

Marketing as a center of constant improvement and change

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Abstract

Marketing is constantly under continuous pressure involving constant improvement and change. On their continuous way of becoming more engaging and effective, marketers need professional development on marketing topics, an engagement strategy that provides a willing marketing team with a road map for success, to keep a tight focus on the metrics, to step away from lifecycle marketing and personas, and to evangelize the customer journey in the organization. They also need a better understanding of the marketing predictions and of the direct relationship between marketing's value and impact and marketing's alignment to the business, viewing marketing and sales as a company's investment, and getting the process of transforming marketing and sales capabilities to drive growth moving in a fruitful direction. They must learn to cut through the noise existing in today's wonderfully rich content world, and to secure relationships by translating a level of honesty to the customer and earning trust. And as marketing spend is on the rise, and CMOs are gaining influence, while in the same time data and automation technology are driving seismic shifts in the industry, marketers must identify and face the current challenges, so as to achieve measurable and actionable results, and to refresh and realign company's marketing objectives on the basis of an outside perspective that also helps those outside the accountable marketing department understand the whole picture. In the same time they must find out the right balance between inbound and outbound marketing, and to create connected experiences between their companies and the audiences they need to reach, while synchronizing all the channels to send the right message to the right person every time.

Keywords: marketing techniques; marketing department; marketing predictions; brand tone of voice

JEL Classification: M31; M15; D83

The continuous challenge of understanding the latest

Marketing techniques, technologies, and trends

Seneca argued that it's the excellence of the acting that matters in life, while Aristotle underlined that excellence is not an act but a habit. Climbing the ladder of time, and coming in present times, allow us to remember the words of Tom Peters: "Excellent firms don't believe in excellence - only in constant improvement and constant change." And there is no doubt about the fact that marketing is constantly under continuous pressure involving constant improvement and change.

No wonder therefore that, according to a recent survey conducted for MarketingProfs by eMedia, (Jarsky, 2015) the most popular topics for marketing training are: *content marketing* (45%), *branding* (45%), *social media* (40%). But despite the real need of spending time and money in order to train marketers, the survey results showed that only 63% of surveyed marketers offer professional development on marketing topics. On their continuous way of becoming more engaging and effective they also need, for instance, to improve their marketing by learning how the human mind processes information and images: “Emotions process input five times faster than the conscious brain; the brains process images 60,000 times faster than text.” (Jarsky, 2015) It is also worth remembering that at the end of last year, in December, (Lucas, 2014) Mark Williams, creative director at LiveWorld, spoke on a magic formula for becoming better marketers: Data + Analysis + Insight. Being in the business of social media marketing since 1999, Williams is aiming for a purpose-driven sustainable engagement.

We have seen recently (Negricea and Purcarea, 2014) that in the era of the Chief Executive Customer digital customer engagement became a top strategic priority, marketers are challenged taking advantage globally of digital technology, but they are missing the inbound call channel, despite the fact that they are tracking the digital user experience across the various touch points and marketing channels. How can companies today better engage their customers using more devices than ever before and across more channels? In order *to create an engagement strategy that provides a willing marketing team with a road map for success* (not only aligning with company’s business objectives), Reggie Wideman, (Wideman, 2015) senior director of strategy at Janrain, highlighted *five actions that brands and companies can take* in this respect: (1) *Write a customer-engagement manifesto*; (2) *Define company’s key use cases and determine a starting point* (by making a list and prioritizing it, finding ways to get company’s customers to create content and provide feedback and so on); (3) *Define the path to value over 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months* (an important step not only for internal evangelism but also for getting customer buy-in); (4) *Map company’s* (sustainable, scalable, cost-effective) *engagement ecosystem* (technology and marketing leadership must work together); (5) *Engage the internal organization* (for prioritizing customer engagement, and delivering on the promise of better customer engagement).

Marketers must make time to learn, even to be in a perpetual state of learning, because being busy doesn't equal success, (Radice, 2015) and when it comes to their relevant market they need to be both, in the information business and an education sponge. For example, the below mentioned most comprehensive marketing report of 2015 recommended to educate marketer team and the larger organization on the importance of mobile (70% of the surveyed marketers see mobile marketing as a critical enabler of products and services, while only 64% of marketers see social media marketing as a critical enabler of products and services).

The 2015 State of Marketing (a report on senior-level marketers published by LinkedIn and Salesforce Marketing Cloud; a survey conducted online from October 28, 2014, to November 25, 2014, and sent to full-time marketers in Salesforce Marketing Cloud's) offered a professional analysis (on the basis of 5000 responses received by due date) for stronger marketing insight (by asking marketers about their budgets, priorities, channels, metrics, and strategies for 2015). According to this analysis, *new business development, quality of leads, and remaining up to date with current marketing technology and trends* are the biggest challenges of 2015. Marketers, that must keep a tight focus (largely centered on attracting customers and engaging them long-term) on the metrics (shifting attention from traditional metrics like conversion rates and return on investment to metrics that better reflect customer satisfaction), identified the following top 5 digital marketing metrics for success in 2015: Revenue growth - 32%; Customer satisfaction - 30%; Return on investment - 23%; Customer retention rates - 23%; Customer acquisition (i.e., audience and/or list growth) - 23%. There are also other significant 2015 recommendations of the report, such as (within the customer journey approach) to step away from lifecycle marketing and personas, and to evangelize the customer journey in the organization.

Understanding both, marketing predictions and the direct relationship between marketing's value and impact and marketing's alignment to the business

Marketers also must make time to learn seeing things as they will be, by better understanding marketing predictions. They must go beyond "Facebook marketing" and "Twitter marketing", for instance, and use a combination approach of multiple social networks and weave together and drive social traffic from one network to another. They must also see video as experiential, by using video and creativity to give customers engaging experiences. (King, 2015)

It's time to develop this channel by keeping with their brand identity, while considering YouTube as more than a platform for sharing video footage. (Hemley, 2015)

In the same time marketers must not forget that there is no doubt about the direct relationship between marketing's value and impact and marketing's alignment to the business. That is why it is important: to focus on impact versus activity; to capture (thanks to the right marketing metrics) marketing's impact and contribution (in significant areas, such as customer acquisition and retention, customer/brand equity, competitive position, operational efficiencies and financials); to effectively move from data to embraced insights; to transform and maintain marketing as a center of excellence on the basis of the right marketing operations road map (technology, systems, tools; workforce; processes/process improvement; performance measures; capital allocation/requirements; supplier management). (Patterson, 2015)

Viewing marketing and sales as a company's investment

According to McKinsey representatives (following a recent benchmarking study involving 15,000 employees at more than 140 leading B2B and B2B2C global businesses), companies must tap the potential of marketing and sales to deliver better results, because better marketing and sales capabilities allow companies to grow faster (Delmulle, Grehan and Sagar, 2015). McKinsey's analysis was based on McKinsey's Commercial Capability Assessment Tool (CCAT), which benchmarks institutional marketing and sales function versus best practice, allowing the company to pinpoint where it stands across 170 practices. There are *two CCAT – B2B2BC categories*: a) *Commercial capabilities*: Consumer and shopper insights; Brand / product portfolio strategy and management; Innovation strategy and execution; Marcom and brand activation (incl. digital); Pricing, promotions and trade terms; Channel strategy and management; Sales and account management; Sales support / service; b) *Enablers*: Organization design and effectiveness; Talent management; Performance management; Tools and information systems). It is considered that *CCAT is valuable in a number of different circumstances, such as*: Starting the dialogue about the current state of company's marketing & sales capabilities; Stimulating new thinking by exploring best practice; Measuring company's capabilities in a fact-based way; Spotting opportunities to share practices across company's business units; Deciding where to make company's capability investments; Identifying the underlying drivers of company's performance problems.

The McKinsey's analysis revealed that: *“revenue growth at companies with more advanced marketing and sales capabilities tended to be 30 percent greater than the average company within their sector.”* McKinsey representatives attracted the attention on the mistake made by many companies which choose to focus on tactical efforts that provide quick and visible results (instead of taking a systematic and deliberate approach to investing in their institutional marketing and sales capabilities), arguing that marketing and sales ROI is just too difficult to assess (especially when compared with revenue-generating line businesses). McKinsey's analysis identified *seven hallmarks of leading companies*: (1) *Viewing marketing and sales as an investment, not an expense* (it is recommendable to focus on building capabilities that are directly linked to specific growth and margin opportunities by instilling ROI discipline); (2) *Knowing what needs to be fixed* (by undertaking a diagnostic that reveals capability strengths and weaknesses, and rolling out a shorter version of the diagnostic on an annual basis to gauge ongoing performance and to spot emerging trends); (3) *Targeting the capabilities that matter the most* (responsible thinking through which capabilities are likely to have the most impact or are most important to beat the company's competition, and focusing on improving these capabilities); (4) *Not trying to do too much* (by focusing the attention on building capabilities, and avoiding failing or losing the right momentum); (5) *Tailoring the approach to the company's stage of development* (by not only choosing the right capabilities, but choosing to develop them in the right sequence according to where the company is on the business-performance curve); (6) *Thinking institutional capabilities, not just individual skills* (by creating a common and accepted frame of reference for company's necessities and priorities); (7) *Having an operating model to keep it all running* (by adequately using the *elements* of a specific and measurable operating model, such as: clear annual performance-improvement goals; scheduled and formal reviews throughout the year by segment, key account, and other categories; individual and business-unit performance reviews; incentives aligned with institutional goals; and leadership role modeling to shape the culture). In the same time, McKinsey representatives highlighted the importance of the right rating of the company's culture, and that in order to get the process (of transforming marketing and sales capabilities to drive growth) moving in a fruitful direction, *CEOs and senior executives should start from three key questions*: (1) *How good are company's marketing and sales capabilities today compared with best practice?* (2) *How much value is at stake in*

radically improving company's marketing and sales performance? (3) What's the ROI on company's current capability investments?

**Trying to build a solid contemporary marketing department
and to differentiate it by a correct brand tone of voice**

MarketingProfs attracted recently (Solomon, 2015) our attention with a practical approach of the components of company's annual planning by dividing planning into "buckets" (market growth, market retention, and brand), ensuring that everyone is aligned on the importance of brand, and that the company has the right resources and tools for a strong marketing function. According to Susan Solomon, there are four foundational elements for company's marketing effort that should be budgeted for in the coming year: (1) *Marketing Fundamentals*: Marketing Automation and CRM (for growth and retention); All the Basics (for a marketing department: Google Analytics, Google Adwords, the Adobe suite, SurveyMonkey, GoogleAlerts or Hootsuite, and simple film editing software); (2) *Branding Fundamentals* (a solid narrative and brand guidelines); (3) *Communications Fundamentals* (an editorial calendar system being critical for planning company's content strategy, assigning stories, managing version control, and providing a "parking lot" for great ideas etc.); (4) *People: The Fundamental Fundamentals* (making sense to inventory marketing department team's skillsets: setting vision and strategy, creative development, project management, writing and editing, data reporting and analysis, technical expertise in digital marketing – or starting budgeting some training or recruitment dollars, taking into account the specific needs of company's industry).

As in order to express company's brand identity, *brand tone of voice* (which encompasses the types of words used, the way sentences are constructed, and the way language flows) is vital, Anne Marie Kelly, (Kelly, 2015) a strategic marketing and business development executive and the founder of Kelly Marketing Solutions (Kelly held senior positions at GfK, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal) recommends *five steps* (each of them requiring a well-thought-out plan) *to creating a distinctive tone of voice*: (1) *Know your brand's DNA* (by identifying company's values, and reflecting those values in the way the company writes); (2) *Establish company's tone of voice "characteristics"* (by determining two or three tone of voice characteristics that reflect the above mentioned values and the personality company wants to

convey); (3) *Conduct a content audit* (by identifying that tone of voice keeping with the characteristics chosen to support company's brand's values, a tone consistent across platforms, target audiences, and countries)' (4) *Create a style guide* (by making sure it's used in all written communication, consistently, across platforms and countries); (5) *Communicate, communicate, communicate* (by making sure that the style guide it is read and understood by all marketers). People must know why should do business with the company.

It is worth mentioning within this context that in February this year, Gillian Vallee, (Vallee, 2015) a multichannel marketing professional, argued that to resonate as genuine, a brand must demonstrate accessibility, inclusiveness, and familiarity. Starting from the Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Report showing that trust and action often go hand in hand, Vallee underlined the need of cutting through the noise existing in today's wonderfully rich content world, and recommends to be authentic in company's marketing approach, considering the followings: (1) *Honesty is still the best policy*; (2) *Think in terms of heart*; (3) *Highlight the unique*. In her opinion, there is always a level of honesty that translates to the customer, and earning trust secures relationships (not only validates company's fiscal and otherwise efforts).

Overcoming challenges facing marketers today

and the role of inbound marketing efforts

Amid ongoing debate on the role of marketing, its goals, and how to achieve them, the CEO and founder of Fliptop, Doug Camplejohn (a leader in Predictive Analytics applications for B2B companies), argued in January 2015 (Camplejohn, 2015) that marketing spend is on the rise, and CMOs are gaining influence, while in the same time data and automation technology are driving seismic shifts in the industry (which have created uncertainty). In Camplejohn's opinion, there are *five common challenges facing marketers today* (and suggestions for overcoming them): (1) *Nobody understands what marketing does* (being responsible for branding, messaging, demand generation, collateral, competitive positioning, revenue etc.); (2) *Not controlling many aspects of the business we are expected to influence* (hence the need for striving to understand as many facets of the business as possible); (3) *Not knowing whether we are measuring the right things* (measurement being critical to understanding, and the most

important metrics are often the hardest to measure, so it is recommendable to start with revenue and work backwards, while avoiding vanity metrics, and only focusing on the factors that drive the business forward, in today's data-driven world being necessary to quantifiably connect marketers' efforts to hard metrics, such as revenue and growth); (4) *Not knowing what expectations to set* (marketers' ability to stay at the top depends on making the right promises at the right time, and within the right context; when setting expectations for marketing deliverables with others don't forget the formula "happiness equals reality minus expectations"); (5) *Not knowing whether the data is leading us to the right place* (the best marketers fuse intuition and analytics to make bold moves, measure, and iterate, by relying on predictive technologies that do the analysis for them and suggest where to make their best marketing bets).

In what concerns data, it is worth noting that next month, in February 2015, Brian Davies, a managing partner at Movéo (a Chicago-based B2B marketing firm), showed that if 2014 was a year of tremendous innovation for marketing, then this year will be no different. (Davies, 2015) He argued that: "*data must drive all marketing decisions, strategies must be tailored to translate across a multitude of mobile devices, and CEOs are demanding to see measurable and actionable results.*" Let's take a look at some *recommendations* made by Davies within this framework: prioritize data; integrate your strategies; embrace both amateur and professional content; track, report, and actually deliver on your goals and objectives; communicate with the rest of your company. In his opinion, it is important to refresh and realign your marketing objectives on the basis of an outside perspective that also helps those outside the accountable marketing department understand the whole picture.

We have discussed a year ago about the difference between *inbound* (targeting consumers who are actually looking for goods and services that you provide, by providing useful and quality content in multiple iterations that meets customers where they are, and market this content across multiple channels to build a relationship based on shared interests and values and convert prospects to leads) and *outbound* ("interruptive marketing" - advertising goods and services by presenting information to consumers even if they are not looking for them) *marketing* and explore options of what each of them can do for company's business.

According to a recent report (based on data from a survey of 270 B2B businesspeople from around the world) from NetProspex and Ascend2, (Nanji, 2015) we find out that only 27%

of B2B leaders say their inbound marketing efforts are very successful in helping to achieve important objectives, while 66% view their efforts as somewhat successful (just 7% say inbound marketing has not helped their business at all). The report referred to: *tactics* (the most effective inbound tactic and the most difficult to execute is content creation); *objectives* (improving lead quality and increasing sales revenue are ranked as the most important inbound marketing objectives for the year ahead); *challenges* (46% of respondents say lack of an effective strategy is a top obstacle to inbound marketing success). Regarding *marketing automation*, it is interesting to note that 55% of respondents make limited use of it to manage their inbound efforts.

And as a renewed conclusion: *Now is the time for Marketing Innovation*

As we noted on the occasion of the last HMM issue (December 2014), at the beginning of November 2014, a new feature, of the widely read blog Ernan's Insights on Marketing Best Practices was launched, called "4 Questions for Marketing Innovators." On March 19, 2015, Ernan's Blog (Roman, 2015) presented the answers of Alisa Norris, CMO of RR Donnelley (a Fortune 300 company), to these 4 questions (What is one marketing topic that is most important to you as an innovator? Why is this so important? How will concentrating on this help improve the customer experience? How will concentrating on this help improve the overall effectiveness of marketing?). According to Norris, *the challenge* today is *to create connected experiences* (which drive brand loyalty, spark conversations, and inspire consumers to act) *between companies and the audiences they need to reach*. And in order to create these connected experiences for consumers *all of the channels* (print, digital, email, text, video, web, and social) *must work together*. Norris recommends a better understanding of the power of print (tactile, shareable, and engaging the senses) as a critical gateway driving the connected experience, not forgetting to mention the importance of the right synchronizing of all the channels, so as to avoid creating disconnected experiences and losing potential sales. In her opinion, as consumers have finite attention bandwidth, in order to improve the effectiveness of marketing brands must synchronize all the channels to send the right message to the right person every time.

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