

By [Deborah Gassner](#)

Last week I had the opportunity to present at the [Seattle Interactive Conference](#), a two-day event celebrating the convergence of online technology, creativity, and emerging trends. The themes engagement and authenticity surfaced in several sessions that I attended before my talk. People want “real” experiences and believe technology should provide them.

This idea was the cornerstone of my talk, which was titled, “Micro-Networks & Hyper-Local Communities: Creating Meaningful Human Connections.” The premise of the talk was that technology creates a problem—when we stare at screens we disconnect from the world around us, but at the same time technology offers the solution by providing a bridge to real-time interactions. People crave connection and community. Technology, and social media in particular, can be used to forge these relationships.

I presented two case studies that focused on the solution: Buy Nothing Ballard, a closed social media group on Facebook that is part of the larger [Buy Nothing Project](#), and [NextDoor](#), a private social network for neighborhoods. But this blog post is not about what I said. Instead, I want to focus on **how** I said it. How I connected with the audience in a talk that was about people connecting. Kind of meta, right?

A good talk should inspire and educate and when it’s done well, keep us engaged from start to finish. I had hours of video from the interviews I had conducted with group members and about 20 minutes to present. The session was 50 minutes, but I was co-presenting with Amy Dickson, Blink’s Director of Marketing, and we wanted to split the time and save a few minutes for Q&A.

I used two approaches: I created an Experience Map and used video clips to illustrate salient

points. An Experience Map illustrates the end-to-end experience a person has with a product or service. ([This post](#) provides in-depth explanation). A quick audience poll revealed that only a handful of attendees were familiar with the term, so I began with a brief explanation and then talked about Jen (one of my interviewees) and walked through her first time using Buy Nothing Ballard. I went through the first four of the stages of Discover, Join, Investigate, and Interact, and touched upon what she was doing and what she was thinking and feeling for each one. Then, for the fifth and final stage I showed a clip of Jen responding to my question as to whether or not she told people about the group.

Yeah, I'm that guy. I really evangelize it...getting into a Buy Nothing group is really monumental to rooting and meeting your neighbors.

Of course, I could have simply shared Jen's thoughts, either by paraphrasing or directly quoting her, but when we see her and hear her voice, when we have all of the cues we get from a real interaction—the sound of her voice, when she pauses, her body language—we can **connect** with her.

I continued to show video clips to highlight peoples' experiences that were often touching and sometimes funny—inviting a stranger over for Christmas dinner, asking for help when someone was housebound with the flu, delivering hot coffee to those that drive up to a member's house and beep their horns.

Beyond keeping the audience engaged I also wanted them to recall what was said. Research has shown that we remember visual images much easier and much better than words. Instead of filling the screen with words I chose an image to get each point across. A common use case for NextDoor's alerts is the Lost Dog; I used the ubiquitous lost dog poster. When I had to transition from Buy Nothing too-good-to-be-true moments to issues that arose I showed a unicorn with the words "Trouble in Paradise" fading in. I've never used such a cheesy image in a deck before and hearing a chuckle from the audience was reassuring.

Unicorns and lost dogs: Telling a story with pictures.

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Was I successful?

Although I can't say for sure, because there was a conference companion app with an activity feed and people tweeted, I was able to get immediate feedback. One attendee posted a photo of the Experience Map and several other attendees "commented" by adding smiley faces. Many of my points found their way to the app and Twitter revealed several more.

After the session I messaged one of the women that had commented on the talk via the conference app. She was engaged and excited about the topic and continued to share her excitement with me: *"I loved the talk! It made me feel like I was witnessing a TED Talk."*

Insert smiley face here.

Deborah is a member of the design team at Blink, involved with interaction and visual design. She is fascinated by how people use technology to communicate and oscillates between delight and fear when she watches her kids with devices.