

Carson Bell ([00:10](#)):

Welcome to the IVC Podcast, the Xcast, where we help brands navigate audience engagement in times of change. It's no understatement to say the pandemic has changed almost everything we know about conducting business. While this disruption has been difficult, there's a group of individuals carving out a unique space in the marketplace that will increasingly require your attention, BETA buyers.

([00:33](#)):

These young professionals have specific expectations of brands. They want them to be technology forward, self-service, personalized and familiar. BETAs continue to grow in prominence and decision making rights and learning how to speak their language and understand their lifestyle is critical. As the Boomers and Gen Xers age out and retire, the BETA buyers will increasingly be in the bullseye of our target audience.

([00:59](#)):

Hello everyone. I am Carson Bell, Associate Strategy Program Manager here at InVision, and I am joined by ...

John Emmaneel ([01:06](#)):

Hi everyone. I'm John Emmaneel, I am the SVP of New Vertical Markets here at InVision. I'm also the General Manager of our Chicago region.

Carson Bell ([01:15](#)):

Before we jump in, we do need to level set. This is a conversation between two generations, myself, an ice coffee drinking, constantly texting millennial, and John ...

John Emmaneel ([01:27](#)):

I'm a turnkey Gen Xer, so highly independent, always looking for the next [inaudible 00:01:32] trend. Maybe a little cynical, but I'll keep that on the down low for this one.

Carson Bell ([01:37](#)):

Appreciate that. Two different generations coming together to discuss the future of experiential. Isn't that poetic? Before we jump into our greater conversation, John, can you give us some background on your history and the experiential space?

John Emmaneel ([01:52](#)):

Yeah, sure. I've been really fortunate in my career to work both on the B2C and B2B side in a variety of verticals, mostly, principally in technology and gaming. It's been really cool. What has been fascinating is I feel like I've had the opportunity to work through a variety of eras, moving originally from straight production to the emergence of event marketing through the first decade of going digital and now to focus more on omnichannel brand experiences. Now it feels like we're entering this BETA era, for lack of better term, that you're talking about and dreaming up live and digital experiences that explore new frontiers such as metaverse, I think, are going to become paramount.

Carson Bell ([02:33](#)):

I like that phrase, the BETA era. Your background pairs perfectly.

John Emmaneel ([02:37](#)):

Okay. I coined it right there for you, so let's trademark. Should we stop and trademark that?

Carson Bell ([02:41](#)):

Yeah, we'll be right back everyone. No, I think your background pairs perfectly with the future of experiences. You have seen them throughout the years and you're leading the charge into the metaverse. While you may be very well versed in that, how familiar are you with the term BETA buyers?

John Emmaneel ([03:00](#)):

I have a level of familiarity obviously, if we're coining an era, but I'd love it if you could explain it a bit further.

Carson Bell ([03:06](#)):

Of course. BETA is traditionally a word used in the tech world describing something in the initial phases of creation, something that is being developed, worked through, and consistently improved. It's a first shot, it's a test. Something in BETA is definitely going to change. Unsurprisingly, this term is used as an acronym to describe today's young professionals age 21 to 40, so myself included. BETAs, it stands for blurred, evolved, technology, and activism, and it describes how they live, work, and play.

([03:41](#)):

BETAs capitalize on disruption and thrive in uncertainty. They have survived stock market crashes, recessions, pandemics, and they believe that this disruption leads to evolution and change. The B2B Institute conducted further research into this growing demographic and the full report, Working in BETA: The Rising B2B Decision Maker sparked our interest in understanding and researching this influential group of individuals.

John Emmaneel ([04:09](#)):

That's right. Well, honestly, it's super fascinating and wonderful, especially the whole notion of disruption leading to evolution and change. Where do you see the impact here?

Carson Bell ([04:21](#)):

I completely agree. The impact I feel like we're seeing is not only is this group growing in prominence, in fact it's projected that three years from now, 44% of the workforce will be millennials. Even more importantly, we're seeing that these BETA characteristics are more pronounced in younger generations. That suggests that their preferences and expectations are not going away, so we need to learn to speak their language.

([04:50](#)):

Coming out of a two and a half year COVID interruption, digital first experiences are increasing in the B2B space, which we both know very well. Three key areas in fact have accelerated this change in communication strategies and they continue to be very important for BETAs to this day. First, we have technology. BETAs grew up with smartphones, we operate in the cloud, and, more often than not, we opt for less traditional methods of peer-to-peer interaction compared to other generations.

([05:24](#)):

92% of millennials say that they carry their smartphone with them, and a quarter of those millennials report looking at their phone more than 100 times per day. John, just take a guess, a ballpark figure, how many times are you looking at your phone per day?

John Emmaneel ([05:41](#)):

That might be too much of a personal question. I recently read that it's closer to 300 times for the average person. Would you agree with that?

Carson Bell ([05:48](#)):

Oh my gosh. I mean for me personally, yes, I agree with that. If I could have my phone embedded into my arm, I think I would. I never want to go anywhere without it, especially because I need the GPS. That idea of things being right there with you and accessible leads me right into our next key area, which is accessibility. I mean how much more accessible can a phone in your arm be, right?

John Emmaneel ([06:12](#)):

Totally. You can call Elon. I think he's probably working on that.

Carson Bell ([06:15](#)):

Accessibility in terms of experiences is what I'm really getting towards here, so experiences must be flexible and seamlessly available through various devices with self-service models. BETAs strive to be self-sufficient, researching and processing business decisions on their own. It's actually reported that 16% of millennial decision makers utilize online sources for brand research compared to older generations.

([06:45](#)):

Our final area is personalization. BETAs expect a customized and familiar user experience. They expect brands to prove they know BETA buyers as individuals, and a common request from BETAs is to actually have these brands "speak human". Interesting little caveat there [inaudible 00:07:05] the technology forward, wouldn't you say?

John Emmaneel ([07:08](#)):

Yeah, totally.

Carson Bell ([07:09](#)):

They also want to have elements of storytelling in all of their communications, which is interesting because strategies such as this typically appear more often in the B2C space. However, they're proven successful and growing in the B2B space as well. John, throughout our work in InVision, you've collaborated on some of the most immersive customer experiences. Can you share some of the processes of creating these events, share some rules of the road for engagement to ensure that they are speaking BETA?

John Emmaneel ([07:39](#)):

Yeah, sure. I think it's all developing as we speak, but traditionally we always start with a complete brand or an attendee or consumer immersion that leads to a strategic roadmap that informs our approach. Then, we work towards seeing the big picture and bringing every touchpoint to a customer

experience. Then, as you were just talking about, we look to make it human, affecting diverse audiences with inclusive and equitable experiences.

[\(08:03\)](#):

For me personally, I also strive for differentiation. I love to play in emerging spaces that are new and future forward. I think rules of engagement, candidly, I think you kind of summed it up, I mean we want to focus on authenticity. I work heavily in the gaming vertical, that's one of the areas I oversee, and that's like the number one rule there. So many of them are BETAs, it has to be authentic and real or they don't even want to be bothered with it. It needs to be purposeful and create a personal connection.

[\(08:33\)](#):

Then, with that connection, you want to personalize that at scale with heavy involvement in interaction. As you were saying, make it about storytelling. It's so easy to make it all about data, but that overwhelms. In terms of B2C, I think you're going to see increasingly that festival, that party, that concert player, that fan festival sort of feel. That's what we're seeing with BETAs, they want to be affiliated with the brand they really believe in and they want to really make it a part of their lifestyle, and then go where the fans are going. Like we've been talking about, making it mobile, exploring a variety of different channels that the BETAs are looking at for their podcasts or for their training or whatever it may be.

Carson Bell [\(09:10\)](#):

Yeah. They definitely have a tendency to cast a wide net as it relates to where they're getting all their information from, so that's a good call out. Why do you think that this is more important now? As I said earlier, BETA preferences are more pronounced in younger generations, so we know they are not going away, but how do we continue and keep this importance level high?

John Emmaneel [\(09:31\)](#):

I think we always want to be meeting consumers within their preexisting and emerging communication channels, always diversifying the media, and then adjusting to how consumers prefer to consume content. Additionally, I think we want to consider their learning styles. Case in point, are you a visual or an auditory learner for example? I'm a little bit more on the auditory side, but would you want to learn how to file your taxes that way? No. I think you probably want to see it more visually, or maybe you would, I don't know.

Carson Bell [\(09:59\)](#):

Not for me. That would not be helpful.

John Emmaneel [\(10:03\)](#):

Might work for me though. Bottom line, we want to make sure we're designing and redesigning content to adjust to meet consumers where and how they learn. Also, in addition, we also want to consider location and expediency targeting, building experiences using tactics to ensure that communications are received and can be acted upon wherever and whenever.

[\(10:24\)](#):

One example that comes to mind as I'm sort of talking through this with you is our recent work with Shawn Mendes on his Wonder album release. Rather than do a live event or what have you, we went for a virtual immersive 360 Wonderland game experience. It met his fans in a mobile digital mode, and then

it was true to his brand and message, included a variety of exploratory and game-like experiences. Then, again, all your channels covered. It was integrated with Spotify for easy point of purchase of the album.

Carson Bell ([10:57](#)):

Perfectly speaking BETA, hitting all of the key points, [inaudible 00:11:01], ease of use, location, et cetera. I think we kind of talk about this, digital natives, a little bit more complex than we would think. Correct?

John Emmaneel ([11:12](#)):

Yeah. You raise an interesting point there, the idea of digital natives and considering one's generation's digital expectation versus another. For example, for me generationally, I might see digital almost as a transactional tool, but you see no divide, right? It's an extension, part and parcel with all aspects of your life. Therefore, we need to recognize where younger millennials and Gen Zs are heading and meet them there versus expecting they to align with where we are now and, from that, then build dynamic campaigns with activations that can flow and change unrestricted that leverage the increasing capabilities that do allow us to ebb and flow and update in real time.

Carson Bell ([11:49](#)):

Well, I know I've seen fashion brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton going onto Roblox, spreading that awareness, meeting their customers where they are potentially exposing themselves to new customers. Coca-Cola. Even the Macy's Day Parade has started creating NFT, and even banks like Barclays are looking into the future with metaverse and what that might mean for their industry. These preferences are seeping into all forms of culture, and it just kind of continues to grow. To your earlier point about incorporating into preexisting channels, it's interesting for me, John, I feel like I'm seeing this. I'm getting ads for all types of things on TikTok or on Snapchat, but I don't know if this placement in these mediums is really moving me towards a decision.

John Emmaneel ([12:34](#)):

Yeah, right? That's where the final element comes into play. I mean you've mentioned that BETAs greatly appreciate differentiation and personalization. While these earlier tactics that I mentioned may aid in this, they're also creating a lot of noise. To get rid of that noise, I think additionally you need to respect and focus on each niche, consumers are all into various different niches, and tailor your differentiating communications that way. In a B2B environment, as we were talking about earlier, you really need to embrace storytelling in much more B2C like ways.

Carson Bell ([13:04](#)):

John, you're ensuring that when you are telling a story, it's a millennial, Gen Z story, not your Gen X story, right?

John Emmaneel ([13:12](#)):

Yes. Yeah, totally. Yeah, I know. God, my whole life, it's been boomers, millennial, boomer, millennial. What about Gen X? We will focus on, yes, I agree, with millennial and Gen Z story, and that's where it gets complicated, right? You have to immerse yourself and truly understand BETA unique care abouts, and that way you can speak to them.

Carson Bell ([13:29](#)):

I do believe incorporating and acting on these ideas will ensure that an experience is speaking BETA. We're working to meet people where they are, we're adjusting to their preferences, and we're incorporating personalization, all critical elements when speaking the BETA language. With these "rules" in mind, I say rules in quotations, let's look towards the future.

([13:51](#)):

During the pandemic, BETA buyers and their colleagues across generations, to be fair, across all generations discovered new ways to find and digest content, to live their lives and to do their jobs. Despite the well-documented yearning for connection for audiences of all ages and generations, nothing really is suggesting that the virtual audiences will return to in-person. Is that right, John?

John Emmaneel ([14:14](#)):

Yeah, that's correct, Carson. Throughout these past years, we've seen the reach of virtual events and their ability to engage new audiences in unique ways and see that continuing. Again, it also ties back to honoring where they are, where BETAs are at, and their personal vices and get to know them more personally. People are ripe for engagement, and BETAs are forthright with their expectations. We need to learn how to adjust accordingly and totally lean into it.

Carson Bell ([14:37](#)):

I love that idea of forthright with their expectations. We're a pretty outspoken bunch, I'll say that. There was a quote that I found while we were kind of kicking off all this research and development that I think really speaks to this mindset and its implications for the future.

([14:53](#)):

The quote reads, "BETAs see 2020 as a moment of change and want companies to prioritize more flexibility, invest in technology, and look towards a post-pandemic future. Other professionals view this period as a stop gap before things get back to normal." This idea of normal, can you speak to it from your perspective, John, as someone that has fully embraced technology, its benefits and difficulties, what do you see for the future of events and experiences?

John Emmaneel ([15:22](#)):

Well, that's a huge question. I mean it's a bit loaded, so I'm going to focus on one area that I think I can cover. One area of focus is the coming of gaming and entertainment convergence. This is something of a passion of mine that I follow in leader practice that we put a lot of effort in working on this. It's that the gaming influenced consumer who's passionate in their supported brands and what they view as authentic, they're going to have a substantial influence on B2B engagement. I mean why do I bring this up? Well, just some off the top quick stats. I mean there's nearly 215 million gamers in the US alone. I think it's something like three and a quarter billion worldwide. Average age is 35, so not BETA.

Carson Bell ([16:00](#)):

Right in the middle.

John Emmaneel ([16:01](#)):

Totally. Huge growing number is actually female gamers, all right? In the US, they're nearly 50% and highly using mobile games. I think it's something like three out of every four households, so 75% of the

households have a gamer in the household, and 79% of people under 22 playing mobile games. If you think about all this together, I mean they're going to bring some big expectations to B2B engagements to feel more like fan events versus business seminars.

[\(16:28\)](#):

Their expectation of digital and virtual, it's already informing developing metaverse on how the avatar experience works, how having your authentic self in one platform versus another, how commerce is working. I mean I could go on and on. It's probably a different podcast, so don't get me started, but I think it's going to have a massive effect on what we're doing.

Carson Bell [\(16:46\)](#):

Oh, completely. I mean those numbers alone, that's a huge chunk of an audience to be able to get to engage with your event. It makes total sense to me. Additionally, as it relates to engaging this BETA audience, we want to get their views. We want to have conversation with them. Do you believe that this new approach, this leaning into more traditional B2C tactics, technology front and center, do you believe this is achievable and sustainable?

John Emmaneel [\(17:09\)](#):

Well, I don't think there is a choice that it's sustainable. I think it's what has to happen. For a brand to succeed with BETA, it's an expectation. If we don't embrace this as B2B engagement architects, we risk our message being lost in the noise and simply ignored.

Carson Bell [\(17:24\)](#):

Wow, that's definitely not what we want. I think that all this information that we've gone through is enough of a backing to get you forward, help you speak BETA. John, I can't thank you enough for joining me. Your perspective has been greatly appreciated.

John Emmaneel [\(17:39\)](#):

Well, thank you for having me. It was a lot of fun.

Carson Bell [\(17:42\)](#):

You heard it here first, folks, two generations coming together to learn to speak a new language.

[\(17:49\)](#):

Whether it is to make a business decision, make personal purchases online, or experience music and art, BETA buyers want to feel understood and recognized by the brands they interact with. They want brands to know them personally and anticipate their needs and problems before they bubble to the surface. Learning a new language is always complicated, but BETA is one to invest time and energy in.

[\(18:10\)](#):

If you're a BETA buyer or out there trying to learn more about BETA buyers, their expectations and preferences, we'd love to hear from you. Does this resonate? How are you speaking BETA today and tomorrow? Thank you so much for joining us, and be sure to tune in for the next IVC Podcast episode coming soon.