

## GoPro Shows How to Win by Losing Control

The days when companies could tightly control what's said about them are long gone (if they ever really existed.) Social networks and new technologies now produce brand conversations and brand experiences that companies have no control over.

You can either deny this new reality and wrestle with people over control of your brand content — or you can embrace the diversity of ways your brand is experienced and shared today and tap into its power to build your brand. To do the latter requires you to see your role as **cultivator** and **curator**. The folks at [GoPro](#) operate with this mentality.

GoPro makes small, wearable high-definition digital cameras. What started out as a way for GoPro founder and CEO [Nick Woodman](#) and his friends to take pictures of themselves while surfing has grown in 10 years into a company valued at over \$2 billion.

GoPro's products are a big reason why the company has been able to grow so quickly and successfully.

The cameras are small, lightweight, and easy to use. Not only do they qualify for high shockproof and waterproof ratings, but they also include a host of features designed specifically for capturing action movies of yourself. The GoPro software and app, media-rich website, and integration capabilities for sharing on YouTube and other social networks complete a seamless experience of capturing and sharing personal content.



photograph by Tom Hart

And yet, the company's management and marketing approach has played a much larger role than its products in the company's success. Woodman and his team seem to understand that GoPro's brand power comes from its users and so they've operated in ways that unleash that power.

**GoPro promotes its users' content; it doesn't censor it.** GoPro's popularity is derived from the thousands of videos that GoPro users have posted online. To enhance the sharing of this content, GoPro selects some videos to be among those posted as the brand's "Video of the Day" on its [YouTube channel](#). The company has also worked with users to create longer, more professionally-produced version of their content.

As you might imagine, some of the videos posted are offensive, inappropriate, and just plain stupid. But

GoPro doesn't censor or try to discourage these. Instead of shying away from what would be considered public relations risks by other less-enlightened companies – a video of two teenagers getting baptized in a church (too polarizing!), one of a snowboarder causing an avalanche (too dangerous!) – GoPro seems to embrace the diversity of video content that its users produce and it trust viewers to make the appropriate associations with the brand.



ograph by Skydive Lillo Centro de Paracaidismo

**GoPro learns from customers; it doesn't restrict them.** GoPro's approach to empowering its users started out of necessity. To get exposure for the first versions of their camera, Woodman and his team handed them out to athletes engaged in extreme sports. Snowboarders to BASE jumpers started using the devices sometimes in unexpected ways and making modifications to the product to suit their needs.

But GoPro didn't try to rein in these entrepreneurial explorations in an effort to control the user experience and the product integrity. It not only applauded the improvisations, it also used them to inspire its own product development. Prompted by the engaging concert performances that users captured with its cameras, for example, the company introduced a music edition that bundles a camera with music-friendly accessories for musicians like instrument and microphone stand mounts.

**GoPro connects with people; it doesn't push product.** GoPro has also let go of doing hard selling of product competitive advantages. Its Super Bowl commercial last year featured video of a baby getting tossed in the air with a GoPro video camera strapped to his head. This year's spot was comprised of footage from Felix Baumgartner's jump from the stratosphere. Without a word spoken, nor a feature mentioned, these spots sparked people's imaginations and conveyed the excitement of the brand.

GoPro understands its brand is about creative expression, not about product technology. While other brands try to compete with GoPro by promoting the superiority of their products' features, GoPro relies on messages that convey the emotional benefits of the product. Woodman once explained the brand's appeal saying, "It's not awesome just because it's brilliant hardware, or a brilliant device. It's awesome because of what it has enabled this person to do, and how it has made them feel."

Loosening your grip on your brand comes with risks, and companies are right to do so with trepidation. But as GoPro demonstrates, it can pay off. Brand-building is changing. People want to experience and share brands in their own way. Your customers can be your most influential brand ambassadors, engaging in authentic, viral marketing on your behalf.

By acting as a cultivator and curator, not a controller, you transform transactions into interactions. And conversations into currency.