

# How to Reach the Distracted Customer

**2019 ERA Conference keynote speaker  
Curt Steinhorst discusses the great challenges  
we face in a constantly-connected world.**



In the age of distraction, human attention is a scarce commodity.

At the recent ERA 50th Anniversary Conference in Austin, Texas, keynote speaker Curt Steinhorst addressed the pressing issue of reaching an increasingly distracted customer at a time when technology developments have fundamentally altered the way people work, engage, communicate and relate to one another.

According to Steinhorst, the latest research shows that despite all available communication options, people are increasingly harder to reach and digital distractions play a huge role.

“We check our phones every 4.3 minutes and we receive more than 200 emails per day,” Steinhorst said. “We go home and we spend 60 percent more time connected to digital [devices] than we do in a conversation with our significant other.”

In the era of distraction, there is no place or activity that is safe, he explained. Even when people go to places to be entertained, like the movie theater, they find themselves back on their devices. “In fact, nine out of 10 people when watching TV today are actively using a second device,” he added.

Distraction is a massive problem that has no age boundaries. Surprisingly, according to Steinhorst, millennials are not the generation spending the most time connected to digital devices in a given week. While research indicates that Gen Xers are spending the most time on social media every single week, when it comes to TV watching, baby boomers exceed all age groups.

So how does digital connectivity translate to connecting with customers?

While there have never before been so many access points to connect with customers as there are today — phone, email, social media, etc. — there is also that much more competition for customer attention.

“We have never had so much within our immediate reach, but we have never been so immediately reachable. We have never been so connected or so interrupted. We have never had so much information or so little space to



process any of it. This is what we mean when we say we have never been so distracted,” Steinhorst stated.

According to him, “there is nothing more valuable than our attention.” Ultimately, however, technology has created a radical shift in the way people make decisions about their attention. One of the great challenges people face in a constantly-connected world is how to grab, capture and keep the attention of a shifting customer base. More importantly, how do they manage their own distractions and capture the attention of others who work alongside them?

“The way we know that [attention] is valuable, is by how offended we get when people won’t give us theirs,” Steinhorst said and added: “We know that attention is

evidence of what matters. The truth is, while we value it, there are three areas that we often undervalue.

“The first one is we value our customers’ attention. But do we value it in the way that they value it? People often ask, how do I get my customer’s attention and what I often ask in return is ‘Are you getting it or are you

*We have never had so much within our immediate reach, but we have never been so immediately reachable.*

*We have never been so connected or so interrupted. We have never had so much information or so little space to process any of it.*

*(continued on next page)*



(continued from previous page)



**Curt Steinhorst**  
Founder  
Focuswise Inc.

*Curt Steinhorst is the bestselling author of “Can I Have Your Attention? Inspiring Better Work Habits, Focusing Your Team, and Getting Stuff Done in the Constantly Connected Workplace.”*

*He is on a mission to rescue us from our distracted selves. After years studying the impact of tech on human behavior, Steinhorst founded Focuswise, which equips organizations to overcome the distinct challenges of the constantly-connected workplace.*

*Diagnosed with ADD as a child, Steinhorst knows intimately the challenges companies face to keep the attention of today’s distracted workforce and customer.*

*For more information, visit [www.curtsteinhorst.com](http://www.curtsteinhorst.com).*

stealing it?’

“Second, we want customers’ attention but we don’t realize that often the most effective way of getting it is by better managing our own.

“And third, we severely misunderstand how [attention] actually works.”

So how does attention work? How do people make sure that they put their attention on what matters?

At any given moment, people have endless options competing for their attention. The problem is that they can’t do all of them.

“Our brain is actually hard-wired to decide what we are going to pay attention to based on what’s most pressing,” Steinhorst explained. “The primary system in our brain makes us pay attention to new, surprising, novel, interesting, things that would make us die, or things that would make us thrive. That’s how our brain works.”

However, according to him, technology has eliminated the boundaries and complicated how people manage attention with customers, family, kids, providing infinite availability to explore new things all the time.

Places are another factor that shapes people’s attention; however, technology has altered that as well. People can be on vacation and working; on a beach, working; at a family event, working; at a baseball game, working; and people can be at work, but not working. All this is also having an impact on people’s relationships with their customers, Steinhorst explained. One of the key reasons for that is that everyone is trying to do more.

“The volume of what people have to manage has never been higher,” Steinhorst said. “On average, people today are consuming 500 percent the amount of information as someone in 1990. If we put too much in our short-term memory, nothing moves to long-term. Despite that fact, we

see an acceleration. But how much more can we get done? We don’t have an accelerated relationship with time. And when we try to, we end up with some significant consequences [because] we are not wired to be able to accomplish work in that manner.”

Thus, Steinhorst suggested that people have to recognize the need to take time in order to actually be efficient with time.

“When you try to do two things at the same time, the quality of the work goes down and our ability to differentiate importance is lost,” he said. “If we start to understand what creates frustrations in a world where all is available all the time, it changes what we expect with how we are going to

put in our attention and where we are going to put it.”

He added, “In the face of infinite competition, confusion reigns.”

So how do people deal with all this confusion? Steinhorst recommended that people shift from the belief that their only value proposition is being available and responsive. If not, he warned, they will actually lose what makes them competitive and what makes them valuable in the process.

Thus, there must be a shift in the critical role that sales reps play to capture customers’ attention. The number one responsibility of sales reps today is to help their customers identify what matters; number two is to save their attention for what matters the most; and number three is to actually reaffirm that they matter.

“Your value proposition has never been more clear if you value your own and your customers’ attention,” Steinhorst said. “Access is the enemy of ingenuity. We have to find time when we are reliably unavailable by simply creating intentional times and places throughout the day to be fully unplugged in order to prioritize and assign what actually matters today.”

*Technology has eliminated the boundaries and complicated how people manage attention with customers, family, kids, providing infinite availability to explore new things all the time.*

*This article was written by Neda Simeonova, editor of The Representor.*