

Marketers, challenged to prove their new skills within the context of the actual trends

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Abstract

Marketers are today more focused on driving business growth, pursuing with diligence the essence of being customer-focused, connecting with the customer with commitment and research in focusing on its values and priorities, remaining relevant to existing customers and also introducing marketers' company to new customers by developing values-based personas. They must prove their new skills within the context of the actual well-known trends, understanding better the need of interacting with customers on a one-to-one basis on social media, and the direct link between customer experience and profitability. As customers want something authentic, B2B marketing leaders must invest in the next big thing, which is Advocate Marketing that amplifies word of mouth recommendations. And as the volume of available data will continue to grow, marketers also need to integrate technology, people, and practices to help take advantage of the wealth of data available today. They are really challenged to create unbreakable bonds between their brands and customers, while keeping in mind the impact of the customers' last, best interaction with a brand.

Keywords: Business growth; Mobile marketing; Social interaction; Advocate Marketing

JEL Classification: M31; M37; D83

Marketers are increasingly challenged

In the last two years we noted in our "Holistic Marketing Management" Journal that:

- the face of the marketing function is struggling to keep pace with major changes, by assuming its strategic and systemic leading role, marketing being challenged to be more and more creative and accountable, more personalized with respect to real-time offering, content delivered across channels, and to engage CEOs and the top leadership to valorize the ability of the marketing function to help drive organizational change, focusing on what is important to customers, consumers and users, within the rise of social media, big-data analytics, and smart mobile devices, differentiating social media marketing from social business; marketers need to know what exactly they should measure and if their analytics are actionable, balancing their inbound and outbound marketing, mastering the latest technology, assimilating vast quantities of data, engaging and delighting their more connected and empowered than ever before customers, and delivering products and services that surpass their expectations, combining technology and teamwork and using technology and teamwork to listen accordingly, creating a vision for an exceptional customer experience and connecting everyone in the organization to the delivery of

that seamless experience, stimulating a more collaborative working relationship between CMOs and CIOs; marketers also need a good understanding of the fact that the content is the fuel for company lead generation and nurturing programs (driving leads through the marketing funnel to become customers), and of not relying too heavily on analytics, but on the so-called “both-brain” approach (by making the right balance between creativity and analytics), and also to constantly reevaluate the marketing strategies (by acting with speed and agility in addressing key customer needs and expectations); (Purcarea, 2014)

- marketers are increasingly challenged: to make sure they have the correct data on customers they are trying to reach, to make every interaction count by matching content and device with the customer and their context, to ensure the orchestration of the six A’s of marketing performance management; to understand the role of marketing technologists and to increase their ability to link different technologies (being aware that marketing moves at the speed of technology), to ensure a successfully intersection with their audience across channels and devices (building a lab marketing culture enabling an understanding of the real value and impact of customer information), the availability of key customer insights in all parts of the enterprise, and also that customers are getting the deserved personalized attention (by merging data acquired across multiple channels into a single customer profile and producing better targeted personalizing messages); (Purcarea, 2014)

- on their continuous way of becoming more engaging and effective, marketers also need: professional development on marketing topics, 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; to 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, 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; to create connected experiences between their companies and the audiences they need to reach, while synchronizing all the channels so as to send the right message to the right person every time; (Purcarea, 2015)

- marketers also need: to go beyond the retention marketing and customer development efforts, to rediscover the invisible consumer (while loving both the invisible and visible consumers), to create a remarkable brand in the habits and minds of very ordinary people; to consider digital marketing as part of the bigger whole that is marketing, and to embark on a journey “with” customers (by sharing purpose which is what powers brand value), continually updating a comprehensive view of their customers, helping their customers to quickly get guidance and make decisions on critical matters, ensuring a higher quality faster interaction and searching for ways to meet their customers’ changing needs and evolving life stage requirements, developing multiple points for their customers’ feedback and using marketing to educate not just promote; to

harness the power of new technologies, attracting the next generation of talent to build engaging brands and content, personalization of digital experience being at the heart of the efforts to overcome around how they create intimacy and relationship in the digital world of customers overwhelmed by a lack of time and too much choice; (Purcarea, 2015)

- in the era of the “Nonstop Customer”, marketers need: to rethink the businesses by acting at the same pace as consumers act now and put a greater emphasis on personalization and relevance; to know the secret behind successful B2B marketing, better understanding the real value of “Account-based marketing”, reinventing the marketing department of a B2B organization by achieving a tangible transformation and delivering the types of insights that the market wants, better understanding the relevance and role of CMOs in the C-Suite under the pressure of data and measurement, preparing for the next era in marketing while understanding that the game changer for marketing transformation is the reciprocity of value equation. (Purcarea, 2015)

Marketers, more focused on driving business growth

According to the most recent ANA Marketer's Edge study (the “Marketing Disruption II” research whose results were debuted at the 2015 Masters of Marketing conference on October 16, 2015 in Orlando, Florida, USA), done in conjunction with McKinsey and GfK, (Disruption ANA, 2015) there are *5 red flags* that marketers need to address to deliver on this promise and become a true engine for growth: *lack of focus* (the starting point for setting a clear agenda of investment being a clear focus on where the value is and how to address customer needs); *on the hunt for capabilities* (by actively investing in new technologies and hiring new talent, and also by investing in new partners); *customer experience* (by having clarity about what matters to customers, or the ability to articulate that as a strategy); *data-driven* (by using insights into customer behaviors and feeding them back into the organization to improve performance); *slow pace* (hence the need to have flexible organizational models and agile ways of working so that things get done fast).

Marketers must strive to be winners by choice, not by chance, pursuing with diligence the essence of being customer-focused (by asking their customers what they can do to make their lives easier, adding value to what they supply), thoroughly understanding, for example, the “mobile moments” (anytime that customer pulls out a mobile device). Because the concept of immediacy rules mobile marketing, and (according to Forrester) marketers must understand their customers’ journey and identify their needs, then design the mobile application so as to quickly provide just what’s needed in the “mobile moments”. (Roman, 2015) Within this context of mobile being a prime access point to sales, Ernan Roman made some recommendations, such as: to consider mobile and its nuances a lifestyle connection; to develop a new mind-set of delivering a satisfying experience with an aspect of immediacy; to incorporate mobile marketing into every aspect of touch points and interaction; to understand that the success on this ever-growing platform will be determined ultimately by innovation and, most of all, relevancy.

Marketers, more focused on social interaction

It is well-known that marketers use a marketing strategy such as inbound marketing (social media marketing - a tactic that uses social media to promote the brand, content marketing - creating and publishing content, blogging, calls to actions etc.) to attract and bring people to their websites, by targeting consumers who are looking for goods and services that marketers provide, while providing useful and quality content (using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn etc., offering incentives, having direct communication with the consumer by using the social media presence) to entice these consumers into finding out more. On the other hand, companies with larger resources are trying to reach a wider audience using outbound marketing (“interruptive marketing”, a marketing strategy in which a business advertises its goods and services by presenting information to consumers even if they are not looking for those goods or services), by using television, print ads, direct mailers, radio etc. (Goodwin, 2013)

At the beginning of December this year, an authority on making social media sell (co-founder of the Google Affiliate Network in 1999; adjunct digital marketing faculty at Loyola University’s business school; a social sales trainer and author of the first social selling book) challenged any sales person to reach, teach, educate and engage a prospect without, first, interrupting them (considering the difference between: *Sales Rep* - email, call, email, call, email, call; *Buyer* - delete, ignore, delete, ignore, delete, ignore; *Social Selling* - reach and teach/educate and engage). Social selling is marketing, not selling at all, shows this authority. If B-to-B organizations, for example, are to survive and thrive, inbound marketing is needed but is not enough, these organizations needing people who actively prospect for new business. (Molander, 2015)

A director of marketing for a global Fortune 500 company argued recently (Fan, 2015) that cutting through the noise in an advertising and content-cluttered digital landscape involves connecting with the customer with commitment and research in focusing on its values and priorities, building an accurate picture, and then acting on that information. This is the proper way for marketers to build a lasting relationship with their customers, remaining relevant to existing customers and also introducing marketers’ company to new customers by developing values-based personas.

According to the opinion of the above mentioned director of marketing there are seven actions considered fundamental building-blocks to a customer-centric strategy: getting inside the heads and hearts of the customer; aligning offers with consumer values; mixing it up, thinking omnichannel; video is powerful; matching the message to the medium; checking in, early and often (earning valuable insight and new opportunities); timing is everything (relevant content, timely, and easy to introduce into trending social themes, social interaction being as much timing as it is good content).

Also recently, the CMO of Vidyard, a video marketing platform that helps transform viewers into customers, underlined that next year, in 2016, the toughest decision of all may be deciding which videos (great for engaging audiences and getting their attention in a crowded market, enriching the customer journey at all stages, being more effective than other content at converting buyers, visual content offering the perfect mix of snackable and actionable) to produce and how to get the most from them. (Lessard, 2015) Within the context of actual well-known trends (marketing clouds, account-based marketing, predictive analytics etc.), video marketing will allow marketers to prove their new skills (by expanding to new applications, creating better content experiences and telling their stories with more impact etc.), in 2016 being expected: that video will play a larger role throughout the customer journey; that more companies will do it themselves having more ways to use video; that marketers will continually optimize content programs thanks to video which provides the opportunity to measure success much better than text-based content, video (video length, imagery, voice-over, graphics, music, personalization); the rise of interactive (overlaid data collection forms, mid-roll surveys and questionnaires, choose-your-own-adventure style videos) and personalized (“1-to-1 personalized video” and “content individualization”) video content.

Another opinion expressed recently, on December 11, 2015, highlighted that interacting with customers on a one-to-one basis on social media makes them more loyal, these customers spending more with you, staying with you longer and telling their friends about you. (Stelzner, 2015) That is why it is recommendable for marketers to take an extra moment to think about something from the customer’s point of view, including better understanding: the direct link between customer experience and profitability; that complaints tell you a lot about what’s going on with your business; that by resolving customers’ problems you can often turn these unsatisfied customers (watching and saying a lot when you don’t respond to the complaints) from being unhappy to happy; that it’s important not to sound robotic when you respond and vary your posts.

B2B marketing leaders must invest in the next big thing: Advocate Marketing.

What Makes a Marketer Great?

On December 9, 2015, (Williams, 2015) an email message from the VP Marketing of Influitive (which has a vision for the future of B2B marketing, its number 1 priority being the advocate experience, thinking that advocacy should be self-service, and integrating advocate marketing with the rest of a marketing organization, by providing a complete advocate marketing solution) highlighted that advocate marketing is the next big thing and B2B marketing leaders must invest in advocacy now, because all analysts (from Forrester, Gartner, SiriusDecisions, and Altimeter Group) agree with it.

Within this framework the common question to ask is: *Why advocate marketing?* A good answer to this question is that: if Marketing is about creating customers, Advocate Marketing

(AM) is about creating customers that create more customers, the AM helping you amplify word of mouth (a low cost channel) recommendations to drive more business (maximizing the value customers bring to an organization, by recruiting and motivating customers to provide references, business referrals and feedback), because customers want something authentic. And that is why is important to: encourage enthusiastic customers to make more recommendations and generate customer content having a serious impact on sales and revenue; create dialog between customers themselves by building a brand community which gives you a vital resource you can tap for intelligence and assistance; activate your employees as a social media army; manage any type of community (customers, employees, partners) with complete freedom to create challenges and rewards; connect your Advocate Marketing Program with CRM and other marketing tech to share data across one easy-to-use API; track activity to drive continual improvement of your Advocacy Program and demonstrate ROI. (Customer Advocacy)

But another common question to ask today is: *What Makes a Marketer Great?* This question was asked at the beginning of October this year by the Editor of Target Marketing, (McGee, 2015) starting from the fact that today marketing is essential to the business strategy, and that social media may have made word-of-mouth more important than ever but it is a marketing-driven kind of word-of-mouth. And the above mentioned Editor ended with another challenging question: *Is it the technology, the results, the circumstances or how you react to them?*

Within such an environment let us remember that the CEO and founder of Fliptop (a leader in predictive analytics applications for B2B companies) argued that there is a need for integrating technology, people, and practices to help take advantage of the wealth of data available today, and taking advantage of all that data-driven Marketing has to offer, taking into account that the ones that will ultimately thrive will be those that prepare themselves now for the forthcoming shift in accountability. (Camplejohn, 2015) He underlined the importance for the data-driven marketers of having the proper foundation to collect, merge, analyze, and act on that data as the volume of available data will continue to grow.

And as a conclusion: *marketers are challenged to create unbreakable bonds between their brands and customers, while keeping in mind that customers' last, best interaction with a brand becomes their minimal expectation for every future interaction with any brand*

Quite some time ago we recalled that innovation is the successful exploitation of new ideas. At the beginning of December 2015, a new feature, of the widely read blog Ernan's Insights on Marketing Best Practices was launched, called: *"4 Questions for Marketing Innovators."* (Roman, 2015) These 4 Questions for Marketing Innovators were: *What is one marketing topic that is most important to you as an innovator? Why is this so important? How will the customer experience be improved by this? How will this improve the effectiveness of marketing?* The person interviewed this time was Justin Norwood, chief strategist for the IBM Watson Trend app, an executive in IBM's Commerce business. (Roman, 2015)

IBM Watson, the leading example in cognitive computing, engages with people in a way that helps them quickly discover new things that wouldn't be possible otherwise. The above mentioned chief strategist showed that customers (shoppers) don't want to be known as a segment or cohort, but as an individual (by the companies they buy from). He gave the example of *the new iOS app, IBM Watson Trend* (which can be downloaded for free) used by the shoppers to understand why people are buying certain products or brands this holiday season. On the other hand, this downloaded for free app can also tell what products will be hot next (before they sell out), *by distilling sentiment of tens of millions of online conversations* (found in 10000 sources across social media sites, blogs, forums, comments, ratings and reviews). The challenge for marketers (facing dismally low conversion rates in today's world of mass marketing and segmentation) is *to create unbreakable bonds between their brands and customers, better knowing their customers and exceeding customers' expectations.*

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