enzymes, the glue, the ligases, as well as the photocopiers, the polymerases of DNA. So we have a portfolio of products that manipulates DNA and RNA in various ways and get used in a variety of different applications, from genome editing, synthetic biology, next-gen sequencing etc.

But those products don't really tell you much about NEB, you know obviously there is lots of companies out there in the same space that sell similar types of products. But to understand NEB and how we think about our customers, you really got to think about how we were founded and how we operate today. In many ways, we're more like a research institute and perhaps even more like our customers and many of our competing companies. We actually use a substantial amount of the profits that we actually generate in our own research endeavors, and research endeavors here really means basic research. This would be best exampled by our Parasitology Division, where we actually have a group of researchers looking into the molecular bases and cellular bases of diseases in the third world that are caused by parasites, things like river blindness, sleeping sickness, elephantiasis and the like. And that research has no commercial gain for us. It's really just trying to understand those diseases such that other researchers can then go on and hopefully find cures for those particular diseases which plague many different groups of individuals in that third world.

I think what that mentality and that focus on research gives us is a greater understanding of what our customers are facing on a daily basis, and a way of working with them that is very different to many of our competitors. The other aspect I would highlight that really allows us to do that is the people. We very often describe NEB as a family company, and certainly the founder of the company and his family are still involved with the company, but we really think about all the staff as almost family. As with everybody's family, you've got that odd aunt or uncle who perhaps you don't always agree with what they say or what they do, but they're still part of your family and you care for them. And certainly, we see that amongst our staff that people do genuinely care for each other, and I think that translates them across to their colleagues in research, well, who we also care for and try to actually give an experience as to how we ourselves would like to be treated.

**Chris**: I won't make you name the crazy aunt that works at NEB, but how many people work at NEB? And don't say half of them.

**Andy**: Good addition. Totally we are a little over 500 people globally. So we have I think it's around 375 at our headquarters here in Ipswich in Massachusetts, and then we have obviously a sales organization in the US, but we also have seven subsidiaries around the world that add to that number and get it up about 500 people in total.

**Chris**: Okay. So in my question following all that was in regard to the family environment that you're talking about. I would imagine that becomes harder as you're a larger company, but do you see kind of an upper limit or do you see that large, really large companies with maybe 5000 and more employees could do the same?

**Andy**: That's a great question. I think it definitely does become harder the larger that you actually become, but I think more of a challenge to be honest with you, is the rate at which you grow. Sometimes we joke with our CEO that he strives and says we’re going to have double-digits profitable growth each year, but to us double-digit means ten. Not 20, 30, 50, 75 etc. And I think if you're growing at a much higher rate, obviously, that typically means you've got to be employing new employees or adding to your head counts more regularly, which means that sometimes you're actually taking risk with employees, they may not be the perfect match, but, "Okay, we need to add someone quickly because we’ve got work to do." I think at NEB, if you look across our history we definitely had steady but consistent growth rather than it being super growth one year and then decline or much shallower growth the following year. And part of that has been adding people carefully when we need them, but also taking, to be honest sometimes, too long to actually find the people who actually fit not only with the position and the needs we have, but with the company culture.

When I joined the company little over seven years ago, I think our average tenure was 17 years in the company. Today, I think it's closer to 13 years which is a combination of adding new starters as well as we had a number of retirees leaving the company. But 13 years, I think is still a substantial amount of time to have an average in your company, and I think by gradually adding staff, it has allowed us to pick the right people, but also help them to appreciate the values of the culture we have, and then enjoy the benefits that offers.

**Chris**: I think that people listening from small companies will really appreciate what you just said as a way to think about how they plan their growth and the value of maybe taking it a little more slowly for the long term value of, as you say, finding the right people and then having the time to incorporate them into your company culture rather than taking the risk with people that aren't quite the right fit, and you're growing so fast that culture gets pushed aside and it's, "Just get it done," sort of environment.

**Andy**: Correct. When I joined the company, I actually say this to any new members of the marketing or sales team here. He actually said to me, "Think of you joining NEB as a marathon and not a sprint. So don't join the company and think “Oh, there’s all these great things that can change on weeks one, two and three. Take your time, understand how you can actually communicate and to some degree get buying into those ideas such that they're going to be more successful versus it being forced on somebody from the outside so to speak.”

**Chris**: Right, and I think that's good advice. Let's move on to today's topic that we're focusing on, which is the buyer's journey. I've been an NEB customer, it was a long time ago. I may have mentioned this in other podcasts, and whenever I talk to somebody from NEB I remember looking in their catalog and calculating the cost of a gram of a lambda vector, which to some, I was in school, and it would have been some millions of dollars, because you're selling such tiny amounts of it. But I have an idea of what I think the buyer's journey looks like for an NEB customer, but how does NEB see it? The buying journey?

**Andy**: That's a great question. In fact, we were doing some exercises recently to try and map out this journey ourselves because it's something you know, I guess, to some degree, but very rarely, or maybe and historically before buyer's journey became a topic of great discussion that it was actually documented. I think the not surprising thing is that journey is actually a very good word for a relationship that NEB has with its customers in that it's not a trip because it tends to be longer in nature, it tends to be more involved, hopefully more enjoyable than just somebody who go pops for a quick day trip. The other aspect however is journey is not necessarily a good word for it, because when you think about a journey, you start somewhere and you end somewhere, which means by its nature it's finite in time. When we were thinking about the customers’ buying journey, we came to the conclusion very quickly that it’s definitely not linear. It actually has many, many different spikes, or they became touch points with it, and customers come into NEB, they have the interaction, then they go again. Then they come back for some other aspect of either the same purchasing cycle, or a different question. And there's many, many touch points that actually make up that journey. The conclusion we came to is that any one of those touch points obviously is important anyone to make as large an important impact as you can, but it's the sum total of those touch points that actually makes up that journey, or better put, the total experience that the customer has with your company, and obviously its brand.

We became very focused on the fact that the sum total of those touchpoints, the total journey, the total experience really can be a source of competitive advantage if you use every one of them as an opportunity for the customer to actually both experience a good quality interaction, but also learn more about you. We also came to the conclusion that many aspects of the journey, or many aspects of the touchpoint are not an opportunity to actually up-sell to your customer. I think too often, I've seen, whether it's an app, whether it's an interaction on the website, you've got this ...it doesn't say it inadvertently this, but you got this message there, “Are you ready to buy yet?" "Here’s the price, here’s they what have you." And I think that for us is not necessarily the way we'd like to interact with our customers. We want to support our customers to actually answer their scientific, their research questions, their research needs, and then when they're ready to buy, we're ready to take the order, but really nurture them through that process and provide them the information and details they need, such that they will buy from you based on the experience, but when they're ready.

**Chris**: I really like that. Honestly, I'm thinking of the United Airlines when you talk about being asked to buy something at every touchpoint.

**Andy**: That's right. Even to check it in, I think you have to press 'No thanks' about five times to get your boarding pass these days, you know.

**Chris**: Exactly. You guys are the antithesis of that. I like how you talk about multiple touchpoints because, of course, any customer of yours probably buys multiple different products, and many times throughout their career. Let's talk about...

**Andy**: Yeah.

**Chris**: Go ahead.

**Andy**: I’ll just say, I did some research recently about frequency of a particular product our family owned you'll get the full details here. But it was very interesting to see that customers were only buying that product, some customers anyway, were only buying it once every two to three years. Although there were connections with that customer that was the only product they actually bought from us. They were very happy, very loyal, but loyalty over this was, you couldn't actually judge it unless you look probably over a ten year period, because they were only buying so infrequently.

**Chris**: Interesting. And of course, there were many possible touchpoints, but I have a few that I’d like to talk about today and just have you describe how you see them fitting in and what you think about, when you think about the experience of each one of these things. So let's start with the one I know the best from way back when, and that is of course the legendary NEB Catalog, how do you see that fitting in?

**Andy**: Yeah, that’s a good description, the legendary catalog. NEB's catalog, I don't know this for a fact, of course, but I think I could argue that it was content marketing before the phrase actually even existed. NEB in its history was almost anti-having a sales organization and developed the catalog to do very much a lot of it's selling for it. So our catalog for anybody who's not familiar with it, the first two-thirds of it are a more traditional type of catalog, list of the products, the prices, specifications of these products, etc. But the last third is what’s called the technical reference guide, and that has a multitude of different information as to how to use the products that are in the catalog, but also how to carry out many basic procedures and methods in molecular biology. Visiting customers have very often seen very old copies of our catalog, and I would say to the customer, "Would you like us to send you a new copy?" And then they show it to you, and there is all these Post-it Notes and dog-eared pages, and they said, "I use this every day, I’ll never find the new pages I want in the new catalog." And they really do use it that way, and I think you forget sometimes when you've got gloves on at the bench, or maybe you’re in part of university where there's no great Wi-Fi reception, then you need that paper catalog to quickly check particular technical piece of information to be able to use that product, or use the protocol you're carrying out.

So our catalog is very important to us, we continue to actually produce it every other year. We're currently working on the 2017/18 version of the catalog which should come out March next year, and although I’d probably would estimate that we probably our mail list shrinks by about 5% to 10% each year, just as younger scientists use the web to replace some of the aspects of the catalog. We're still producing tens and tens of thousands of copies every other year, and we get requests sometimes for 30, 40 catalogs which are not used as traditional catalogs. They're actually used as a teaching aid in high schools or undergraduate classes, where they'll say, "Here’s a plasmid. Work out the restriction site using the catalog in there," so it's a very valuable tool that has historically and even today helps to differentiate NEB's focus on science and support for the research community throughout its use.

**Chris**: It's a great story, and it is content marketing. I don't think there's any argument about that even before content marketing had a name. Because we're starting out in the early days of restriction enzymes, and I don't know if you were one of the original producers, but at some point a restriction enzyme is not a hugely differentiated product. I always want to be careful when I say that to somebody because I realize there could be other things around it, but that is how you differentiated yourself by not only providing the information about the product, but yes, here's how to use it, here's how other people are using it, here’s what works, here's our recommendations, so much valuable information around it which really is where the value is.

**Andy**: I'll be wrong not to say that we have the largest collection of restriction enzymes, most recombining restriction enzymes, most enzymes that work in one buffer, and all those sorts of things. But I would agree with you the support tools and the expertise, whether that's in our catalog, or even databases like REBASE, which is basically a database of all the restriction enzymes that have ever been discovered, not just those that are available commercially, tools that help researchers to understand it's not just a consumable, but it's actually a product that there are technical information and resources going in to help them use it. Not just reliable and every time, but actually understand the data they get from it.

**Chris**: I have to ask you about if someone would get a new catalog, I'm assuming there's new content in there as well, besides products, and I'm just thinking about the person who wants to move their bookmarks from the old one to the new one.

**Andy**: That's a good question. There are new products and as a consequence new chapters that get added in the front part of that catalog, but we also every year do look at that technical reference guide. We send out surveys to our customers to try and assess parts of the catalog that are valuable and parts that are not so valuable. Unfortunately, we very rarely get feedback to take things out, which means you always reduce the number of pages that you would like to. But we have tried to think about how we connect it to the website. So obviously, there's a finite number of pages you can put in any document like that. We add shortened URLs where people can find additional information, not just on our website, but on other websites as well. As well as we've actually been experimenting for the last probably 18 months or so with digital media, eBook type devices to try and see if there are other media that, I'm not going to say replace the catalog, but certainly supplement it.

Because people learn in different ways, and whereas we're talking obviously about a print and paper tool here, there other tools that can be used, so how do you make that print more dynamic? You embed videos in it, you embed voice overs to know how to pronounce a particular term, or what does a particular term mean? Animations that bring protocol to life, and although as I said, I don't know whether these would ever replace the catalog at least in the short to medium term, it's critical that we experiment with those types of media. We have a tool we call NEB Pubs which is exactly that experimenting with different media to try and find out what is valuable to scientists and what do they not see valuable. And as you know, with digital media, it's easier to track which pages they look at, don't look at, use in depths versus the catalog that we have to ask them one on one to find out those answers.

**Chris**: I really like the way you framed that. One, I like the fact that you're talking about doing experiments. I've heard this concept before and you would think that in the sciences that that would be a normal thing, but most people, or I think, a lot of people... I can't say most because I don't know, but, don't really think about doing marketing things as an experiment. They do something and they hope it works, but they're not always saying, "What could we learn if we try this? And if it doesn't work, that's not a failure, that's one thing we know we don't need to try anymore".

**Andy**: I totally agree. Particularly in the digital realm, technologies and ways of interacting and communicating are advancing much faster outside of the life sciences than they are within it. One of my former managers had the expression, “Steal with pride,” and what he meant by that was, don't be afraid to take a technology, take an idea, a marketing idea from another industry and re-invent it for the life sciences and see what can happen. I think scientists sometimes don't like to think that they're influenced by marketing as people outside of the sciences are, but of course they're all human beings and have the same emotions and therefore definitely are. But the key is can they adopt it and train perhaps other idea for the life science market place. And if you don't try you'll never know. So don't put all your eggs into that one new idea, but if you can put 10% of your budget into it and see what happens, you might actually be on to a winner.

**Chris**: That's been a hot topic, it's come up a couple of times on the podcast and the fact is that our customers are living in a world where the rest of their whole life is digital, and the whole Amazon experience, I think you might have mentioned that in your webinar, but that's how they're being trained to interact with companies now. So if you're not doing it or experimenting with those things from outside the life sciences, you're going to fall behind.

**Andy**: That's totally true. It's within our own vertical, you compare yourself with who the leaders actually are, but all those customers, if it's search, they think Google, if it's online buying it's Amazon, or whatever it might actually be, so they set the standards for a person's experience and they don't care that you don't have the IT budget that an Amazon or a Google has, they just expect that to be the norm.

**Chris**: That's a nice transition to several touchpoints. I have a list here, and we can talk about each of them briefly. Let's start with the web in general. What kinds of things are you doing on the web that might be different? Or how do you just see your website fits in on the buyer's journey again?

**Andy**: I don't know whether these are all necessarily different, but we definitely view neb.com, our website as the center of most aspects of the customer's buying journey. We use both inbound and outbound marketing activities to drive customers' interests to explore those interests further to our website. Our website, being the scientists we are, and in line with the catalog, is very content-centric. A lot of content that doesn't necessarily directly relate to our products but gives them an experience of a company and a brand that's trying to support their research. If we have a campaign around a new product, again we'll have in-bound and out-bound activities to drive customers to the website to explore that new product in more detail. There is request on there to ways to request samples or literature or more information about that product, that then goes into our back-end marketing automation CRM systems. But that website is a vital part of the customer's journey, and a vital part of our marketing mix.

I think the challenge, to be honest with you, we find with our website most is trying to make sure customers have the ability to find what they want on that website. I remember a few years after I joined NEB we started to really delve into the web analytics. We were horrified to see our bounce rates, which were significant until we realized that all customers were very happy, they just had a question, they either come directly to neb.com or they would go to Google and search there. They would come to our website, they would get the answers to their question, and they leave again. But that one page in and out was viewed as a bounce and therefore increased our bounce rate. But then we realized that was equally important. The customer had a question, they needed it answered, they needed it answered quickly, and they left again. So there's an opportunity for us to try and retain them and get them to look at other content on the website, but it wasn't necessarily a bad thing, and that took a lot of thinking about to realize that sometimes the metrics you truck on the surface are not as bad as they might seem.

**Chris**: Yeah, because a bounce rate can be a disturbing metric, but as you say… And they're busy, if they're coming for a question, they want to find it. They're probably in the middle of something.

**Andy**: Yeah, very true, just to add to that, if you visit our website, you’ll know there's a number of online tools there some of which relate to a product, some of which don't. But 25% of our web traffic actually are researchers or individuals who use that tool as part of that visit. Those tools, particularly the ones that are not directly related to products are critical to driving traffic to the website and obviously engaging those customers in understanding what NEB is about again in terms of supporting their research needs.

**Chris**: That's a brilliant example of being more than just being there for products and as a branding element - We're about helping you get your job done.

**Andy**: Pretty much so.

**Chris**: Let's talk about, I'm fascinated by this one, NEB TV. In the content marketing world, Joe Pulizzi and others are always talking about creating a media company, and so that's essentially what I think you're trying to do here, and something I encourage every company to think about, whether it's TV or some... it doesn't have to be video or audio or text. It can be whatever you want it to be, but that whole idea of publishing content. So tell us what you're doing with that.

**Andy**: Yes, so I mean, NEB TV was a concept we actually came up with, I think it’s about 18 months ago, something like that. The idea behind it really, but first I'll actually say and everybody knows this, video is a very important part of the marketing mix. You’ve only got to read all the stats about YouTube to understand the power that video can actually convey.

But the idea behind it is a little bit silly in some regards, but if you look at the channels, there're various cooking channels that actually exist on the TV. You know how addictive watching somebody follow a recipe actually is. And a lot of these programs bring a little bit of humor to that, so what we're originally thinking is how do we actually communicate scientific concepts that very much are in some regards following a recipe? So the idea we came up with is, "Let's convert those cooking shows into more of a scientific show."

It got modified over time to what we have today, which is really a vehicle for communicating messages about new areas of science, a little bit of corporate messaging about what NEB, who NEB is and how we differentiate ourselves from the competitors, a little bit about perhaps some new products. But communicating it in a more light-hearted way, we looked at our brand persona and it’s very interesting that, because we interact with scientists, we actually communicate like scientists- very fact based, very regimented in terms of following a protocol, asking a question, getting a very precise answer, etc. But that tone isn't necessarily conveying who NEB is, and NEB TV gave us a vehicle to have individuals actually speak and you can see them, you can listen to them, and realizing it's real people, it's people who, to come back to the word you used before, who are genuine, enjoy science and can actually communicate it in a way that people hopefully find engaging and enjoyable.

**Chris**: Yes. What I like about that, the thing I locked on to early in your answer there, was how you started out, it sounds like you started one way and it evolved, and just encouraging companies and people who are doing this sort of thing to think about… when you get started there’s something like that, you don't really know what the best way to deal it with is, but you’ll never find out if you don't start. And it's not the worst thing in the world to have to pivot, and say, "You know what, we like what we're doing, but we know we can do better, we're going to leave that up, or we're going to shift directions here," there's no way to know, again, it's an experiment until you get some response, to say, "These are the episodes that people love, we're going to make more of those."

**Andy**: I agree. What I think I'd add to that is sometimes people think video can be expensive to produce. We actually make all of the videos, we record them all in-house. In fact, the first versions that we started to produce, it was actually before NEB TV. We were actually doing with two iPads at different angles and then just added them together. We do use some third party editing expertise today, but we still record the whole thing in-house. The scripts are written fairly loosely, all internally, so it can be done cost effectively and hopefully generate the return you're looking for.

**Chris**: I think that the way you just said it's hugely valuable because, as you say, many people will think that video is hugely expensive, and they think, "We can't get the quality we need on the iPad". I just ran across a course on LinkedIn this morning about... It's a photography course by what I presume to be a pretty well-known photographer, who now only shoots on his iPhone. How it's changed, how he looks at the world and tells stories. I think, you are to be commended for just saying, "You know what we don't need a couple $5,000 cameras.”

**Andy**: I mean, the technology obviously is driving to make that possible, but don't be afraid of the technology and embrace it, because I think it can do wonders to your marketing mix.

**Chris**: Those are the videos millennials are looking at anyway. That's the context. The comparison is what they're seeing from their friends' phones.

**Andy**: Totally, yeah. Because that means typically you want a short, I think I’ve read somewhere that the best engaged videos are going to be sub- two minutes. You know that was a little bit longer than that for NEB TV, but the protocol videos we also always try to keep them in that lengths, and you get very high engagements that they'll actually watch the whole thing or ninety something percent of it anyway.

**Chris**: Nice. Let's talk a little bit about iPhone apps.

**Andy**: So we had our NEB Tools up available for sometime now. This was actually, again, little bit of experiment to take some of the online tools that we actually had and convert them into apps for both the Android platform and iPhone. So we developed tools that again no connection to selling product, but how to actually use our product or carry out simple scientific protocols. So we have ones that are like little dials, where you can actually dial into different restriction enzymes and see which buffer to use to get the best digest across both the enzymes as well as simple tools to calculate the molarity of a particular chemical solution that you're actually making up. So again, it's another way to actually engage with our customers and support the research they're doing.

**Chris**: Nice. It's pure support, I love it. Alright now we're jumping from small appliances to large ones. I had from you on your Webinar with Harrison Wright, head of Affinity Biotechnology, talking about your freezer program and how you found a way to bridge, maybe I’m just stretching this, bridge the gap between B to C marketing and B to B buying. I feel like the freezers fall into that, right?

**Andy**: Yeah, definitely. For any of the listeners who’re not familiar, our freezer program and there're other companies that have freezer programs as well, these are ways of actually putting products that are temperature sensitive directly into the labs or into the institutions where the researchers, where these customers are actually located. So if you think about it sometimes people have described that one as the ATM for enzymes, which I'll explain why in a moment. But one of the challenges sometimes that companies in the life sciences actually have is at the end of the day, we are a B to B industry in terms of you are interacting with institutions, with companies and they're the ones who pay the bills versus the actual consumers.

As a consequence of that, some of the ordering and shipment and invoicing information is up at that level. You don't often...you don't always, I should say, get the information of who the end user is, who's actually using that product. Because as a purchasing agent or a lab manager who is that name in between the researcher and the companies providing the product. in this context, because you're actually placing the product closer to the end user, the researcher, the researcher can actually go up to that freezer program, this is a description of NEB's freezer program, so that they call NEB Now, to go up to the platform, they've obviously pre-registered in advance, they scroll through a name or type the name in, click on that and then just put in there a four digit password that opens up the freezer, they can go in, take the product out, they scan the bar code on the bar code reader that's on the front of the freezer. If you imagine a freezer that looks pretty similar to freezers, they have... you know the labs are even in your homes, but there’s a tablet embedded in the front, and then you scan that bar code and you walk away. On the back end that order gets processed and you get an email just confirming your order.

What customers seem to like about this is freezer program is generally the advantages of it is that convenience aspect. You know, if you are a night owl and you do an experiment at 10:00, on a Friday night, and you run out of your precious enzyme, then rather than wait till Monday or Tuesday to get the product delivered to you, you can go to this freezer and just pick it up like a corner store in many regards. But the real value that we have is now this gives us information about the end user. Whereas before I might have only known that this University or that purchasing agent there is purchasing this products at whatever frequency, now I know that, Dr. Smith, every Tuesday, let's say goes to a freezer and picks up product X. Over time, I can then actually start to build up a picture of this fictitious Dr. Smith to find out what other products they buy from the freezer over time, what technical support calls they might be asking us, what movement or attraction on our website they might be having, and as we build up this picture and I should say always comes back into our CRM. We can then not only support them better, but hopefully market to them better and make sure that the messages we sell them are tailored towards the type of products they're using. If we can tie that in with their publications data because we now know what products, what their name is, and what areas of research they're in, we can now take product X, we can send them a technical tip or an application note to say, "Here is some information about that product that you just purchased for the first time, used in an application that's in your area." If she is a Cancer Biologist, maybe we got an application for that product in cancer. We can make their application and their support and information about that product more tailored to this specific research interests.

**Chris**: Beautiful. We might come back to that a little bit, but the whole aspect of building up that picture off of all of these assets, whether they're on the web or it's a freezer, or something else, and really taking advantage of your CRM to know who they are and then segment them, and send them relevant messages is fantastic. One more thing in the buyer's journey, you wouldn't necessarily think that this is part of the buyer's journey, but it certainly fits in somewhere because you are communicating to the audience. Let's talk about the Passion in Science Awards.

**Andy**: Sure. The Passion in Science Awards was something we kicked off couple of years ago. We were actually working with a couple of third parties to try and identify ways in which to celebrate NEB's 40th Anniversary. And the conclusion that we came to is NEB if it liked blowing its own trumpet about being 40 years old was not the way to actually celebrate that anniversary publicly and wasn't really consistent with our brand and how we want to position ourselves. So what we came up with was a concept to try and celebrate customers who actually had similar values to ourselves. One of the great values that we find with the scientific community in our customer base and our competitors' customer base as well globally, is there are so many scientists who do fantastic things outside of science. Whether that be something altruistic that they, I don’t know where, they have a great fundraising activity to support a particular disease or something like that, or maybe they are going the extra mile to support stem education or they got a strong environmental focus, and they're trying to actually clean up simple things. Make their lab more green, or maybe they got an interest in a particular art.

We built the Awards around four criteria that really celebrated the passion that these scientists had, not only as being scientists, but the passion they had of these other activities that were on connective with that science, to be fair, but was slightly on the periphery. And we went to the Life Science Research Community and asked people to nominate either themselves or their colleagues, and with them we whittled it down to a shortlist that we then had the NEB family vote on. So it wasn't just a group of managers or a group of leading scientists. We actually opened it up to the entire NEB staff to read the stories of these researchers and vote, and then we ended up with four winners in each category. We actually brought them to New England Biolabs and they gave presentations around their stories and they got a little award in terms of a plaque and things like that. They also had the opportunity to get a tour and things like that.

What was most fascinating is how they built relationships with each other. I remember very well within the first day of having these 16 people together, there were four or five collaborations that already spun up. And these were individuals that had never met each other before. Some of them were research based, some were actually focused around teaching third parties, and they were very different. On the art section, we had one individual who was using rap to teach her students about PCR at that time, we had another one who was creating 3-dimensional modules of viruses to help visually impaired students have a greater understanding of what a virus might actually look like. So really diverse subjects and how these came together. It was a very humbling, to be honest with you, experience to see these wonderful individuals and what they were doing outside of their...related to but slightly outside of their core scientific disciplines.

We had the pleasure, we repeated it earlier this year, we decided to do it every two years, and we didn't think we can repeat the success of the first one because we didn't think... you know we just thought maybe we struck it lucky with these 16 wonderful individuals. And it was the same again, totally different group of individuals, but again great people who had done everything from creating videos to talk about how plants are cool, through to individuals who were creating art out of maps of the brain. Truly inspirational people.

**Chris**: Beautiful. I have a couple... many thoughts on that, so with regards to the buyer's journey, what I like about this award idea is it's kind of the end and the beginning of the buyer's journey. For existing customers, it's an extra high touch that fits with your brand, and caring about science but more than that, and then, of course, it's an awareness tool. I'm sure you publicize this and the scientists themselves, the award winners, of course, are sharing it with their colleagues and so then that comes back to the top of the funnel and people who don't know you might say, "Oh, who's NEB, what are they about?" So I really like how that works at both ends.

**Andy**: Very much so. We were pleasantly surprised that social media actually played a bigger part in the second awards than the first one in terms of attracting the group of individuals that eventually went on to win the awards. But we created a single video of all of the interactions for the first set of awardees and then in the second set which we modified, we actually had individual videos on our website of all the presentations that the individuals gave. It's just a great way of communicating more about them, to be honest with you, and the great things that scientists can accomplish. But it also fitted very well with our own core beliefs of, “You should always treat others like you want to be treated yourself,” and this sort of genuineness, and I think that definitely came across that we built relationships with these individuals. To be honest, whether they were customers or are customers, is secondary in many regards because they have an experience here that they enjoyed and they tell others.

There was one of the winners this year that, you know, she asked me to send her a NEB catalog, and when she saw the catalog, she said, "I’ve spoken to my other professor in my department who actually does a biotech course, and he wants to use it, so can you send me another ten?" So that message gets out there in small numbers, I agree, but it's the personal touch that I think is so important to us.

**Chris**: Absolutely. So we've gone a little long, do you have a minute for one more question?

**Andy**: Sure. As long as everyone is hanging in there.

**Chris**: I think we're getting good value today out of this interview and it's fantastic. So let's tie this all back to the digital part. You talked a little bit of this with freezers, and maybe you already answered it, but, how does NEB use the data that it collects to then continually improve the customer experience?

**Andy**: Great question. All of the different touchpoints that we've discussed may be the Catalog a little bit less, but really form a digital ecosystem, I mentioned earlier on about there's many different touchpoints that make up the total customer experience. For that experience to be as valuable as it needs to be to gain that competitive advantage, you have to understand how they interact. And in our case we bring a lot of that data back into our CRM so that we can actually understand how all these touchpoints connect.

I'll be honest with you, the interpretation of that data, I don't want to say it’s big data, but it's moving in that direction, is really a work in progress. There are certain touchpoints that we can analyze the data and we can use it actively, there's other ones that are not to the level that I would like yet. But the ultimate goal of bringing all these data together is personalization. I believe strongly that the eventual direction of marketing is personalization, and being able to market the support services, the products, whatever that is that you interact with the customer about, is tailoring it specific to them as an individual.

Now within life sciences and this complication of B to B to C, whether you truly get one to one marketing, I don't know. I think that might be a challenge that perhaps that is for the next generation of marketers. But certainly personalizing it to a greater degree, so understanding whether you're a Cancer Biologist, using Molecular Biology tools, versus an Immunologist using laser type tools, or you're a lab manager, a purchasing manager and you're located in this university or that company. I think we have to get closer to understanding how those groups or segments of customers think and act, so that you become more personalized. And that in itself will add to the competitive advantage you can gain.

**Chris**: Beautiful. This has just been a fantastic episode. I really appreciate you taking the time to share all these fantastic insights with us about your customers' journey, all the things you're doing, the things you're experimenting on, how it all fits in with your branding entire story. So I can find those Passion in Science Awards on your website, right?

**Andy**: You can, yes. The original ones and the second set, you should be able to find that.

**Chris**: So I'll put a link to those and of course the general website on with the show notes of this episodes so that anybody who wants to look at those videos and see what you're doing can do that. Andy Bertera, thank you so much for helping me out with this.

**Andy**: Thank you Chris, I enjoyed the discussion, it's always fun to talk about the marketing activities and get feedback on them. And if any listeners would be interested in talking further about these ideas as well as brainstorming other ways to improve best practice in our industry, I'll be happy to talk to them.

**Chris**: All right. Well, thank you very much.

**Andy**: Thanks for the time, Chris.

**Chris**: You bet.

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