

# Quip's VP of growth talks D2C models, podcast ads, and making a toothbrush as cool as Nikes

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An interview with:  
**Shane Pittson**

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*Shane Pittson is the vice president of growth at oral-care provider Quip, overseeing advertising efforts and consumer research, optimizing lifetime value and customer acquisition costs, and improving retention rates. We recently spoke with Pittson about creating buzz for a brand, gaining retail distribution, Quip's brief stint on dating apps, and more.*

eMarketer:

**Why do you think Quip has been successful?**

**Shane Pittson:**

One of the first things that comes to mind for me is the product itself—the hero product of the electric toothbrush being genuinely category disrupting.

Quip wasn't a pure marketing or brand play. From the get-go, it incorporated thoughtful product and service design, which brought something new to the category. It wasn't necessarily that it was an innovation in the sense of an invention of features that didn't exist, but rather it brought all of the most impactful features into a design that was attractive, that people wanted to use, and that they wanted on their bathroom mirror or counter.

Early on, I felt like we were onto something when we saw people posting things like, “Today was a good shopping day; I got a new pair of gold Nikes and a gold Quip,” photographing them together. I remember thinking that may be the first time that a toothbrush is at the same kind of hype or excitement level as a new pair of sneakers. Bringing that kind of experience and excitement to a category that was really stagnant, at a price point that was really accessible, set the brand up for success.

eMarketer:

**Initially, Quip was entirely direct-to-consumer [D2C] and only later branched out to major retailers like Target. How important was starting out as a D2C to the company's trajectory?**

**Shane Pittson:**

That order was very helpful. Ultimately, distribution is great. There's a certain amount of people who prefer to shop in-person—and as a brand that has accessibility in mind, we don't want to exclude people who don't want to shop online. So, I think moving into stores was always part of the plan. But starting as D2C-only, I think it allowed us more flexibility in many ways and ultimately allowed us to enter conversations with retailers that had large-scale distribution, bringing with us more interesting data and perspectives to inform those conversations.

That's the benefit of D2C: Customers are very supportive and willing to give feedback. We have around an 80% response rate with post-purchase surveys. Going into conversations with larger-scale retail partners, we have a clear view of what our customers are asking for from an innovation road-map perspective.

**eMarketer:**

**It seems as though the retailer also benefits when the brand starts that distribution conversation with actual customer data to plan around.**

**Shane Pittson:**

Yes. I think both parties ultimately benefit from that understanding and knowledge of the customer, their desires, and their backgrounds.

In terms of the brand's perspective, we definitely tested retail. We did a pop-up shop or two and worked with [Gwyneth Paltrow's wellness brand] Goop on some holiday stores.

Additionally, we worked with [corporate gifting company] New Stand in New York. We tested quite a few small retail outlets and saw that we were really high-producing in those environments. That gave us a lot of confidence that retail would be a smart strategy for us. We were also able to understand, even with the smaller tests, how many of those people who discovered us through brick-and-mortars were coming back and starting subscriptions with us online.

eMarketer:

**Many D2Cs have built subscriptions and replenishment into their business models. How does that affect the relationship with retailers? And how much do subscriptions improve lifetime value?**

**Shane Pittson:**

We've created a positive loop where we're sending incremental foot traffic to the retailer [through new product releases and add-ons]. In August of last year, we launched the Quip Smart Toothbrush and Smart Motor. The motor is backward compatible with the millions of brushes that we've already sold. It's an easy, low-cost upgrade.

And to continue driving value, we give users of that brush points for brushing for 2 minutes twice a day. There are different kinds of bonuses for streaks or other kinds of behaviors that exhibit good oral-care habits. And rewards that you can get with those points include gift cards to some of our retail partners.

eMarketer:

**Which channels have done particularly well for Quip? Have any channels not performed how you expected?**

**Shane Pittson:**

I'll answer the last part of that first, because it's funny. We did more than one test with different dating apps. Because we were thinking, "Oh, fresh breath goes with oral health. It's probably a really good group of people to be interested in oral-care products." That didn't pan out very well for us, but those tests were smaller scale.

What we did have success with, like most D2Cs, was where we began: digital. That allowed us to test into messaging, understand what messaging was performing best, and refine how we spoke about Quip.

From there, we began to look into offline. I think the first offline test we did was on the New York City subway. Out-of-home still has a great place in helping to cast that wider net and then grow top-of-funnel awareness and interest.

We then made the leap into audio and TV, and those have been great channels for us with a lot of great partners. I think that audio is an extension of influencer marketing in many ways, with the rise of podcasts and their hosts having unique and dedicated followings and a range of audience sizes for very relatable advertising.

Every podcast host we work with gets the product and is able to try it so that they can speak on it from a firsthand experience, which I think is one thing that's been really helpful for our business.

eMarketer:

**From a social media standpoint, how much success are you seeing, specifically with respect to converting traffic?**

**Shane Pittson:**

Social remains one of our consistent marketing channels. Early on, I think one of the biggest benefits of something like Facebook was being able to see people's real-time reactions to new products and messaging. Those platforms are always going to play an important part in our marketing mix—mass distribution of social media messaging, then seeing what resonates best and refining accordingly.

eMarketer:

**Quip now offers quite a few products, but that wasn't the case in the beginning. Would it have been easier to launch with a larger assortment, or did the focus on one hero product help at the outset?**

**Shane Pittson:**

I think as a startup, and one with a relatively small team, having that focus on a single product, making improvements, and being able to quickly iterate on one key or core element was helpful.

I think it was also helpful from a messaging perspective. You're not trying to juggle a whole bunch of different products and needs. That's part of how we got from there to where we are now.

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