

PACE PERSPECTIVES

BRAND ATTACHMENT

Building Emotional Connections Across the Customer Journey

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with Gordon Price Locke and Adam Braxton



PACE

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OVERVIEW

Consumers will encounter thousands of brands in a lifetime but will develop meaningful attachments to only a few of them. Why is this?

Behavioral science shows us that every human impulse is driven by emotions. Seconds later, the rational part of our brain could reject the initial impulse, but if our emotions are strong enough, they'll override rational thought. This cognitive bias has tremendous impact on the buying cycle, the brands we love, what we choose to buy and our likelihood to stay loyal when substitute products compete. As we connect ourselves to a brand based on our shared values and the way a brand makes us feel, we may develop strong brand attachment.

More than 40 years of research in behavioral economics has proven that all humans are irrational, emotional creatures. We crave relationships, travel in packs, form families, treat our household pets as royalty, etc. We don't limit our relationships to just humans and animals; even more broadly, we form relationships with ideas ... and at the heart of it, a brand is an idea.

Appealing to those relationships and values persuades audiences, so brands must mirror their target customers' idealized self-image, so that the customers perceive the brand as their one-and-only choice. You're either a Coke person or a Pepsi person. Team iPhone or Team Android. Team Google or Team Alexa.



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In mature categories such as body washes, laundry detergent or carbonated beverages, for example, where functional performance of competitors is relatively at parity, brand attachment is a way for brands to establish relationships with people.

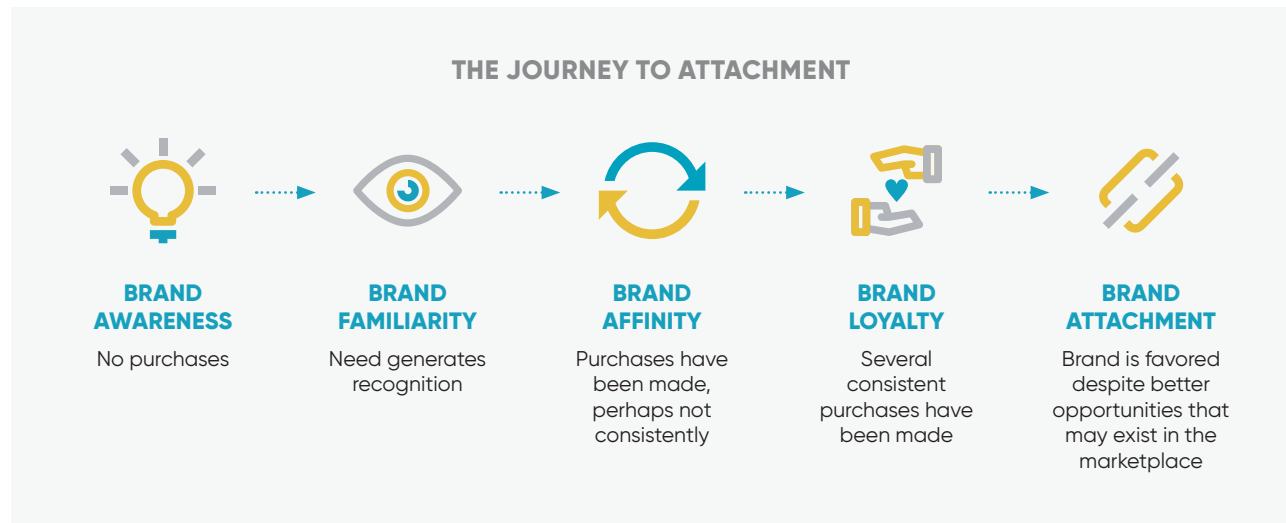
Millennials hold \$200 billion in U.S. buying power¹, the largest of any demographic, so it's important to take note of their involvement in social issues. But opinions on social issues are constantly changing. Without a real sense of attachment between the customer and brand, in a matter of seconds the relationship can crumble and your customer will be on to the next one.

This paper will explain the need for brands to move past transactional loyalty to a new realm of unbeatable, unmatched, and irreplaceable true customer brand attachment.

DEFINING BRAND ATTACHMENT

THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

At Pace, we define brand attachment as the emotional and cognitive connection a person creates with a brand. This connection is what enables a person to allow emotion and sentiment to affect the outcome of a choice over basic logic. Strong brand attachment is the core of all strong brand relationships and goes much deeper than brand attitude, which reflects how a consumer feels – positively or negatively – about a brand.



Let's use [Tom's of Maine](#) as an example. Here's a breakdown of user behavior.

Brand Awareness

You know the brand because you've seen its advertising in a magazine. It's here you learned that Tom's products are all natural.

Brand Familiarity

You're in the grocery store and notice Tom's toothpaste is on sale, so you purchase it.

Brand Affinity

Your tube is now empty, and you liked the product, so you purchase it again. Historical brand recognition is a sign of brand affinity.

Brand Loyalty

In this case, you now need a new mouthwash and, after a quick check of all the options, grab the Tom's brand even though other brands are cheaper. Affinity plus a propensity to purchase is brand loyalty.

Brand Attachment

Despite the popularity of alternative products, other promotions or customer reviews, the bond is too strong to break – you have made a mental and emotional commitment to this brand. You're a "Tom's person" through and through, and will continue to vouch for its worth.

DEFINING BRAND ATTACHMENT

Customers who truly feel a sense of connection and attachment are customers who would be confident saying that the brand is “an extension of themselves” or reflective of who they are². The brand gratifies the self.

It may be intentional from the brand, but for consumers, attachment is much more subliminal. Brands must form personal connections over time by expressing the values, passions and interests that mean the most to their audience, so that eventually, consumers will see themselves reflected in the brand.

That is the key differentiator between brand loyalty and attachment. Brands budget advertising to drive clicks often via loyalty points and rewards, which tend to be short-lived compared to deeper branding initiatives to help a company's long game. In fact, loyalty programs only increase purchase instances by [less than 0.5%](#).

JoAnn Sciarrino, Director, Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations and the Isabella Cunningham Endowed Chair of Advertising at University of Texas at Austin, says “Even though most marketers measure and set annual brand performance goals for loyalty, my research has shown that loyalty alone is not a significant predictor of digital interactions or revenues for many consumer categories. However, brands with strong brand attachment have nearly double the number of digital interactions than brands with strong loyalty, and weekly brand attachment is highly correlated with weekly brand revenues.”

THE MISSED OPPORTUNITY

For a previous white paper, [Master Brand Storytelling: Power of the Parent](#), we polled more than 1,000 consumers and marketing executives to determine the power of master brand storytelling, and we found a major discrepancy between marketers and consumers.

While 60 percent of all consumers and 67 percent of millennials (the group with the largest buying power) believe parent brand, messaging and values are as important as product performance, 50 percent of them do not actually know the parent brand behind their most frequently purchased products or services.

That's a huge missed opportunity for building more long-term brand attachments. Where's the disconnect?



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DEFINING BRAND ATTACHMENT

A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OVER CONVENIENCE

Jill goes to the same grocery store every week because it's close to her house. If her family moves, and a new chain becomes the closest, she'll switch stores. For this reason, you can't confuse repetition with an emotional bond. Because if she were emotionally connected to her current grocery store's values, mission statement and experience, she would be much more likely to stay with that brand even if it's no longer the most convenient. She stays in this relationship because of convenience, but if a new store opened an equal distance from her house and were a better option, she would quickly end her relationship – just like that.

DIFFERENTIATING BRAND ATTITUDES FROM BRAND ATTACHMENT

While both brand attitudes and brand attachment are psychological notions of a brand, they are very different. Consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand are also likely to have a favorable attitude toward it. However, while a good brand attitude can lead to brand attachment, the two are different because brand attachment forms over time, resulting in a deeper connection, with emotions at play.

Attitudes, on the other hand, reflect only a person's evaluative reaction to an object, which can be served without ever coming in contact with the object. We as consumers could have a positive brand attitude toward any objects – many of which have little or no importance to our lives or personal values. Brand attachments occur much less often.



Consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand are also likely to have a favorable attitude toward it, during the ups and downs the brand may experience.

DEFINING BRAND ATTACHMENT

COGNITIVE BIAS: THE SCIENCE OF ATTACHMENT

The notion of cognitive bias was introduced by the godfathers of behavioral economics (and my personal heroes), [Amos Tversky](#) and [Daniel Kahneman](#), in 1972. They define cognitive bias as a systematic pattern of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment³. Put plainly, they were able to repeatedly identify that human judgments and decisions differ from [rational choice theory](#). This means that consumers can defy logic and 'follow their heart' (or emotions) as long as the brand continues to provide satisfaction.



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In research published last year in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Northeastern University Psychology Professor Lisa Feldman Barrett discovered that the neurotransmitter dopamine is involved in human bonding, bringing the brain's reward system into how we form human attachments. Douglas Van Praet points out that this is central to the bonds made with brands, as consumer decision-making is about making anticipatory judgments, and our brain does this largely through the release of dopamine⁴.

We know that the same types of mental states that occur with human-to-human contact can also occur with human-to-brand. There is scientific evidence that something deeper is going on at a subconscious emotional level between brands and certain audiences.

So, how do we convince target audiences that our brand is the only choice for them? Understanding their psychological tendencies helps us identify and solve for their logic.

DEFINING BRAND ATTACHMENT

COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX, 2016

What should we remember?

- We store memories differently based on how they were experienced
- We reduce events and lists to their key elements
- We discard specifics to form generalities
- We edit and reinforce some memories after the fact
- We favor simple-looking options and complete information over complex, ambiguous options
- To avoid mistakes, we're motivated to preserve our autonomy and status in a group, and to avoid irreversible decisions
- To get things done, we tend to complete things we've invested time and energy in
- To stay focused, we favor the immediate, relatable thing in front of us
- To act, we must be confident we can make an impact and feel what we do is important

Too much information

- We notice things already primed in memory or repeated often
- Bizarre/funny/visually striking/anthropomorphic things stick out more than nonbizarre/unfunny things
- We notice when something has changed
- We are drawn to details that confirm our own existing beliefs
- We notice flaws in others more easily than flaws in ourselves
- We find stories and patterns even in sparse data
- We fill in characteristics from stereotypes, generalities, and prior histories
- We imagine things and people we're familiar with or fond of as better
- We simplify probabilities and numbers, making them easier to think about
- We think we know what other people are thinking
- We project our current mindset and assumptions onto the past and future

Need to act fast

Not enough meaning

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CONSUMERS

Emotions are a critical way to attach consumers to your brand because consumers feel first and think second.

A study about dynamic facial expressions taught us that humans are really only capable of communicating four basic emotions: happy, sad, afraid and angry⁵.



Of all the emotions, research shows us that fear pushes people to report greater brand attachment. A study published in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#) demonstrated that consumers who experienced fear while watching a film felt a greater affiliation with a present brand than those who watched films evoking other emotions, like happiness, sadness or excitement. As marketers, we can't serve horror films to our audiences, but we can drive a sense of urgency and evoke FOMO (fear of missing out).

This is further validated by research from the [IPA Databank](#), which contains more than 1,300 case studies of successful advertising campaigns. Campaigns with purely emotional content performed nearly two times as well (31% vs. 16%) as those with only rational content⁶. Humans are mentally wired to pay attention to our emotions – especially fear, guilt or love – our emotions lead us to act, oftentimes impulsively.

The underlying emotions of affection, connection and passion map to happiness, sadness and fear. If we can drive to the heart with these emotions by using endearing names, push brand values that match an audience and give audiences something that can make their lives better or a feeling of completion, we're well on our way to building that deeper connection.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CONSUMERS

TRUST LEADS TO LOYALTY AND ATTACHMENT

Accountability, transparency, honor and trust are attributes that brands with the highest levels of attachment all have in common. While they aren't part of the four basic emotions discussed above, these are tied directly to a person's (and a brand's) value system. While these attributes are hard to measure (more feelings than data science), several behavioral economists and neuroscientists have been partnering to study brain functions where consumers trust (or don't trust) particular brands and how that influences behavior.

Lawrence A. Crosby and his partner Paul J. Zak have spent years documenting how brand trust strengthens a relationship between a brand and its customers. Crosby says that if a consumer trusts a brand, he or she exhibits strong "customer loyalty and commitment, leading to higher levels of repurchase, share of wallet, cross-selling, referrals, general buyer-seller cooperation⁷, etc." Trust leads to brand attachment, and consumers with strong brand attachments influence people around them.

MILLENNIALS REQUIRE A SHIFT IN BASIC ATTACHMENT RATIONALE

As the baby boomers age out, millennials will be the biggest generation, and with that, big challenges are ahead, since this demographic tends to be brand-agnostic, focusing more on social responsibility and evaluating price based on the experiences they provide. It's the value of the experience that increases their intent to purchase.



A Sense of Partnership

By choosing to buy products from the Body Shop, consumers can show they value the environment and nature. They willingly sacrifice by paying a premium versus buying the average drugstore product. Each time they buy and use the product, consumers feel good about doing their part to make the world a better place. To them, it's the same as making a donation to a philanthropic organization, and they see themselves as teaming up with the brand based on shared values and beliefs.

“ I love The Body Shop because everything is natural, they have amazing morals and ethics and they help out so many charities and communities. But also, obviously, their products are amazing. You don't often see multitasking brands who make good makeup, skin care, body care and hair care products, but The Body Shop manages to do that. ”

WAYS TO DRIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRANDS

Today, it's more effective to have a better brand than a better product. Audiences connect to brands that share their values and missions. Additionally, when consumers value the role a brand plays in helping them achieve their goals, they come to regard it as meaningful and significant. They become more emotionally bonded; they grow attached. Consumers do this because they feel satisfied, which drives greater brand attachment, loyalty and the likelihood of spreading the word about how much they love that brand.

TECHNIQUE 1: STRIVE TO BE A BETTER BRAND

The attachment that consumers have to [Apple](#) exceeds the basics of convenience, loyalty and simple emotion. To many marketers, they're a perfect example of a brand that connects to their audience's heart and mind. But was there a moment where they really evolved to develop attached consumers for years to come?



Unveiling the iPhone

Steve Jobs stood before the Macworld Convention in January 2007, wearing a simple black turtleneck and jeans. As he unveiled the first iPhone, exclaiming, "Every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along," he created a deep level of brand attachment to a huge audience⁸. Sure, he already had a loyal pack of Mac lovers, but the number of consumers attached to Apple grew exponentially after this unveiling. The simplicity of his speech and his passion about wanting to make the world better created such anticipation that many consumers were lined up 12 hours before stores opened to buy the phone they just had to have. He built "a sense of belonging to an elite club by portraying the Mac as embodying the values of righteous outsiderism and rebellion against injustice⁹."

“ I love Apple because their products just work. They make you want to be a part of their family, they're innovative and they don't care what all the other companies do. ”

Fast-forward 11+ years, and Apple is still riding the high that Jobs cultivated due to his obsession with building a deep connection with his customers, leading to the holiest of holy brand attachments. The simple, user-friendly experience made it adaptable to audiences spanning many generations. Like Apple, brand leaders usually have the advantage of being the first in their categories – giving the gift of time to allow your brand to become embedded in your audience's mind before the competition does.

Take Amazon. In the past year, Amazon's brand value has increased by 42%. They've been a top brand for a while, but now rank as the highest-valued brand in 2018¹⁰. Their e-commerce experience is unmatched – and it's all based on brand attachment. They were able to look at what their consumer wants – personalized, detailed, fast delivery – and use important data to give it to them.

WAYS TO DRIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRANDS

If customers are faced with things they need, they'll quickly think "I can probably find it on Amazon," bypass all other retailers, whether in-store or online, and have it delivered within days.

The experience doesn't stop with e-commerce. They're building something greater: an alliance to the company, and any future innovations it brings.

Sure, better products may come to compete, but if the original brand has the reach and is able to get close to their audience, they'll continue to keep perceptions the same and remain on top.

TECHNIQUE 2:

IF YOU CAN'T BE FIRST, BE DIFFERENT

Rarely are products or services unique, so it's up to the brand to create a deficit for their competition. It's innovation and attachment that keep certain brands in the game at all.



Self-Connection: Consumers Describing Themselves With a Brand

Harleys are known for the distinct sound of their engines, but what sets them apart from competitors is that their marketing approach is more about lifestyle than transportation. Despite the outlaw-biker image, Harley's customers not only pay a higher premium as an homage to the brand they adore, it's also the No. 1 seller of motorcycles to women, African Americans, Hispanics, young adults and baby boomers.

Their marketing budget dedicates a healthy amount to creating experiences for bike owners, such as big bike events around the world. It's these experiences that make the brand stand out, allowing them to spend less on traditional marketing channels.

“ Remember the scene from the movie “The Shawshank Redemption” where Andy is standing in the rain after escaping from prison? That’s the feeling of riding a Harley. When you ride, you escape from this world and experience freedom. The minute you start the bike, all five of your senses get a jump-start. It’s just you, the bike and the road. ”

WAYS TO DRIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRANDS

TECHNIQUE 3:

BE A PART OF THEIR WORLD

Marketers should strive continually to increase brand attachment as a means to achieve desired business outcomes. It's a slow process, so it helps to create engaging, meaningful experiences when and where your target audiences need you.



Brand Prominence: Being Visible in a Neighborhood

Enterprise Rent-A-Car wasn't an originator like Hertz, and it had comparable offerings and prices. To be different, they opened locations in the suburbs rather than just at airline terminals. Now, they're America's largest car rental company. They're an established part of your neighborhood, which helps increase familiarity with the brand and evokes a level of trust.



I travel every other week for work, and Enterprise is always the most convenient and accommodating car rental service in the airport. Staff is super friendly! Love how easy and quick the process is to turn in your keys – so helpful. ”

TECHNIQUE 4:

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO DIGITAL ASSETS AND TECHNOLOGY

Google's Abigail Posner says we can't underestimate the importance of emotion in marketing. Understand the emotional appeal and key drivers behind the discovery, viewing, sharing and creation of online video, photography and visual content. "In the language of the visual web, when we share a video or an image, we're not just sharing the object, we're sharing in the emotional response it creates."¹¹



Anthropomorphism: An Indication of Attachment

Technology and AI are only continuing to grow. For many consumers who have Alexa in their home, it provides a sense of enjoyment, entertainment, knowledge and partnership because it's always there – literally waiting for you to speak to it. The stronger one's attachment to an object, the more likely one is to maintain proximity to the object.



Alexa does the job so well I'd be willing to bet that she'll be named as a contributing factor in a divorce one day. My wife and I are already using her to settle arguments, treating her like an impartial mediator whenever we disagree on a known fact. 'See?' the winner will say, after an exasperated back and forth about whether Atticus Finch's name was actually Atticus Finch or not. 'Alexa knows. She's on my side, not yours.' ”

A MODEL FOR MEASUREMENT

If given the right questions, consumers can articulate the nature of their emotional attachment to brands. We simply have to ask them and provide a numeric scale to obtain quantitative data. [The Blake Project](#) has spent decades building tools to understand emotions and human motivation in order to accelerate brand growth, and their results are truly amazing¹².

Their research shows that on average, 50% of purchase decisions are based on emotion. In the vodka category, this number reaches as high as 90%. This is why Grey Goose sells for much more than Smirnoff, yet when it's removed from its emotionally evocative bottle, consumers pick Smirnoff over Grey Goose in 9 out of 10 taste tests. Irrational? Maybe. Emotional? Definitely¹³.

As marketers and product owners, you're likely already measuring for awareness/reach, engagement and conversions, but as a brand, where do you begin to start measuring attachment and emotional connections?



If given the right questions, consumers can articulate the nature of their emotional attachment to brands. We simply have to ask them and provide a numeric scale to obtain quantitative data.

Pace's VP of Strategic Insights, Adam Braxton, explains, "Unlike standard marketing KPIs that indicate success at different stages in a customer's journey, such as awareness, leads generated, or even sales conversion, brand attachment is a calculated phenomenon that is representative of opinions formed over multiple customer interactions and therefore multiple data points. As a result, it can provide a longer and more strategic understanding of the change in audience behaviors and the real impact of your marketing on your holistic brand equity."

"Traditional brand attachment measurement models have involved incorporating heavy frequencies of social comments into a marketing mix model to attribute involvement with the brand to true purchase intent. However, many organizations find themselves with neither the frequency of social interactions nor the marketing mix modeling software to back it. The good news is that there are a few simple steps all marketers can take to start assessing brand attachment."

A MODEL FOR MEASUREMENT

So where do you begin? The first step is to identify where your brand stands today. Begin by adding a few questions around attachment to active qualitative research surveys. This will allow you to begin to gather data to create a benchmark from which to grow.

Below are four brand attachment questions using an 11-point scale with anchors of “not at all” (0) and “completely” (10)¹⁴.

MEASURING BRAND ATTACHMENT



1. To what extent is [brand name] part of you and who you are?
2. To what extent do you personally feel connected to [brand name]?
3. To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward [brand name] often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?
4. To what extent does [brand name] say something to other people about who you are?

CONCLUSION

Over the course of their lives, your audience interacts with thousands of brands, but they will develop attachments to only a few of them. Your audience is busy, and time is too valuable. They just don't have the mental capacity to think about your brand often if their emotions are involved. Because of this, it's so important that they have a strong attachment to your brand, so that when they quickly, sometimes even impulsively, need to purchase something, you get their favor.

“Brands are sometimes faced with the hard task of avoiding what they want to say, in favor of saying what the audience needs and wants to hear ... it is harder than many think, yet it is the crux of getting across the line into brand attachment.”

Gordon Locke
CMO, Pace

Find out what your customers' passions, connections and affections are and build your brand around them to create lasting emotional bonds with your target audience.

WORK CITATION

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Nicole is a creative strategic marketer and analytics professional who boosts online visibility, plans and creates efficiencies for content, brand, and digital marketing strategies, increases conversions and maximizes ROI. She has extensive strategic planning experience with eCommerce and content-related websites involving both traditional and digital marketing, brand management, content marketing, organic and paid search, social media, email marketing, CRM's, and lead generation programs. Currently, she works with Pace clients including Gold's Gym, 3M, Walmart, Argo Group and Four Seasons. Prior to joining Pace, Nicole served in various marketing and analytics roles for large corporations, including Hanesbrands Inc., Kayser-Roth Corporation and Tanger Outlets.



GORDON PRICE LOCKE

Chief Marketing Officer & Subject Matter Expert

Gordon has 25 years of marketing leadership experience ranging from re-engineering well-known brands and product portfolios to developing strategic storytelling platforms. At Pace, his role is to help new and existing clients develop winning content programs to reach their strategic objectives. Gordon is also an advisor, speaker and author on integrated marketing. His work, agency and client experience include Hawaiian Airlines, Sabre, HP, TIAA, Gold's Gym, Dell, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Rosenbluth-American Express to Teradata, Nestle Purina, Fossil, Grant Thornton and Intuit. He has traveled to 40+ countries and has lived in Charlotte, North Carolina; Washington, D.C.; Honolulu; Dallas and now Greensboro, North Carolina.



ADAM BRAXTON

Vice President, Strategic Insights

Adam brings nearly 15 years of digital marketing and strategy experience to Pace. Adam's primary responsibilities include guiding digital and channel-optimization strategy for multiple Pace clients, including Wells Fargo and Walmart. He has extensive strategic experience and understanding in multidisciplinary and integrated programs, including platform management, program measurement, email and CRM performance, and applied marketing automation. Prior to joining Pace, Adam served as the director of digital marketing for Flow Automotive, a conglomerate of more than 30 dealerships, and was a senior digital strategist at Mullen. Adam is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and holds a master's in business administration from Wake Forest University.



EMILY RHODES

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Emily manages Pace's web and social content to support both new business and marketing efforts. As both a left-brain and right-brain thinker, she mixes knowledge of business strategy with a passion for copywriting to create compelling stories. Emily graduated from the University of South Carolina with a degree in public relations and comes to Pace with experience working on brands such as Chick-fil-A, Denny's and Wells Fargo.

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ABOUT PACE

Pace is a leading creative agency that develops integrated experiences for a diverse client base of some of the world's most iconic brands. Its staff of more than 370 employees across the country produces award-winning work that moves audiences to action. It has offices in Dallas and San Antonio, Texas; Greensboro, North Carolina; New York City; and Bentonville, Arkansas.

PACE