

digital growth

The background of the cover features a glowing digital globe with a network of white nodes and lines. Two hands are visible at the bottom, holding the globe. The overall color scheme is dark blue and purple with bright highlights from the digital elements.

March 2022 | Issue 13

Digital Growth Round Up

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Creativity in Business

Understanding Consumer
Psychology

The Emergence of Visual
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An Updated Look at
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Letter From the Editor

Hi All,

As we close up Q1 and head into Q2, many businesses have been contemplating digital growth and how they can elevate their marketing, sales, and customer service efforts.

Over the last few months, a lot has changed in the digital space. With third-party cookies quickly being discontinued and the introduction of the metaverse, many businesses have started scrambling to select the right digital marketing tactics for their business. In the age of the Metaverse, transformative technology, and departmental alignment, it's difficult to keep up-to-date with the latest digital trends and tools. But we are here to help provide some perspective.

In this quarter's magazine, we will be taking a look at how you can use marketing technology to grow your business, what digital tactics you should place your efforts on and how you can gain greater insight into your customers through first-party data.

We hope that this issue helps you gain perspective into where you can place your digital marketing and sales efforts to drive continued business growth and workplace positivity.

Thanks,

Amit Vyas
CEO, NEXA

www.digitalnexus.com



About the Editor

Amit Vyas is the Co-Founder and CEO of Nexa, a digital marketing agency that was launched in Dubai in 2005. With close to a decade of experience within Digital Marketing, Amit has seen firsthand, the dynamic environment with which businesses now have to operate in order to achieve growth and to succeed.

Amit has worked with hundreds of businesses in the Middle East from startups to large multinational clients during his time at Nexa and previously, in the UK. He can be found at international conferences and has spoken at marketing events in the USA (SXSW and Content Marketing Conference), Australia (ANZMAC), India (Content Marketing Summit at the World Marketing Congress) as well as countless others in Europe and the UAE.



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Do you have an article that you'd like to share or want to collaborate with our writers?

Send an email to Amit@digitalnexus.com with your ideas.

About Nexa

As one of the largest fully independent Digital Marketing Agencies in the UAE, Nexa has provided a vast array of services to over 1,000 clients in the region since 2005. Nexa is HubSpot's only Diamond Partner Agency for the GCC region. www.DigitalNexus.com

MarTech

in the News

Is PPC Marketing Still Relevant?

By: Toni Becker

Digital marketing is always evolving and you have probably questioned whether or not certain go-to tactics are even still relevant. Pay-Per-Click marketing, referred to as PPC, is an example of a tactic many have begun to question. So, is PPC marketing still relevant in today's digital landscape?

PPC marketing is an online advertising tactic that is used to drive traffic to a website or web page. Through this tactic, a marketer will pay a publisher when the ad is clicked by a user. This kind of marketing is usually associated with first-tier search engines such as Google and has been a staple in the digital marketing sphere for years.

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This kind of tactic comes with a variety of benefits that should not be overlooked, even in the age of inbound marketing and personalization. For example, through paid website traffic you are directing users who are interested in your product or service, and actively seeking your services, to your website. This kind of marketing offers long-term value as it builds an authentic and high-quality value for your business.

So, with the above in mind, PPC is still relevant and not going anywhere, any time soon. However, the key is to balance your PPC marketing alongside your inbound marketing efforts such as content marketing.

Let's take a look at how to best implement a PPC campaign in 2022

Before we dive right into the benefits of PPC, let's look a little closer at what PPC is and how it works.

PPC marketing is a model of digital advertising that can be used across a variety of digital platforms. To put it as simply as possible, businesses will create an ad, and pay for each click that the ad receives. This payment can cost anywhere from a few cents to a much higher amount. There are a variety of PPC ads you can invest in with the most common PPC ad option being search ads (ads displayed on the search results for specific keywords). Another popular PPC ad option is the display ad, a graphic or banner design displayed on a 3rd party website as well as a social media paid ad that operates similarly to display ads. The options all have the same functionality - you are paying for each advertisement click - which means you are paying for quality.

Now that we have a greater understanding of what PPC is, let's take a look at the benefits that come with this tactic.

Consistent and Immediate Results

One of the greatest benefits of PPC is that unlike marketing tactics like Search Engine Optimization, PPC can yield overnight results for marketers as soon as their ads go live.

This is why PPC is vital for businesses that are looking to generate income quickly or advertise a short-term promotion. For search ads presented on Google, ads can be set up through the Google platform portal itself and can be set up based on budget and groups and once the ad is launched it will appear on the search engine results immediately which means you will be attracting conversions just as quickly. However, it's not all smooth sailing. You will need to finetune the campaign to suit your goals, keep an eye on its performance and amend in real-time to make sure you are getting the desired results.

Like all digital marketing strategies, you need to focus your efforts on measurements and data to ensure your budget is being used effectively and you are attracting the right prospects to your website.

Increased Revenue

Of course, no one would recommend a digital marketing tactic if it did not assist in the buyer's cycle and increase revenue, but we want to take you through how PPC has the power to do just

that. PPC directly links and contributes to your primary KPIs and can bring through revenue - all of which can be measured. As previously mentioned, this kind of marketing yields quick results and therefore functions as a reliable source of revenue. Based on statistics released by Google, on average a business will generate \$2 in revenue for every \$1 they spend through Google ads (PPC). This means 2:1 return on investment.

It is also important to mention that most PPC options have KPIs directly built into the campaigns, allowing you to base your campaign around very specific goals.

Need we say more?

Controlled Spend

The concept of PPC that grabs the attention of marketers is that it is built around budget control. It offers a great level of monetary control than other paid marketing strategies. As a marketer, you will gain control over how your budget is spent in real-time through a PPC tactic.

Another benefit, something we have highlighted throughout this article, is that you only pay for clicks - not views. This means you are paying for relevant traffic and high-quality prospects. Social media and search PPC allows you to create a campaign structure that is broken into account, campaign, ad group, ads, and keyword or audience. With this hierarchy in place, you have direct control over how you spend your money as you can increase or boost your ad spend based on demographics, location, or queries that drive your goals.

Highly Targeted

The control over your ad budget goes further and is based on other vital metrics such as audience targeting. The audience is vital to sales (of course) and PPC is designed to target specific audiences. As stated previously, PPC will allow you to manage how, where, and when your ads are displayed - and to whom they are displayed.

Once again, this helps you achieve your goals and KPIs, bettering your bottom line and providing you with a great return on investment.

Greater Conversion Rates

According to data from Formstack, PPC ads are listed in the top 3 digital marketing tactics for on-page conversions, and data from Unbound states that 50% of visitors that land on a retailers website through PPC ads are more likely to convert into sales than those that land on the page through an organic link.

PPC places ads right at the top of the search engine results and 40% of online users will click on the top 3 paid ads before any other link.

This is why PPC is so quick and delivers fast results - making PPC powerful for businesses offering short-term promotions, events, and seasonal specials.

These are just a few of the benefits that come with PPC advertising, but if you need more reassurance that PPC is powerful for businesses in 2022, let's take a look at some statistics.

PPC ranks highly out of all forms of digital marketing, with 20% of marketers claiming that it provides the highest ROI. (Statista)

PPC drives 36% of revenue for retail businesses. (Wolfgang Digital)

PPC drives 46% of revenue for eCommerce businesses. (Wolfgang Digital)

75% of users say that search ads make it easier for them to find what they are looking for online. (Blue Corona)

79% of brands say that PPC is a big driving force for their business sales. (PPChero)

The Wrap Up

PPC ads are worth the investment because they are fast and flexible and when implemented correctly and strategically, result in highly targeted traffic being obtained which inevitably better the bottom line.

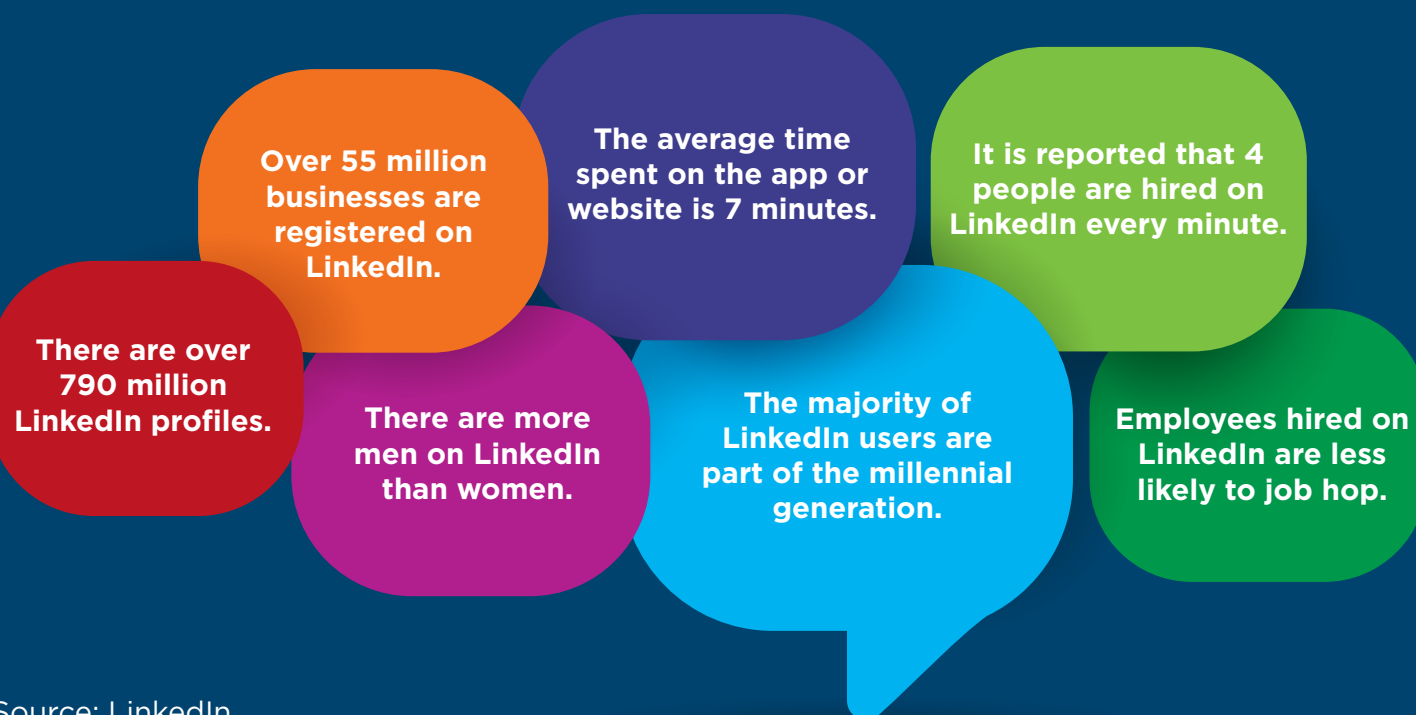


LinkedIn

is a Powerhouse Platform:

HERE'S HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

By: Shannon Correia



Source: LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a great space to grow your network of connections and find business opportunities among professional networks across various industries. You'll often find inspiring stories circulating, as well as celebrations for accomplishments. As time is money, the frequent but short timespan on the platform is directed towards invested time that ultimately leads to career growth.

Apart from industry updates, many people use LinkedIn for recruitment purposes. There are millions of open jobs advertised which people can easily apply for and find out detailed information about the company, the people who work there, and the specifics of the jobs themselves.

LINKEDIN PREMIUM

01

While many people are using the free LinkedIn services, there are also Premium services which 39% of people opt to pay for. This includes options for career-minded people, businesses, salespeople, and recruiters. These services are available for a monthly fee and offer tools to help you grow according to your needs and goals. What makes this particularly great for recruitment is that you can add specific filters based on career levels, experience, and company history.

BUSINESS PROFILES

02

To begin with, be sure your business has its own profile. Under the "My Company" tab, you can organize your internal conversations. LinkedIn is actually great for building employee relations beyond the backend of the platform since you can use it to share your employer brand and build a sense of community among your team. Employees are highly likely to engage with posts from their co-workers, and often share their company's posts and achievements, which helps your reach expand. That means more views, followers and applicants.

LEAD GENERATION

03

Now, let's talk business. LinkedIn is a great place to generate leads. According to HubSpot, this platform is far better for lead generation in comparison to other leading social media networks, making it a great space for B2B marketers and high-quality B2B lead generation.

HELPFUL FEATURES

04

Businesses have access to a range of helpful features, like Showcase pages to present highlights to your audience. The calendar chatbot allows LinkedIn members to meet up and connect with ease, even if they are in different time zones. It is AI-powered, which also includes smart replies for ease of use. Other ways to connect on LinkedIn include InMail messages which are direct and cut out the need to send emails back and forth.

CONTENT SHARING

05

There is so much to be shared on LinkedIn, from articles to links, presentations, and videos. Notably, content shared on the platform is generally accepted as being credible which is great for building trusted relationships. When sharing content, keep in mind that knowledge sharing is popular, and long-form content with multiple images tends to perform best. When posting ads on LinkedIn, remember that you have the benefit of targeting based on location, company, and job title.



Website Design Trends for 2022

By: Toni Becker

We're well into 2022 and many businesses have overlooked their website design but it's time to take a look at trends that are dominating this year - which may inspire you to make a few pages to your digital home. Some of these styles may be familiar while others will leave you in awe of how far the digital space has evolved over the years.

Web design trends affect all areas of a website, from the user experience to site development and everything in between. So, it's important we understand these trends and work to create websites that can house these styles without relying too heavily on them as styles change over time.

Let's dive into some of the website design trends to keep an eye on.

Website Design Trends in 2022

Today, user experience is more important than ever and websites need to be accessible and easy to navigate while driving the reader to action. Let's take a look at what to expect in design this coming year.

Immersive Design to Inspire Purchasing

According to Statista, a world-renowned company that specializes in consumer and market data, people around the globe spend more than 2.5 hours on their smartphones and 1.5 hours on their desktops. This online time is mostly dedicated to entertainment, business, and communication, and the rest of the time is spent searching the internet for information and shopping for a product or service.

It is important to keep the above in mind when creating a website designed to sell a product or service because based on the above, the most effective way to sell something to the digital consumer is to let them engage with it and "feel" it.

So, how is this done?

When it comes to products the process isn't too difficult because there are many digitally effective ways to help the consumer engage with or "feel" the product online. This may be creating 3D renderings of the product and providing dimensions about the product at hand. However, how do you make this an **experience** for the consumer?

Today, designers need to craft a digital environment that makes the consumer feel they are immersed in the brand as opposed to just being an observer. Immersive technologies allow users to accept virtual elements in their environment, becoming more immersed in the experience as a result. This could be something as simple as an interactive image or something more advanced like virtual reality or augmented reality. For example, creating an integrative game on your website is a great way to keep the consumer engaged with your brand. Then when it comes to immersive web-based shopping, you can allow users to drop and drag a product into an image of their home or allow them to try on cosmetics and even clothes with the same principle. When covid-19 first hit, many showrooms took a major hit and the virtual showroom became the go-to website feature to help boost sales, and this type of website is only going to grow in 2022.

Essentially, designers should be focusing on immersive websites that enhance user engagement and blur the lines between a physical and online environment/experience.

Moving Typography to Draw the Eye to Content

Website typography and its color, size, and style are usually used to grab the attention of the reader and in 2022, you can expect to see more motion in text.

Even slight motion of text, in a static setting, is noticeable and designers can strategically place a well-timed motion to text-based content to make parts of a website truly stand out.

However, it is important to note that this strategy should be applied strategically and sparingly, and only used on text that readers should take special note of, and text that drives the reader to take a specific action.

We live in the digital age, and the user wants to experience your website and your brand instead of feeling like a passive visitor and this is why motion in web design is important. It engages the user and allows space for fluidity which results in a seamless user experience - and of course, greater sales.

Interactive Graphics to Engage the Viewer

As a web designer, the objective is to attract, engage and convert visitors into clients through content. Engaging visitors is about holding their attention for as long as possible, and there are multiple ways to go about reaching these objectives.

One way to look at this is to make the elements of the website as engaging and interactive as possible. This includes making an eye-catching button that is enticing the visitor to click on it, instead of creating a flat and boring object that the user won't be interested in clicking on - or won't even be able to see. For example, creating a button that can be animated when a user scrolls over it is a way to engage the visitor and entice them to take a specific action.

Designers need to be as creative as possible in their design elements and a great example of this is the slide show. What a visitor would usually scroll through, you can create into a slideshow experience that makes them feel more engaged in the website.

Side note: As scrolling has become more dynamic and automated, designers will also have to provide clear controls on the page that allows visitors to stop and engage with key content.

The above three trends to look out for all highlight the importance of creating an engaging and interactive space for website visitors. This kind of design establishes an interaction between the user, your content, and your brand and can drive them to take the desired action with ease.



Trends Article: Buying into NFT Trade: Is It a Fad or Worthwhile Investment?

By: Shannon Correia

By now you would have heard about non-fungible tokens. With so much talk around the concept as a whole and the true value it holds, investors may be asking themselves: is this going to be a wise investment move, or is this a fad? Let's take a deep dive to investigate this phenomenon.

When it comes to stock markets, investors are warned against speculative bubbles. Some have been calling cryptocurrency a speculative market. While the concerns are there, cryptocurrencies continue to grow, albeit with highs and lows along the way. Closely linked to this is the trading of NFTs and NFT crypto payments. The question relates to its ability to grow in the long term.



NFT Meaning

NFT means non-fungible token. A digital creation can become an NFT by registering it as one-of-a-kind or extremely rare digital file. It is essentially a certification of authenticity and ownership of the original digital creative, which can be anything from a meme to an animation. They are usually part of the Ethereum blockchain cryptocurrency (the world's second-largest), though there are other systems that can have their own versions of NFTs.

Like the traditional art world, these digital artworks can then be stored and resold. In some instances, the artist can make royalties each time the digital asset is sold. This also offers them the ability to trace their artwork over time, seeing how many times it is sold and who has ownership, since all NFT sales are recorded in a public ledger.

Are NFTs a Fad?

As we mentioned, there is a legitimate concern that the popularity of NFTs will decrease when the speculative bubble pops - if it does. That would mean NFTs are a fad - a too-good-to-be-true attempt at claiming fools' gold. There are many reasons for this which are rooted in the intrinsic value of NFTs. Or, is this the future of art and collectibles?

So, What Is the Value of an NFT?

The main lure of an NFT is the certification that comes along with it that shows its authenticity. It has been compared to the traditional art world, where prints are made and distributed of an original painting. That said, there are key differences, and art is one realm of NFTs, which can refer to any digital assets. Paintings need to be viewed in real life - as in, you'd have to travel to the country it's in. NFTs can be bought and sold at a moment's notice online.

The prints are also far less valuable and not exact replicas. Digital copies are, on the other hand, are, and you don't need to travel to see them. This means this is comparing apples and oranges and tends to decrease the validity of original NFTs holding as much value. The digital copies are also shared at a much higher rate online - think memes and tweets, which anyone can see and engage with directly.

NFTs mark the evolution of the art trade to online spaces. Keanu Reeves famously scoffed off the idea, saying that these items can be easily reproduced, which detracts from the idea of digital scarcity in this sense. After all, that idea of exclusivity and ownership rights are what is driving these investments.

NFTs have several positives and negatives. Going back to the art world, in one sense, is that it is helping digital creatives to find a marketplace online for their content creation. They can then take their work straight to the marketplace, instead of having to display their work in a gallery, museum, or store. On the other, it can be used for laundering since the value of art is essentially infinite. Some are not buying into the trade, while others are spending fortunes on it. As more people begin creating and buying NFTs, time will tell if this is a fad or not.

The reputation of an artist and the quality of their work are factors that influence the value of an NFT. For instance, artist Beeple has become well known for his animations which have been traded using this blockchain technology. He is now a multi-millionaire. That of course isn't the complete case of NFTs - some artworks don't cost a fortune which the layperson can invest in, too.

The associations made are also critical for NFTs, which takes us back to the public ledger recording all the sales. Unknown artists and buyers will not yield as much value associated with a digital file as others that are well known.

Whether ownership matters to you will determine whether you find NFTs valuable or not. The ability to easily replicate and share content decreases the sense of rarity. Plus, much of these NFTs live online (though they could be transferred into physical prints), which also distances itself from traditional art trade, whereby owners proudly hang their artworks up for display - not only artistically, but for status, too.

The general consensus at the moment is that you should invest in NFTs if you are interested in the art world and find a digital creative that you love; If so, then it is worth the investment. However, you need to be fine with the potential of that NFT not being worth anything in the future. This uncertainty means it is difficult to equate to long-term stability and growth in this market. Investors are therefore spreading their risks into a variety of investment opportunities and seeing how this plays out.

NFTs and Their Role in the Metaverse

An NFT is a non-fungible token, which is a digital item associated with a token that uses the same blockchain technology as cryptocurrencies. They can be created online, and then bought and sold via marketplaces.

NFTs are expected to become the favored currencies within the metaverse since it helps with authentication and can be used among the various realms within this virtual universe (since each of these may have their own sets of rules and regulations). It is also valuable as it cannot be deleted, copied, or destroyed since it is secured with a cryptographic key.

NFT-based projects are driving the possibilities of using this technology for the likes of property deeds. It also facilitates identification and community-based experiences. Essentially, NFTs can help with the purchasing of assets in this virtual space, as well as allowing accessibility into controlled spaces. They can also be used as a way of valuing digital assets, as well as authenticating ownership.

To sum it up, NFTs will be used to authenticate assets and identity. It is the solution to a secure and decentralized form of verification, which will be necessary for the metaverse to function as a society.

Tips for NFT Investments

When it comes to investment purposes, it once again comes down to value. Do your best to confirm its value - is it the modern-day equivalent of a Picasso? It is essential that you value the creative, and that you believe others will in the future.

Also remember, you're purchasing something inherently digital. It is not a physical stock - it includes the more intangible aspects like conceptualization and intellectual property. If you do invest in NFTs, be sure that you are taking the proper security measures to protect them. This will keep it safe from hackers and scammers. Ensure it is backed up and stored safely that you are accessing on un-compromised devices, using secure passwords.

Finally, have a look at the current NFT market and be sure to keep an eye on it. To date, NFTs have become some of the most expensive artworks to ever sell at auctions. It is also a market that is opening up and becoming more mainstream.

What it all comes down to is this: the value is determined by the demand, as with a lot of trade. It is worth what someone is willing to pay for it. It appears to be a budding market with opportunities for creators and investors alike.

Aligning Marketing, Sales, and Service Departments

By: Toni Becker

Departmental silos reduce overall organizational collaboration and inhibit growth while fragmenting your customer service experience. Today, it is vital to have all your teams working toward a common goal and in order to achieve this, you need to break down these departmental walls.

This kind of alignment is key to success as it offers transparency and accountability between departments. And in today's digital age, it is vital that organizations create an effortlessly streamlined customer experience, from marketing through to sales and service.

Without proper sales and marketing alignment, leads will quickly fall through the cracks, and the statistics speak for themselves:

- **8%** of companies have strong sales and marketing alignment. (**Forrester**)
- **46%** of marketers with powerful lead management processes have sales teams follow up on more than **75%** of marketing-generated leads. (**Pipeline**)
- **HubSpot** has stated that 76% of content marketers forget about sales enablement and 79% of marketing leads never convert to sales due to the lack of lead nurturing. (**HubSpot**)
- **65%** of sales representatives have stated they struggle to find content to send to prospects. (**Content Marketing Institute**)

The above highlights just how significant the lack of departmental alignment can become and it is vital that you begin to break down your silos in order to improve business, increase sales, and better your bottom line.

Thanks to technology such as Customer Relationship Management platforms, you have the power to use technology and automation to integrate your teams and align your departments in a single location.

In this article, we take a look at the importance of departmental alignment and how CRMs can be used to automate processes and integrate your teams toward a single goal.

What is Departmental Alignment?

Organizational or departmental alignment refers to the idea that all departments, from the CEO to sales to marketing, have a single goal for the company and work collaboratively to reach these goals with accountability and transparency. Departmental alignment is vital for seamless business processes and operations, both when it comes to internal processes and customer service.

This is because if departments aren't aligned they work with different technology and limited data which can significantly affect all areas of customer service. In fact, according to a survey completed by Clear Company, 97% of employees and executives attribute lack of team alignment to negative project outcomes.

Before we dive into what technology you can implement across your organization to encourage greater alignment, let's take a

deeper look at the benefits that come with complete marketing, sales, and service alignment.

The Benefits of Departmental Alignment

A McKinsey Global Survey outlined that 80% of business executives report social collaboration tools have enhanced internal processes. This report was conducted in 2016, and with the rise of greater collaborative tools, the number continues to grow.

Now that we have an understanding of which social and collaborative features add benefit to your business, let's take a look at **how and why** they improve business processes:

Full Customer View: By aligning your departments, your employees are able to share more data on customers and leads, which provides a clear view of every customer journey, from start to finish.

Greater Customer Experience: As roles, accountability, and responsibilities within each department become defined, fewer opportunities will be missed and there will be less overlap.

Quicker Decision Making: With a centralized location for data, leadership within each department is able to make decisions accurately and quickly. A CRM provides a single location for marketing, sales, and service data and provides direction for decision-making while siloed teams struggle with a variety of opinions, making the decision-making process difficult and disconnected.

Better Accountability and Transparency: Aligned teams share a single goal and they understand what their specific role is within the organization and how they can affect the larger company. This understanding makes way for greater engagement, drive, productivity, transparency, and of course, accountability.

Optimized Responsibilities: Aligned departments and teams to ensure that every employee is assigned tasks that best suit their skillset. Each person is aware of their role and what is expected of them. This once again improved productivity and morale across the business.

We live in the digital age, and as people continue to seek community and a greater working environment, it is important that organizations break down silos and allow teams to communicate and grow together. The benefits of departmental and team alignment are undeniable, but how can you implement this kind of alignment across your business?



We have touched on Customer Relationship Management tools, also known as CRMs, and now we take a look at what a CRM is, how it aligns your teams and how you can implement it across your organization.

A collaborative tool or collaborative Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform allows your business to create communication between different departments, from marketing to sales and service.

Techtopia defines collaborative CRMs as "a CRM approach in which the customer interaction data of an organization is integrated and synchronously shared to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty for maximized profitability and revenue."

The CRM philosophy is simple: Putting the customer first by aligning departments to deliver a greater customer experience.


This sits at the heart of a CRM and alignment strategy because:

- **86%** of customers will pay more for a greater customer experience
- **Customer-centric companies** are 60% more profitable than those that don't place focus on customer care
- **1 in 3** customers will move away from a brand after just one negative experience

The Wrap Up

CRM has the power to bring all departments together by storing data and information in a single location while tracking all customer interactions in real-time. This, in turn, betters all areas of the business from sales to marketing and customer support, allowing employees to make informed decisions on lead generation tactics, lead nurturing, cross-selling, and upselling opportunities.

When a CRM is implemented successfully across an organization it gives companies greater insight into opportunities to grow with each customer or lead, by measuring their value and identifying where they are within the buyer's cycle. Essentially, aligning your departments in a single CRM allows you to gain new customers and retain existing ones while giving you insight into individual customer needs and wants - allowing you to improve your marketing, sales, and service tactics and create a more personalized experience for your customers and leads.

A person in a dark suit is pointing at a whiteboard with a pencil. The whiteboard has some handwritten notes and diagrams. In the foreground, a hand is holding a tablet displaying various digital marketing icons, including a group of people, arrows, a network diagram, a pie chart, and a line graph. The text "DIGITAL MARKETING" is prominently displayed on the tablet screen.

Practical Digital Marketing Tips and Tactics

By: Toni Becker

Marketers the world over are scrambling to keep up with the latest marketing technology and trends while meeting budgets at the same time. Marketing budgets have taken a significant dip since the pandemic and according to the **2021 Gartner State of marketing budget report**, marketing budgets have hit their lowest record level, dropping to 6.4% of business revenue in 2021 in stark contrast to the 11% of 2020. The same report by Gartner shows that CMOs have moved their spending across channels, with marketing technology taking up 26.6% of the total marketing budget.

With the above in mind, marketers need to readjust their spend and focus their marketing endeavors on tools and tactics that yield results and a return on investment. So, how can this be done practically and within budget?

In this article we'll take a look at 5 important marketing tools and trends you need to focus on and apply to your budget in the new year, these include:

1. Customer Relationship Management Software
2. Inbound Marketing
3. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning
4. Video Marketing

4 Marketing Tools and Trends to Invest in for 2022

CRM technology is expected to be the single largest revenue area of spending of enterprise software in 2022. The reason CRM's are the go-to marketing technology is that they are designed to maximize profits and help your company thrive. This is why it is vital your business select the ideal CRM to suit your marketing, sales, and service requirements - and you best do this before your competitors do.

So, what exactly is a CRM and how can it benefit your business and marketing efforts?

1. CRM Software

CRM software is designed to help your business attract, engage, delight, and convert leads into customers, using streamlined marketing efforts and data analysis to better processes, increase sales, and nurture relationships.

There are a variety of benefits that come with a CRM, including:

- Trustworthy and personalized reporting capabilities
- Easy to view lead, marketing, sales, and service data
- Improved marketing messaging with automation
- Improved lead generation
- Improved customer nurturing
- Proactive marketing, sales, and service solutions
- Simplified departmental collaboration

With a powerful CRM at the helm of your marketing efforts, your team members are able to gather insights and data, allowing them to work together to provide exceptional service to leads and customers.

Marketing and lead data is expertly presented by a CRM platform and helps your team better understand customers, thus creating greater marketing campaigns than ever before. This leads to better marketing messaging and outreach, all of which can be implemented through CRM automation.

2. Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing has revolutionized the marketing field and is radically shifting the way new business leads are generated, nurtured, and converted into customers.

Ten years ago, cold-calling prospects were the norm and it was done in the hope that they would buy our products or services. Back then, our options were somewhat limited to print media, radio, and television or email marketing from an advertising perspective. But things have changed.

New-age customers loathe being called by salespeople without having prompted the call. They want to be in a position whereby they are in charge of the sales process and at the center of your marketing efforts. Today, a customer will reach out to the business when they have researched their options and are ready to take the next step. Google suggests that customers today are more than 70% through the purchasing and decision process BEFORE they even reach out to a potential supplier. And this is when inbound marketing comes into play.

What separates Inbound Marketing from other forms of marketing is the ability to draw a straight line between your marketing efforts and the revenue generated from this, essentially this methodology measures accurate ROI - and who doesn't want that?

The other aspects that make Inbound Marketing so powerful are:

Attraction: Optimised content is created to draw people to your brand. This stage is all about providing value and simultaneously increasing your brand's visibility online.

Conversion: Engaging with the people who are drawn to your content is the next critical stage. A business can generate leads and guide these potential customers in their purchasing journey.

Nurturing: Strengthening this initial bond with potential customers and customers alike by providing them with more interactions and valuable content. Maintaining consistency and relevancy is part of the inbound philosophy.

Closing deals: This is when the leads take the final step and purchase with your business. It is the final stage of a process that inbound marketing aims to repeat with loyal customers.

Investing time in creating a strong inbound marketing strategy is vital, and this methodology goes hand in hand with a quality CRM system and quality content creation.

3. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

There is a common theme throughout this article and that is the importance of CRMs in marketing. This is because CRMs are ahead of the game and leading the way in marketing innovation. 2022 will see the inclusion of AI in CRM software and according to a report released by HubSpot, 14% of global CIOs have already deployed AI and according to Gartner's 2019 CIO Agenda Survey, it's estimated that AI associated with CRM activities are projected to increase worldwide business revenue by an astounding \$1.1 trillion by the end of 2021.

With these stats in mind, the modern marketing world needs to understand the requirements of the tech-savvy consumer, and these consumers expect instant communication and brand engagement. With this in mind, marketers need to invest in the best AI and machine learning technology to guide the buyer's

journey and one of the most prominent players in this arena is the chatbot. A chatbot is a programmed interface that a website visitor is able to interact within real-time and these "bots" are programmed to behave and converse like humans and interact with the visitor in a conversational tone.

Thanks to ever-advancing technology, today, chatbots have been expertly programmed to be more personalized and answer specific questions - not just generic ones. This means that chatbots are designed to drive the customer journey smoothly and quickly without having leads fall through the cracks.

In 2022, it's time to take full advantage of new-age AI and drive the buyer's journey effortlessly - ultimately increasing your bottom line. Any business with a website should have a chatbot as part of its marketing strategy in 2022.

4. Video Marketing

Think about how many times you have watched a video today, be it on TikTok, Facebook or Instagram. Today, video is a part of our daily lives and the marketing world has taken notice. Thanks to new technology and social media accessibility, video marketing is about engagement, social "shareability" and virality. And if you want to stay ahead in your industry, you need to invest in video marketing before your competitors get ahead of you.

The reason video is so powerful is that it is easy to consume. We live in the digital age and as consumers, our attention span has shrunk considerably. And with this in mind, dynamic and strategic video content allows marketers to grab the attention of the digital audience to a greater degree than long-winded text or static imagery.

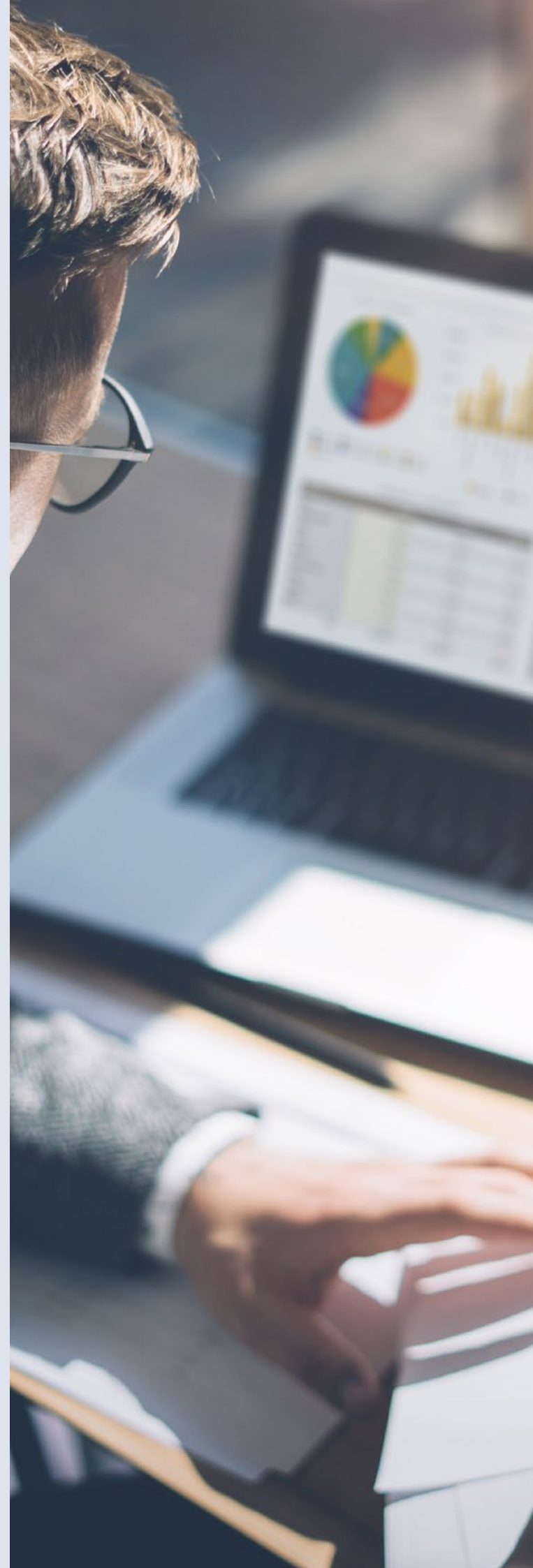
As a business owner or marketer you may be considering the expense of video marketing, as stated above, budget is important in 2022. So, will video fit into your budget? The answer is a resounding yes.

Thanks to new-age technology and social platforms, video is becoming less expensive to produce. In fact, a simple smartphone camera can be used to create a full-length, eye-catching video. And social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram make it easier for anyone to edit a video to their liking. Essentially, there is no excuse to not get on board with video marketing in 2022.

The Wrap Up

The above outlines 4 practical tactics you can use to better your marketing efforts in 2022. All of the above work together to ensure your marketing message reaches the right audience, at the right time, on the right platform.

With a powerful CRM at the helm of all your marketing efforts, and with your focus placed firmly on automation, inbound marketing, AI, and video content - you are sure to have a stellar business year.



Improve SEO with a Localization Strategy

By: Shannon Correia

If you're looking to do business in the Middle East, there are a couple of things you need to know. Okay, a lot of things you need to know. In this article, we'll be sharing insights on how you can begin to formulate your localization and SEO strategies - two complementary and very important factors that will help expand your business in the region.

Localization Strategy for SEO

Localization is all about ensuring your brand fits in with audiences' ideals and cultures. Instead of having broad marketing strategies, it is hyper-targeted to suit a specific segment. The goal is for it to feel like a natural fit, and for that familiarity to resonate with your audiences.

There are two key elements to this which we'll explore below, before expanding on them through Middle Eastern applications.

Market Research

To achieve this, you need to conduct thorough and accurate market research, to pinpoint the specific interests, behaviors, language, habits, and expectations of a particular group of people. For example, in Belgium hugs are not the common way of greeting people, while in Portugal a kiss on each cheek is standard. These kinds of gestures and norms inform society and can help to ensure that your marketing team does not create any misinformed blunders that will put your target market off.

Tailoring the Website

Your website needs to have the applicable language options available. It may be simplest to offer the site in both English and the second language with a toggle, or if it's a global site, ask which country site the person would like the visit. Translations cannot be done poorly as this will cause confusion - be sure to use translators for this.

Now, localizing a website requires more than adjustments to the language. You need to also ensure that the content shared is not duplicated (to avoid SEO penalties) and to actually create SEO content in that language. This will help boost the site's visibility, especially since the competition for smaller markets tends to be much smaller than with English.

SEO is key for marketers the world over, and this is especially true in the Middle East, where the number of internet users is among the world's highest. Be sure to offer Arabic language options and to create an Arabic SEO strategy to ensure you're promoting your website to the highest possible degree.

In addition to this, SEO efforts cannot be a copy-paste effort. It needs to go beyond translation - you need to conduct keyword research in that specific language - in this case, Arabic. The differences in the way people communicate linguistically result in different ways of doing online searches. For example - do people search for "cars," "vehicles," or "auto"?

Once you have your SEO in place, you need to ensure that the traffic you get translates into leads. To do this, you'll need an effective lead generation strategy. All of the content on your site should inspire people to take the next step in their buyer's journey with your brand, so be sure to consider and cater to the consumer experience holistically. When you're in new markets, an in-depth understanding of consumer values, interests, beliefs, and habits is crucial.

Localization is essential for increasing your reach and targeting the right market. It can help your SEO efforts and vice versa. This is especially important when marketing a brand into global markets - making it locally relevant and well-known will go a long way in your sales efforts.





How Consumer Data is Changing the Customer Experience

By: Shannon Correia

Data remains to be a hot topic that needs to be handled with care. Marketers of today have access to a wide range of data relating to their audiences which is changing the customer experience. Read on to find out what makes consumer data important, where and how to get it, the insights to look for, and the role that privacy plays in all of it.

Why is Consumer Data Important?

Data allows you to personalize marketing messages to your audience. With more information, it is possible to improve market segmentation and present potential customers with information that is more aligned with their needs. By doing this, your business can build stronger relationships with your audience, which will ideally develop into brand loyalty.

Another reason for the importance of data is the fact that it allows for accurate predictions to be made. Accurate insights mean you can see exactly what is and isn't working, and improve forecasting going forward. This, of course, is all geared towards improving the overall customer experience.

Consumer Data Insights

With privacy concerns rampant, there have been a number of changes introduced that affect the ways companies collect data from their audiences. You'll be hard-pressed to find a website that doesn't ask your permission to store cookies so the website can better understand your preferences. This is changing, however, with the death of the cookie.

If you haven't heard yet, Chrome will be phasing out third-party cookies this year. This will affect the way marketers use ad-tracking tools. Without this ability to track precise data, they will need to find other ways to generate this information and make use of alternative marketing strategies. Remember, this only refers to third-party cookies - you can still track basic data using first-party cookies. Essentially, the focus of tracking users online will shift from an individual level to looking at larger groups (Google FLoC). This will enable people online to still see relevant ads, without compromising their personal privacy.

With shifts in how society views and values privacy, marketers will be required to build on the information they already have about their audience and find creative ways to reach them. There are other ways to track your consumers without using cookies, too, by utilizing the likes of CRM technology.

Data Consumer vs Data Producer

There is a difference between data consumers and producers, just as there is between a consumer and a buyer. They can be the same person, but this is not always the case. When it comes to toys, for example, marketers utilize storytelling to engage their audience and excite them about the product (the children). Their marketing efforts are adjusted when communicating with parents who are the buyers of the products and have other needs and factors to consider, such as price.

In short, the data consumers are the marketers who use the information, while data producers are the consumers who share their information. All of this information is of no use if it is not managed well. It needs to be collected and stored responsibly for legal reasons to promote the safety of your audience, and then it needs to be analyzed so that insight can be drawn out from that data.

How to Collect Consumer Data

There are various ways that marketers can collect consumer data, namely:

First-party data: Data collected directly from your audience from your website, social media platforms, customer feedback surveys, subscription services, and CRM system. It is highly reliable since it is collected first-hand and reveals information about your audience's actions, behaviors, characteristics, and interests.

Would you like to learn more about first-party data? Read [How to Use First-Party Data to Drive Business Growth](#).

Consumer Data for Sale

Second-party data: First-party data that is collected and sold to a business.

Third-party data: Third-party data is information collected by data providers who work with data at scale from various sources. This includes declared, inferred, and observed data. This data is then aggregated and sold to other businesses. There are data providers for various industries which allow marketers to purchase relevant data sets. The original sources remain anonymous and seek to provide overarching trends and insights at a macro level. Competitors will also have access to this data. This type of data provides you with unbiased information for marketing context and research.

As we mentioned with second-party data above, it is possible to buy consumer goods. However, this is often limited due to privacy laws and governing bodies to protect consumers who may be unaware of where their data will be shared. This can result in unwanted and unwarranted communication that confuses and deters a potential customer.

Consumer Data and Privacy

Privacy goes hand in hand with data. Why? Because consumer data is personal. People are divided on where they stand when it comes to how much privacy they want and how much personal information they want to share. The crux of this argument is that data is used to improve the customer experience, but at what cost does convenience come at? There is a fine line between utilizing insights in a healthy way versus manipulating your audience into making purchases.

Where do you stand on the extent of marketers using consumer data? We'd love to discuss some of the ways you ensure your business harnesses this information in a healthy way.





Understanding Consumer Psychology and the Role this Plays for Marketers

By: Shannon Correia

Let's discuss the intricacies of navigating consumer psychology. By attaining this type of in-depth knowledge about your audiences, your ability to build lasting relations can improve significantly. Along with this, however, come great ethical responsibilities. Read along as we unpack this in greater detail.

According to Britannica, consumer psychology is:

A branch of social psychology is concerned with the market behavior of consumers. Consumer psychologists examine the preferences, customs, and habits of various consumer groups; their research on consumer attitudes is often used to help design advertising campaigns and to formulate new products.

In other words, the inner workings of your audience affect your buyer personas and targeting campaigns. When you understand how someone thinks and feels, you'll be able to go beyond the surface level of target market identifiers and be able to form better connections with them. With so many choices consumers face, being a brand that is favored is a massive feat. And the way to achieve this is to have an in-depth understanding of your customer base.

A Culture of Consumerism

In the creation of consumerist culture, we had the introduction of TV as the main form of media, which helped to centralize the pervading culture. There was also the creation of infinite goods which required the demand to match that. The idea that having things equated to satisfaction was then promoted. Possession was the route to the top of the societal hierarchy - hello, material girls, and the never-ending next best thing.

On the whole, consumer behavior has an influence on society and the way it functions. The way a group of people thinks will affect what they buy, what they care about, and so on. In today's age, people have become critical of the culture of consumerism, and this has created a shift in consciousness. This is why branding is of the utmost importance for brands who would like to find acceptance and support from their target audiences.

Consumer psychology is also related to how and why people buy and use products and services. More and more, we're seeing marketers look to these elements when researching their audiences. It should be noted, however, that there is a fine line involved, as using underhanded tactics forms the basis for manipulation, which is something your brand needs to stay away from doing. So, how can marketers use consumer psychology in an ethical manner?

For one, viewing your consumers at a personalized level with rich and complex lives is important. From a positive point of view, it should evoke empathy and help you better identify their specific needs which you can solve for. By understanding the holistic elements of your customers' lives, you can see beyond the need to appeal to the desires of the moment and attempt to sell things and ideas that don't really benefit them in the long term.

How to Handle Consumer Psychology

This crosses the line into negative territory when marketers use people's fears and habits against them, or try to close deals using psychological tricks that put the business's needs before that of their customers. While these tactics can result in more sales, they often leave the consumer feeling despondent, tricked, and filled with buyer's remorse which negatively impacts their perceptions of a brand and the potential for creating brand loyalty.

Conducting research into the psychological aspects of your audience requires you to look into the hard-hitting questions that are rooted not only in personality but also in terms of

hard-wired human behavior. For example, you could produce the same advert for your audience, yet it could be interpreted and responded to in very different ways among the specific segments. Where people stand in society and how much they care about that also affects how people think, what they want, and how they'll act.

While it's one thing to factor in personality types, this simply tells you what a person is like and how they respond to things. To really get a sense of someone's psychological makeup, you'll need to look at what drives them at a core level, like Carl Jung's studies on the 'shadow self' or the learned childhood messages that become engrained in our thought patterns. For this, have a look at the enneagram types, it is a fascinating examination of what drives people based on their core fear and desires.

The Role of Fear and Desire in Decision-Making

That is the crux of this article - how fear and desire affect psychology. It is known that fear and desire can actually look the same, albeit they are on opposite ends of the spectrum. In fact, we have seen this come to light as one of the main themes in the latest installment of The Matrix. Let me explain...

In *Resurrections*, the driving force of the matrix is fear and desire, in which we're hopeful about a better future, and fearful of a dark past while being stuck in a continual loop of living life on autopilot. By continually yearning and fearing, you're an endless consumer. In another lesson we learn from the movie, we see that feelings are easier to control than facts and that buying into a reality is easier than disposing of dreams.

While Mallow's hierarchy of needs may be outdated and too general to apply to all of society today, it can help to illustrate the levels of needs humans have. While a portion of spending is done for survival, much of it extends beyond that. For example, you may need a car to get to work, but the market is filled with a variety of cars and what you choose to spend on it is influenced by more than just the need for transport. This can include the likes of showcasing your social status, or attempting to fulfill inner desires to feel something - it's called retail therapy for a reason, and the hit of dopamine that comes from making a purchase can be addictive.

One of the ways marketers use fear is by utilizing supply and demand factors. When you only have a limited supply, you ensue a scarcity mindset, and demand increases based on the idea of exclusivity. Whether this marketing is true or not, it will have an influence on your consumers. The same goes for social influence, since people are hard-wired to want to belong, and so they'll take steps that help them achieve that.

The Drive to Consume

At the end of the day, advertising is about showing people something to persuade them to take the desired action. Marketing is lined to conditioning, whereby audiences are taught to create associations with brands over time. It is important that your consumers are not coerced or exploited for capital gains. Businesses perform better in the long run by caring for their customers.

In one sense, attitudes and outlooks can certainly change, so marketers will want to keep their eye on these shifts. But at a deeper level, the factors that drive human behavior and psychology are hard-wired, so once your marketing team has these down, you're set and use these findings to inform your marketing for years to come. It is also important to consider

Many factors will influence someone's perception of a brand and its offering. For instance, the visuals and colors play a role (research color psychology for your next marketing campaign), as well as the key messaging, since words evoke different feelings and associations. Everything matters and means something, so marketers need to be well aware of this. This will not only improve your own campaigns and increase trust, but it will also safeguard your brand from unintentionally causing offense.

In today's times, we have seen an increasingly polarised world. There are many different viewpoints and limited understanding or connection between those with opposing views. This can be difficult for brands to appeal to and they will find that the age-old saying that you can't please everyone still rings true. The policies and values of a business will no doubt affect customer perceptions, as informed by their own set of thoughts, beliefs, and opinions.

So, what are some of the ways marketers can learn about consumer psychology? Gaining knowledge about psychology is the first step as this will give you a theoretical basis to work with. When it comes to applying this information to your customer audience, there are various ways to learn about them, from social listening to surveys and importantly, observations.

Now more than ever, consumers seek safety and reliability. By authentically appealing to these desires, you'll be on

your way to bettering your brand's perception. Consider what you're appealing to, especially when consumers buy things for both obvious and hidden motives. On the one hand, there are rational and conscious needs, and on the other is subconscious feelings that are ruled by emotions and predispositions.

Thinking about brands, they too have personality types. This helps people to categorize and remember them and what they represent. For example, Lindt chocolate is a luxury item that is all about indulgence. Meanwhile, Jeep is all for the rugged track and adventure. In other words, when studying consumer psychology, be sure to take into account your branding as this affects how people view your brand.

The Key Takeaways on Understanding Consumer Psychology

There you have it - a look at consumer psychology as it applies to marketers. The main takeaways from this article are to understand your audience on a deeper level, avoid using tactics that play on the human condition unfairly, and see where your business fits in ethically.



Justifying Your Marketing Budget to Make Business Sense

Making The Business Case For Your Marketing Budget

To watch this discussion unfold online, tune into Nexa's Growth Series Webinar with Amit Vyas and Andrew Thomas.

By: Shannon Correia

With economic challenges and business uncertainty, a familiar story since the start of the pandemic, the battle for marketing budgets is fierce. It's therefore key that CMOs and Marketing executives justify investment and help their fellow company leaders to think beyond the short-term in order to create the patience, trust, and confidence in long-term growth and value that marketing can provide a business. In this article, we'll identify the key actions that can help marketers to not only justify current activity but also increase marketing investment for the future.

Marketing Budgets

Marketing budgets are the first to be slashed when businesses need to reel in their spending. We've seen this happen during the 2008 and 2020 global recessions.

More and more marketers are reportedly experiencing pressure from company leaders and CFOs, who want to see the justification of their spending. When you're talking about big companies with experienced marketing teams, the issue might come down to the lag in digital transformation, and what impact this may have on the business.

The expectations are shifting, and being able to show the effect of this investment, you need to show results. This comes down to negotiating spending power and ultimately your influence in the marketplace. These concerns have also come into play due to years of complacency or funds that could have been spent more efficiently.

Marketing Objectives

Some clients desire marketing and advertising for awareness, but when it comes to the objectives, there is silence. Getting down to the details of what you want to do and how that can make a real difference to the justification of the brand. Having a broad idea can result in a lack of focus and unclear outcomes which results in poor allocation of budgets and misunderstandings between business leaders and marketers.

To deliver results, you need to work backward by setting goals and having a clear direction about what is needed. When you do this and figure out what you need and what needs to be done to achieve it, you can determine an appropriate budget.

Some clients have a set figure to work with. For others, there is room to move budgets. There may be a reluctance to share the exact numbers and a general lack of transparency from an account's point of view. To improve this, marketing teams need to improve their relationships with other departments. An example of overcoming this is having the opportunity to justify a detailed budgeting plan for marketing with the CFO. In short, communication is key!

5 Ways to Justify Your Marketing Budget

The explanation of the budget breakdown matters as oftentimes, the marketing can be vague and back and white. This can be difficult to apply to a dynamic space like marketing. This is why aligning your marketing KPIs with the business's greater goals is crucial.

Reporting

The links to another issue in marketing: reporting. Collecting data and knowing how to read it to determine the performance of your marketing efforts and activities requires insight and skill. Software can help with this greatly in the digital marketing space, helping to hone in on highly specific sets of data and drawing analysis from them.

Customer Journey

The customer journey needs to be taken into account when reporting as well. From the touchpoints to extending the overall customer lifespan with a brand is crucial to understand and show how your marketing budget has real and long-term effects on the ROI of a business. To do this, you need to be tracking the buyer's journey acutely.

Accountability

Getting sign-offs for marketing campaigns requires accountability over time. Preparing for this and keeping records of everything is necessary by marketing teams, but so are the timelines of reporting. You need to make it clear that certain results will take time to show results when it comes to marketing and therefore getting the go-ahead to justify budgets.

Mindset

This links to the necessary mindset of companies when it comes to marketing, where alignment between sales and marketing is needed. For example, diving headfirst into generating leads is not an optimal strategy. Although having that step available earlier on can result in leads, knowing that you need to build the relationship further first can result in higher quality and sales-qualified leads may take longer, but result in better overall results.

Collaboration

Encouraging collaboration between marketing leaders and CFOs needs to become normalized. Deloitte reported that the amount of collaborations occurring between these departments is just 17%, which can result in friction when it comes to budgeting.

Approach

Another deterrent for marketing teams getting their desired budgets is the approach. Many teams are jumping in, going for an all-or-nothing approach. This can be associated with a lot of risks, especially for the CFO. By experimenting at the start with new campaigns or channels, you can show that you're on the right track and minimize the risks. This can also provide you with helpful benchmarks as you expand your marketing.

All in all, all departments in the business need to generate returns. While it can be tricky to justify marketing budgets to the financial leaders of a business, there are ways to improve the communication and understanding between the two. This can make the process of budgeting sign-offs smoother, and ensure that the marketing team is able to perform their duties without limitations.

Tune into a brand new episode of the **The Growth Show** with Amit and Andrew. You can catch us on **YouTube**, **LinkedIn** and the **Digital Nexa website**.

Why First-Party Data Should be a Priority in 2022

By: Toni Becker

With privacy concerns and regulatory laws being enforced across the globe, digital marketers are dealing with the loss of third-party cookies which has led to certain challenges. When the announcement was first made, marketers became anxious about how they were going to track and understand the buyer behaviors of their target markets, but it's not all doom and gloom.

One thing marketers are good at is adjusting their processes and aligning their strategies with new and improved tactics. So today, marketers have no choice but to focus their efforts on a first-party data strategy.

In this article, we will take a look at the key differences between first, second, and third-party data, unpack the benefits of focusing your marketing strategy on first-party data and look at some steps to creating a powerful first-party data marketing strategy.



Let's dive right in...

What is the difference between first, second, and third-party data?

There are three prominent types of data collection: First-party, second-party and third-party. In this article, we will be taking a look at the difference between first- and third-party as these are the prominent players in the digital marketing field.

TYPES OF DATA

DATA

First-Party Data:

Data you have collected yourself through lead get forms, social media, MarTech etc.

Second-Party Data:

Someone else's or another organization data

Third-Party Data:

Information or insight purchased in bulk, often from a data aggregator

First-party data collection is the way you obtain data directly from your sources, this means that you own this data. The data source is incredibly valuable as you get your information firsthand from the buyer and audience. This eliminates any chance of error or misunderstanding. Essentially, this is the most reliable and effective form of information collection.

There are a variety of ways to collect first-party data, the most common being:

- Social media
- Google analytics
- Email
- Website
- Customer surveys and feedback
- Customer Relationship Management systems
- Mobile Applications
- Call centers

The kind of information you can collect from first-party data includes:

- Behavior and interests
- Demographics
- Brand interaction
- Time spent on websites and websites visited
- Purchase history

First-party data is the most vital form of data and research actually proves that is the more superior form of data collection. In fact, according to a survey completed by Winterberry Group, 36% of executives say increasing the quality of first-party data is crucial for brands. Forbes reported that 41% of high-performance marketers are using first-party data as part of their overarching marketing strategy and incorporating MarTech (specifically Customer Relationship Management systems) to support this process.

What is Third-Party Data?

First-party data is collected from your own sources such as website lead generation forms while third-party lead generation is data obtained through online sources. It consists of purchasing information from other businesses and through other online sources such as Facebook.

Examples of third-party data collection include:

- Google
- Amazon
- Facebook
- Oracle Data Cloud

Due to security risks, this kind of data is no more, and as stated previously, this left marketers in a tizzy all over the world as it was the easiest way to collect data. However, the American Marketing Association has explained that third-party data is actually not as effective as we may think.

The report stated that third-party data is not accurate in its data collection and that there are more reliable ways to collect data - such as first-party data collection.

Below, we take a look at the benefits of first-party data collection and how you can use it to better your lead generation and marketing efforts.

The Benefits of Focusing Your Strategy on First-Party Data Collection

First-party data is the most accurate data you can collect, it is owned, created by, and sourced from individual people directly and because of this, it is clean and unaltered information that can personalize and better all your inbound marketing efforts.

By collecting first-party data you are able to fully understand your individual leads and customers, meaning you are able to anticipate their needs. But it doesn't just end there, here are just a few benefits that come with a first-party data collection strategy.

Personalization: By collecting data straight from the source you are able to get to know your individual customers. You are able to research what items they are browsing on your website and understand what subject interests them about your business. This kind of data empowers your marketing team to create personalized messages for your clients and build one-on-one relationships with each of them.

GDPR Compliance: By using first-party data, that is data collected from your customers and leads themselves, you are following the right processes when it comes to information security, and gathering data legitimately should be your number one focus as a marketer.

Meaningful Marketing: By understanding your individual leads and customers you are able to craft personalized marketing messages, reaching your lead at the right time, with the right message. This will build trust with your audience and show them that you care about their particular needs and wants.

Accuracy: First-party data is the most accurate data collection as it is obtained through your customers and prospects, unlike third-party data that is aggregated through a variety of data sets. As this data comes from your audience it is also more relevant to your marketing and sales efforts - saving your marketers valuable time and resources focusing their efforts on substantial and high-quality prospects, leads, and customers.

Cost-effective: First-party is a cost-effective way to source data. Although it may take more time and effort, it is a significant cost cut. Third-party data collection is imprecise and aggregated into segments and doesn't offer thorough insights into individual customers -and as it is aggregated it costs more to source but doesn't provide the rewards.

These are just a few of the benefits that come with a first-party data strategy. So, how do you begin implementing this across your marketing efforts?

Let's take a look.

Steps to creating a powerful first-party data marketing strategy

Define Your Objectives

You may be implementing a first-party data strategy for, well, the first time but one thing that hasn't changed is your objective. Go back to basics and focus on what you want to do for your audience - are you offering an omnichannel experience or are you focused on providing real-time and more personalized marketing - or both? Are you wanting to retarget individuals who have shown interest in your business or do you want to understand certain audience behaviors? All of the above objectives can be improved through first-party data collection - and once you have those goals down you are

able to begin crafting a first-party data collection campaign and strategy focused on your particular goals.

Define Your Customer and Audience Segments

Once you are able to define the customer lifecycle or buyer's journey, you will be able to identify the key stages of visitor engagement. This will provide you with techniques on how to market to them at each stage of the cycle.

In order to fully define your audience and target them successfully, you will need the correct first-party data and you can gain this data through web, CRM, communication channels, and mobile - to name just a few. However, before personalization can begin you need to identify and segment your visitors into marketing groups.

You can segment these personas in demographics, affinities, lead quality, and online behaviors.

Data Collection Sources

It is now time to specify how your data and related channels can be combined to provide the best customer experiences. There are a number of ways to understand your customers through data collection and this is not just limited to data points. It can be about how you are able to combine and enrich the data in order to create even more insights.

This means you will want to collect data from individuals that relate to their last purchase, previous data usage, and lifetime value - this is done by collecting data and building your insights.

Using Your Insights

Your data collection, segmentation, and insight are only as good as your marketing team's ability to use them correctly. Insights collected are valuable when they automate relevant customer experiences and are used in an inbound marketing strategy that guides the buyer to make a purchase. Identify the right marketing platforms and messages to suit each stage in the buyer's lifecycle and use individual insights to craft the right message for the segmented audience and individual lead.

Analytics and Measurement

As with all marketing strategies - measurement is key. This includes reporting tools and platforms that are able to collect relevant data and provide you with qualitative insights and feedback regarding your first-party data collection.

The Wrap Up

First-Party data is important for businesses in 2022 as it provides a great way to acquire high-quality data without breaking the bank. It also ensures you do not go against any new regulations regarding online data and allows your marketing and sales team to understand your audience and their behavior's on a greater level. And by understanding your audience, segmenting them, and creating personalized messages, you are sure to drive more sales and increase your bottom line.

Top sources of first party data to inform your digital marketing:

- Company Website: **56%**
- Mobile App: **42%**
- Purchase History: **38%**
- Email: **30%**
- Web Forms: **28%**
- Phone calls: **27%**
- Organic Search: **22%**
- Online Chats: **21%**



Trends: 3 Quick Fire Q&As to Understand the Metaverse - CTA to learn more with our pillar page?

By: Shannon Correia

What is the metaverse?

The metaverse is a broad term that encompasses a virtual world. It is an immersive space where you are an active participant online, instead of just being a viewer. The metaverse is where people, places, and things have digital clones. In terms of people, you'll have an avatar that can interact with others and move in these spaces online.

When you enter the metaverse, you'll not only be able to interact with others in spaces, you'll also be able to build the new environments that exist there. There are already people purchasing land and other digital assets for this virtual world. This also ties in with cryptocurrency and blockchain technology, both of which are technologies used in the metaverse.

It can be said that the metaverse is a more multi-dimensional experience of digital content. It takes the current ways we use the internet (by sampling visiting websites as an outsider) and takes it that next step forward, which is why it has been dubbed 'the future of the internet.'

What can you expect in the metaverse?

Expect immersive cyberspace with 3D iterations that make the virtual world seem very real. VR and AR technologies will be incorporated into this. The metaverse is also linked to the already growing digital economy. In the simplest of terms, the metaverse is a virtual universe. Accessing it requires a device (usually a computer as some platforms require a certain degree of processing power) and, of course, an internet connection. To buy and sell items in the metaverse, you'll need a cryptocurrency wallet as the digital assets in this virtual world are repented by NFTs.

In the metaverse, social places will exist where avatars interact with each other. Avatars can be people or bots and essentially hang out and do things together, whether it's working or engaging in the next generation of social media. Researchers believe that this will improve online communication since there is a being to address, instead of just a name to text to. It will be the most realistic way of meeting and engaging with others - the next best thing to meeting in person.

What can you expect from the metaverse?

As people use the metaverse, they will be building this world by adding in their user-generated content. This includes digital assets like buildings, as well as personal stories, much like the ones shared on social media today. Avatars will be able to gather together in virtual spaces which will bridge the gap between distances. The metaverse is designed to be a digital clone of the real world and is not a fantasy land, although those spaces will certainly exist if you wish to visit them.

The metaverse is set to be a decentralized space, which poses both risks and opportunities. Since it is still in development, it is expected that big tech and mega-corporations that are actively building these spaces will have significant influence. It is yet to be seen how the concept of democracy, privacy, and freedom will be navigated.



Changing Commerce: Visual and social

How to Master Social Commerce

By: Shannon Correia

In today's world, this, that, and the other is happening online. Just a few years ago we were speaking about the rise of eCommerce, and now online shopping has spilled over onto social media platforms. Social commerce often runs in conjunction with eCommerce and is based on the premise of customers making instant purchases without leaving an app.

Social Media Shopping

Over the years, social media has become a lot more business-friendly across the board. There is space for organic content, advertising, user-generated content, and now, shopping. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and TikTok have shopping features available on their apps.

Rather than producing the same kind of content that leads to mindless scrolling, we've seen businesses stepping up their

game. Long gone are the days of white box stock photography being enough. It's all about the aesthetics and subtle selling that feels like a seamless experience for the user. So, it's all about communicating. Sharing remains the core of social media platforms, and now, online shopping has become even more quick and easy. Rather than clicking on a link to an online store, finding the product, filling out your details, and making the payment, people can click on the item they see on social media and instantly add it to their cart.

eCommerce stands for electronic commerce, so social commerce is really a part of that since it involves online

transactions taking place electronically. These spaces are used primarily for B2C markets, as well as C2C or customer-to-customer sales (think Facebook marketplace). Another extension of this is chat commerce, where people can buy products through direct messaging channels like WhatsApp. With the way that these platforms are set up, it certainly feeds into instant gratification. But this isn't the only lure of shopping via social media platforms. It's also where people spend a lot of their time online, with hours spent on these apps each day by millions of people around the world. In other words, it makes sense since part of the role of a business is to meet their audience where they're at and to make their buyer's journey as satisfactory as possible.

When selling products on social platforms, there are a number of features available to enhance the experience. You can create engaging and shareable content, as well as have direct communication just a tap away. This means social media platforms are not just able to earn you engagement and reach, but actual direct sales too. Conversion is therefore not just a matter of directing traffic, but also leads and deals.

Indeed, the role of social media managers has become far more complicated.

That said, it is still new, with rollouts occurring just a couple of years ago in selected countries. That is why it is best to include this as part of your sales strategy. However, it won't be replacing your eCommerce. Believe it or not, the term social commerce dates back to 2005 by Yahoo, and it referred to a collaborative set of tools involved in the online shopping experience.

As millennials continue to crossover into their 30s, the Gen Z market continues to grow. With this generation being so accustomed to all things online and social, selling via these apps is a great way to reach, interest them, and take it one step further by setting the stage for quick buy's.

Now, let's talk numbers. According to Statista, social commerce worldwide is estimated to have generated about \$475 billion in 2020 (Statista).

With an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.4 percent from 2021 to 2028, revenues in this segment are expected to reach approximately 3.37 trillion dollars in the latter year.

How to Master Social Commerce

Let's take a look at the opportunities presented by social commerce and the various ways it can benefit businesses.

Integrations

To make the experience of setting up your social commerce store, these apps have created integrations that connect to your eCommerce store. This makes it super easy to upload stock and manage inventory.

Platform Selection

When you begin planning your social stores, it is important that you select the right platform. Base this on your existing audience and their preferences. While you can have multiple stores across the platforms, there is no need to overextend your store. Learning the in's and out's is important so that you have a fully-functional store.

Marketing

Once you're set up, be sure that your store and your marketing campaigns are aligned. This will help promote your store and products and improve the customer experience. There are certain products that sell especially well on social media - think fast-moving consumer goods in the fashion and beauty industries for one. How you market the products can add to the consumer's desire to bag something quickly. It's also about ensuring the price is right - that, and creating the right amount of hype for the products.

Targeted Advertising

Speaking about marketing, ads on social media have the benefit of hyper-targeting audiences. By using your analytics wisely, you'll be able to reach your niche audiences and appeal to them in the best way possible. It can also help you to develop personalized campaigns that ultimately perform better.

Direct Communication

As we mentioned, one of the benefits of social media shopping is that you have the ability to send direct communication with ease as well. You can streamline sales queries with chatbots to improve the element of customer service. Being highly responsive is key, especially when it comes to the instantaneity of social shopping.

Engagement

Following on from the above, social media is all about networking, so be sure to engage with your followers. This is not a traditional-style store where hardcore selling is the goal. Instead, you're creating a casual space that is inherently social - remember, you need to develop an online community for your brand.

User-Generated Content

Once you manage to make social sales, it is the marketer's duty to encourage customers to continue their relationship with your brand online. When they share and review your products, they're bringing the social shopping experience full circle which can be highly beneficial for businesses in terms of public perception.

Social Storefront

Finally, think about your social media accounts holistically, since this is how your customers will see and interact with them. Your page is essentially a digital storefront, so be sure that it represents your brand. There are also other avenues for social selling, like 'live shopping,' where products are shoppable during live streams. This is also a great way to promote products in real-time and make announcements. Certain apps like Snapchat also have AI-powered features that allow you to virtually try on or test out the products with lenses.

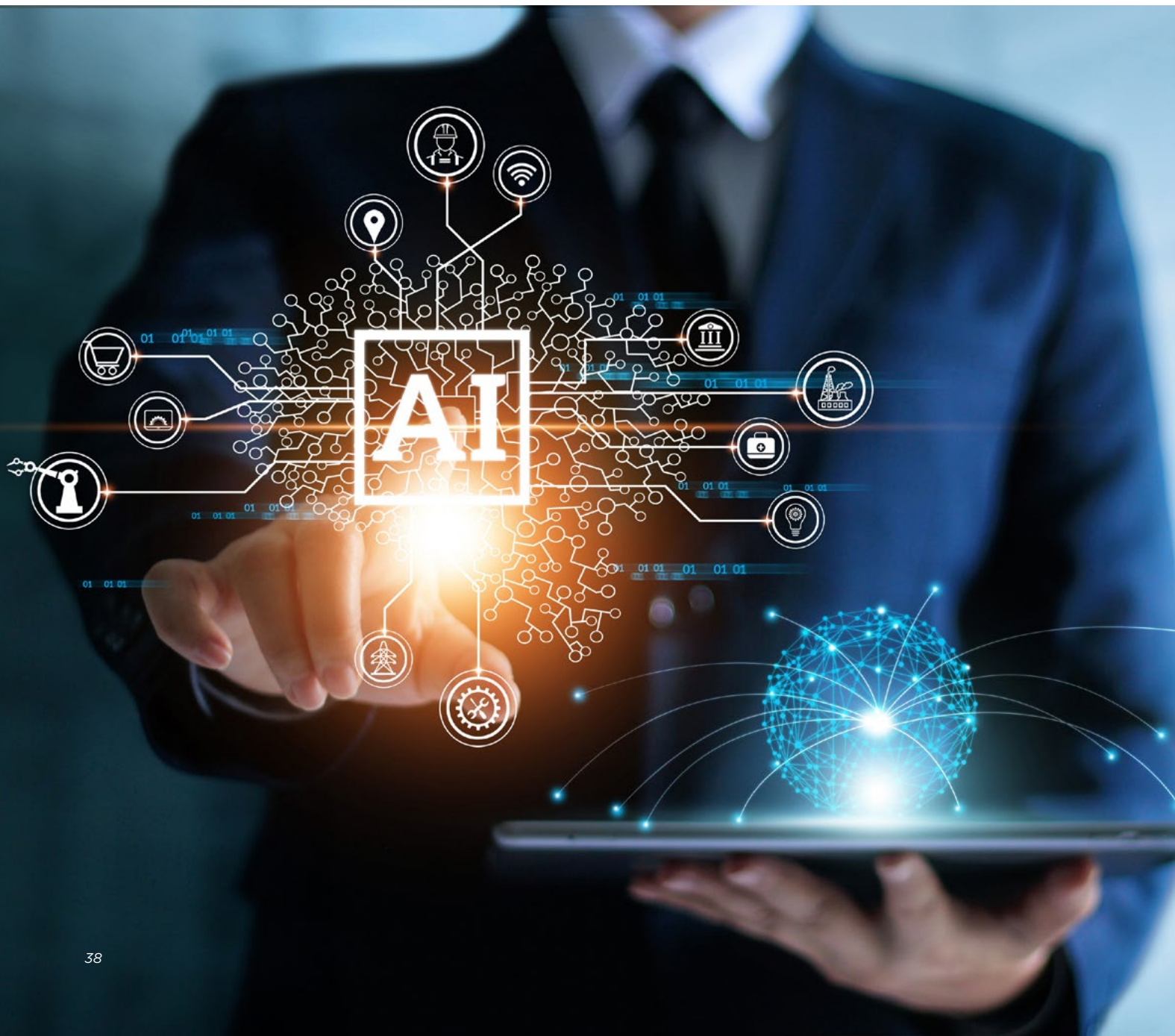
That wraps up our overview of social shopping. Based on everything mentioned above, it is clear that these kinds of buyer's journeys are growing and filled with potential. It is something that more businesses will be considering adding to their sales strategies due to the many opportunities that it holds. Are you ready to set up your social shopping strategy?

How AI is Transforming Creativity in the Business World?

By: Toni Becker

We live in the digital age, an age of disruption and constant change. Everything around us is continually transforming and the business and marketing world is no exception. Today, anyone with a thought-out strategy is able to establish and share their brand and capture the market itself.

While Artificial Intelligence (AI) may seem like a buzzword and an up in the air concept, it's important to note that we are using AI every day. From Siri to machine learning technology and even online chatbots, AI is everywhere. There are, of course, many future predictions and expectations around this topic and without a doubt, AI is set to shape our future and the future of business.



In this article we will be taking a look at the following topics:

- AI in business
- AI and marketing
- AI and hiring
- AI and analytics
- AI and cybersecurity

Let's dive right in.

AI in Business

Businesses that implement AI apps are set to become more diverse, as they have the ability to fully analyze data across a variety of functionalities including Customer Relationship Management (CRMs) platforms. This kind of strategy and having this form of data on hand helps business owners gain a competitive edge over their competitors as they have clear insight into the behavior of individual prospects and current customers. With this knowledge, they are able to create personalized inbound marketing campaigns that direct the prospect to take action and nurture them through the buyers' cycle with ease.

But that is not where AI ends. AI is able to find solutions to considerably complex business problems in a more human manner, resembling characteristics of human intelligence. An example of this would be website chatbots that are able to answer individual and unique questions posed by the online user. This makes customer service that much easier and builds trust between audience and brand.

AI helps solve business problems, nurture relationships, generate leads, and guide prospects through the buyer's journey, ultimately improving a business's bottom line.

AI and Marketing

AI has the ability to analyze your customer and your marketing endeavors. This kind of predictive analysis can be applied when it comes to collecting data and insight via your website, social media, and related digital channels. Because of AI and machine learning being applied to Customer Relationship Management platforms you are also able to take your customer experience to the next level through in-depth customer insight. This means you are able to track your customers' journey with your brand, identify what product or service they are interested in and create a marketing experience that drives the specific customer to make a purchase - reaching your prospect with the right message, at the right time, through the right platforms.

This can be particularly helpful for start-up businesses as they allow small business owners to identify specific opportunities and work on solutions to enhance business growth, brand awareness, and sales.

Essentially, AI helps you put a magnifying glass on quality prospects.

For example, just about all your customers are present on social media, and AI data mining techniques can be used to analyze your social media traffic and the most effective influencers can be quickly identified, and because of this, your marketing approaches can be classified.

In Summary: AI software is so powerful that, unlike other statistic-based approaches, they can learn. This means this software can adapt to market behavior changes and continually improve performance based on this data.

AI and Hiring

Since 2020 and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, many businesses have had to make the switch to remote working. With this in mind, businesses are hiring people from all over the world and HR managers are quickly becoming overwhelmed with the number of applications coming through. With advanced AI algorithms and customer relationship management software designed for HR purposes, HR professionals can use these algorithms to help in the decision-making process. This kind of technology helps them identify the right candidates for positions. This intelligent software is able to filter resumes based on certain segmentations, helping businesses find the right candidates for the interviewing process - taking hours off of the hiring process.

This process also eliminates the risk of bias in the hiring process. Prejudice is a human trait and machines are impartial to this kind of harmful thinking. This allows recruiters to pick candidates based solely on their potential and skillset. In Summary: AI in the HR industry is making the process of sourcing quality candidates that much easier while eliminating human prejudice, making for a fairer and more rewarding hiring process.

AI and Analytics

Thanks to AI, businesses are able to make the entire customer experience that much better thanks to in-depth customer insights. Data collection through mobile surveys, lead generation forms, and email surveys are one of the most effective means of research but how do you match leads to the right surveys - at the right time? AI is able to do just that. Using machine learning technology and models, market research is able to completely personalize mobile and market surveys by presenting personalized questions to the audience when they are the most receptive. Once this insight is collected, AI will filter low-quality data from high-quality data and will also be able to identify where individuals are in the buyer's cycle - making sure that follow-up emails and campaigns reach the individual at the right time, with the right message.

AI and Customer Service

Today's consumers are used to engaging with chatbots online. These machine learning bots are able to engage with consumers on a human level and have conversations with them via text and speech commands. Even though this kind of technology isn't perfect (yet) it is able to solve customer problems and answer customer questions in real-time. This is the kind of support that consumers appreciate. We live in the age of instant communication and instant gratification and by providing consumers with a way to communicate with the business 24 hours a day - you are building trust and directing them to act in real-time.

In Summary: AI such as chatbots delivers a personalized experience, encouraging brand loyalty and increasing conversions.

The Wrap Up

AI offers a creative and automated way for businesses to better streamline and personalize the entire marketing, sales, and service process. And this is the creativity of AI - taking all of your manual, time-consuming processes and making them more automated, more personalized, and more efficient.

What business doesn't want that?



Jumping the Funnel & Creating an Omnichannel

By: Toni Becker

All marketers know about sales and marketing funnels, the methodology that describes a customer's journey with your brand, from the beginning stages when a person discovers your business, to the purchasing stage.

The traditional sales and marketing funnel offers a single path journey and doesn't paint the entire complex picture of the sales and marketing process that we have come to know today. Because of this, the traditional marketing and sales funnel has shifted due to buyers' behavior. This shift is noticeable in the B2C space but is becoming particularly important in the B2B space and businesses within the B2B space need to take note in order to keep up with the current marketplace.

Recently, digital Growth Show hosts, Amit Vyas and Andrew Thomas discussed the importance of omnichannel sales and marketing in the B2B space, and in this article, we will unpack this discussion and take a look at the five success factors that businesses need to keep in mind when moving to omnichannel sales.

Why is There a Shift to Omnichannel Sales?

Since 2020, the world has experienced a significant shift. Businesses were forced into remote working situations and because of this, individuals had no choice but to learn new technologies and digital efficiencies if they wanted to streamline remote business processes. By learning these technologies and embracing these processes, businesses soon learned that they can better all business efficiencies through these technologies - so why go back to the way things were?

This did not just change the way businesses are run. The consumer also became used to a new way of purchasing products and services and engaging with brands. Essentially, both businesses and consumers are able to optimize their needs and goals through digital means.

And this is why omnichannel sales are taking center stage.

Think about it like this, how many Zoom meetings have you attended over the past year? How many meetings or discussions have been had via digital channels as opposed to face to face? This is the kind of business that is expected in this day and age, and customers have become used to this process. The digital realm now allows customers to do their own research, and once they are ready to meet with your business, they will reach out to you, on their own terms - and this is where omnichannel communication and sales become relevant. Your consumer is now in the driving seat, and as a business, you need to give them what they want. This may sound ominous for B2B businesses who are used to being in control of the buying process, however, the benefits apply to both the buyer and the seller - because everything is made more efficient than ever before.

In fact, McKinsey conducted a recent study on this phenomenon and according to McKinsey, 94% of people in the B2B space have said that this new way of conducting business is as effective, if not more effective, than it was previously.

So, how can you implement omnichannel sales processes across your business?

5 Ways to Implement Omnichannel Sales in Your B2B Business:

1. **Customer Centricity:** When beginning an omnichannel marketing and sales approach, it is important that you clearly define the customer journey. This should be based on data, and a Customer Relationship Management platform will help you in collecting the necessary data to better your consumer understanding - this bettering the consumer experience.
2. **Holistic Approach:** This is about clearly defining the role each of your digital channels and sales channels plays. You need to define these roles in order to reach

certain customer expectations and deliver the necessary information to the customer.

3. **Reduce Channel Conflict:** In the past, many B2B businesses relied on 3rd parties to sell their products and services. During 2020, there was a significant shift in this practice as businesses had to save money and digitize by going direct to clients. This is a dynamic shift and one that is cutting out the middle-man, saving businesses across the globe time and money.
4. **Digital Sales and Digital Marketing:** Digital marketing has always been vital for brands and B2B businesses however, digital marketing cannot function successfully without a drive toward digital sales processes. This is why inbound marketing has become vital. It is about conducting personalized digital marketing strategies that add value to the buyer's life, driving them through the customer journey, nurturing leads, and ultimately making a sale once the buyer is ready. Customer Relationship Management platforms play an important role in this regard, as marketers and sales professionals are able to drive these processes from a single location - tracking potential customers, nurturing them through digital marketing campaigns, and directing them to make a purchase. It comes down to reaching the customer at the right time, in the right place, with the right message - in order to drive sales.
5. **Faster Decision Making:** Omnichannel marketing and sales results in faster and better decision-making. This is because the channels of communication are always open and organizing face-to-face meetings that take time (and money) can be excluded from the process unless necessary. Platforms like Zoom help in this regard as buyers and sellers can have well-structured online meetings that lead to faster decision making - on both the buyer and seller's part.

The Wrap Up

Omnichannel sales and marketing allow B2B businesses to achieve more availability, drive sales and traffic, and integrate digital touchpoints in order to better the bottom line. An omnichannel B2B strategy will inevitably improve the customer experience and provide more channels for research and purchase and this is why it is becoming more and more important for businesses to investigate and implement this strategy in the new normal.

Tune into a brand new episode of the *The Growth Show* with Amit and Andrew. You can catch us on YouTube, LinkedIn and the Digital Nexa website.



An Updated Look at Content Marketing: Why You Need Creativity and a Tech Stack

By: Shannon Correia

There is a lot to be said about content marketing and the vital role it plays in inbound strategies. To really make it work for your business going forward, you're going to need two crucial elements: creativity and tech. Having a tech stack enables you to work efficiently, while creativity is the driving force that'll help your business stand out. Let's take a look.

What You Need in Your Tech Stack for A Successful Content Strategy

If content is king of the digital world, digital technology is its crowning glory. With so many tools at the fingertips of marketing teams, the possibility of creating stellar content that performs is well within reach. In this article, we'll be discussing the ways tech meets content, and how you can improve your strategy with a stack of tools designed to improve content.

The Emergence of Content Stacks

There are thousands of companies vying for space within the marketing tech landscape. So much so, that MarTech is a commonly used and understood term. While this is true for digital marketing overall, the same can be said for content. And content is a ball game of its own. Why? Because the ROI of content cannot be measured in the same way as paid ads, for example.

So, having to explain to your heads of business the value and importance of content can be tricky. Tools can help the entire process, from strategizing through to production, publishing, and reporting. This can vastly improve metrics and streamline content creation processes. This results in enhanced productivity and more effective campaigns. Depending on your tech stack, or range of tools in your arsenal, you can even provide customized content that is more engaging for your audience, resulting in deeper connections and more meaningful relationship-building.

The audiences of today have free-flowing access to information online. With over 2 billion websites in existence and businesses trying to outdo each other as thought leaders with published content, customers have come to expect a certain standard of content from businesses.

Content spans across digital platforms and as such, they need to flow seamlessly with an integrated marketing approach. Sophisticated systems help to thread all of these, along with customer interactions all under one roof, which aids brands in building better, stronger relationships with their audiences. Based on this, you can see how a CRM system might be a great foundation, but in truth, you'll need a tech stack at the helm.

A tech stack refers to the various technological tools that help writers and marketers to produce and publish the best possible content in a way that makes the most sense to your audience and the algorithms. These tech stacks have essentially removed the need to have a team of computer scientists since this tech is easy-to-use and already programmed. In other words, you're using low-code and no-code tech.

With the right tech tools, marketers are more empowered than ever before. Becoming more productive and having better processes, results in optimized content that can then be measured in detail, and follow-up communication that is personalized can follow. In other words, brand and business growth await.

Creating Successful Content Strategies with Tech Stacks

There are many tools available on the market for businesses. In the same way that businesses need to be selective about which social media platforms they use, so too do content marketers need to narrow down which tools make the most sense to them. The goal is for these tools to provide value. If you're working with the wrong tools, it can actually result in unnecessary steps with wasted time and poor results.

Technology is not there to perform the job for you, instead, it is there to facilitate the process. The content teams will need to analyze their roles and outcomes and see which tools would be beneficial to them. When you have the right mix, you'll not only be producing successful content campaigns that help the business grow, but you'll be able to scale up better as a content team as well.

Since tech stacks are there to provide you with automation and the streamlining of processes, it is ideal to find tools that can work together just as seamlessly. Preventing friction is key and for that, you'll need to look to integrations and flexibility. You also don't want to get to a point where you're relying too heavily on the tech you're using.

A golden goal for content marketers of today is to speak with audiences on a more intimate level. This goes beyond sending communication that is addressed to a specific person. Instead, it ties in with the greater aim of businesses which is to provide more customized experiences to more in-depth niches. Remember, tech is there to help your strategy - it itself is not the strategy.

In other words, ask not what the technology can do for you, but what it can help you to accomplish. It's the equivalent of the all-important background dancers on stage. Super important, as they add a lot to the performance, but they are not the star of the show. The content itself, the strategy orchestrating the event, and the creativity are what ultimately make the performance. And, importantly, that's what's going to make the show memorable and meaningful enough for the audience to remember it and return the next time.

So, how do you know what to include in your content stack? Begin with an audit and see where processes could be enhanced. Then, take your time conducting thorough research and fixing out which selection of tools will make the most sense to your business.

Intro to MarTech Tools

Content tools fall under the greater umbrella of marketing tech stacks. These often correlate, as these are not lone tech tools working in isolation. Remember, teamwork makes the dream work.

The tech stack is designed to ultimately enhance the buyer journey as they make their way from the attract to engage and analyze stages.

Here are some examples of widely used MarTech tools that can be used as a starting point when developing your marketing tech stack:

Ads: Google Ads, AdRoll, Quantcast, Basis

ABM: Demandbase, Terminus, RollWorks

Page builders: Unbounce, Instapage, GetResponse, Knak

Social media management: Sprout Social, Buffer, Sprinklr, Hootsuite, MeetEdgar, Later

CMS: WordPress, Ghost, Medium, Drupal, Squarespace

SEO: Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Conductor, Siteimprove

CRM: HubSpot, Salesforce

Webinars: Zoom, GoToMeeting, WebEx, Blue Jeans

Video marketing: Vidyad, Wistia, Vimeo

Content: Uberflip, Outgrow, Ion

Content production: Google Suite, Grammarly

Design: Canva, Adobe Suite

Lead scoring: MadKudu, Salespanel, Infer, ActiveCampaign

Leads: Intercom, LeanData, Bizible, Terminus

Data: Clearbit, ZoomInfo, LinkedIn Sales Navigator, Cognism, Segment, Tealium, mParticle

Automation: Marketo, Pardot, Eloqua, ActiveCampaign, Keap, Constant Contact

Email marketing: Encharge, MailChimp, Omnisend

Sales: Outreach, SalesLoft

Cloud calls: Aircall, Dialpad, Talkdesk

Web Analytics: Google Analytics, Firebase, Heap

Business intelligence: Tableau, Microsoft BI, Looker, Domo

Product analytics: Heap, Google Analytics, Adobe Analytics

Conversion rate optimization: Hotjar, Crazy Egg, FullStory, Quantum Metric, Optimizely, Unbounce, Instapage

Operations: Slack, ClickUp, HubSpot

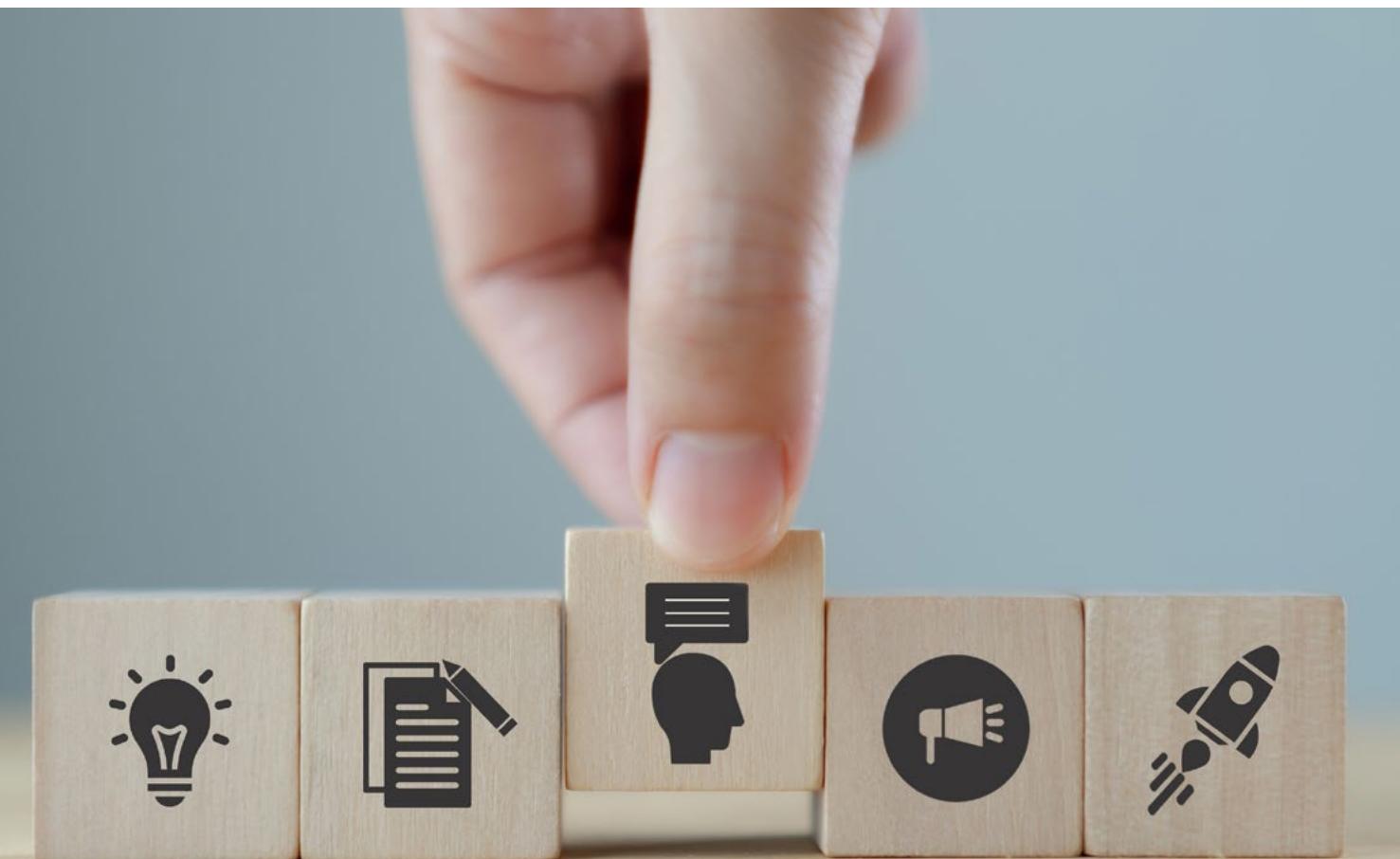
Based on the above, you already get an idea about how many tools are available and how many your business may need. When building your tech stack, ensure that it enhances the work your content and greater marketing team are busy with. Utilizing some of the tools above, you can see your content marketing soar, with improved ways to attract, engage, convert, and delight your audiences.



Writing for Content Creation: The Value of Skill and Creativity

By: Shannon Correia

Every other person today with a phone and online presence is a self-proclaimed content creator. Content extends to many realms, and one of the cornerstones of it is writing. The written work is a skill - one which can be learned to a certain degree, though the words read best when there is a natural underlying passion.



You've seen the job listing: copywriter or content creator wanted. Must be able to write all types of content, work well with deadlines, and take a vested interest in the topic at hand. Sometimes, that job spec includes a whole lot more than the realm of content creation, and sometimes just one writing sample will do. So, how do we navigate this predicament, where writers are needed, yet the skill and value of their craft are misunderstood and undervalued?

"Sex and the City" writer Candace Bushnell was recently quoted in The New Yorker as saying "People valued writing; it wasn't considered something everyone can do. Now, because of the computer, everyone has to do it, so we think everyone can do it."

This brings to light a pertinent issue for writers - just because Google can guess the rest of my sentence and people have access to laptops, does that make them a writer? How about a good one? Let's take a look at what constitutes the art of writing. And yes, it is an art.

Communication skills

A vague term, but communication really is the crux of writing. That said, writing is something often done in solitude, in a dialogue with one's inner voice and thoughts. When you read something, you're getting insight into someone's mind's eye. It's not communication in its truest sense because there's no back and forth, but communication is certainly needed to perform the job.

By definition, communicating is the sharing of ideas. That is what the written word has done for centuries. But writers need to communicate with their editors and managers to ensure they're converting the right message at the right time to the right people. That, plus the ability to receive criticism is key.

Storytelling

Communication is the perfect segway to storytelling. Writers can quite literally explore the depths of wonderland, and find ways to share this with their audience. To capture the attention of the reader, sustain it, and leave a lasting impression is the ultimate goal. Anyone can write about how the chicken crossed the street, but few people can paint the picture in a way that is truly compelling - you need context, delivery, and interest that is peaked and sustained. Sure, you add a generic punchline, but the effect of that will be minimal in the long run.

Technicality

While the ability to string together words into compressive sentences seems relatively easy, there is a lot of technical skill involved. Writing in the active voice, for example, can change the way a message is conveyed, as can the use of literary devices. Being cringy with word choices can actually have an opposite and unintended effect.

It's not only the words but the structure too. Being able to work with specific keywords and according to word counts requires skill in terms of structure as well. If you're trying to convince or inform, you need to lay out the information in a way that makes sense. That can change everything. This also applies to the connotations that certain words have.

Research

Behind the words of writers is a plethora of research. Fictional or not, anthropology plays a role. Observing people - the way they are and the way they live is very telling and can inform good writing. Not only that, but writers have often incurred wisdom across a variety of topics. You can jump from topics on the daily, delving into one topic and then moving to the next.

This is why writers need to write, but they need to live to be able to truly write. In the same breath, they also need to stay up to date as writing that is out of touch with missed references can fall flat quickly.

Voice

The ability to turn a concept into a full-fledged message is a skill. There are voices at play, too - the writer's voice, which you can pick up when reading their work, as well as the tone of voice that their words are set to convey. The choice in wording and delivery can play a big role in how something is understood and perceived. In an overly sensitive and politically correct society, this is especially important to get right.

Creativity

Let's talk creativity, because this is an intangible quality that can completely transform any pursuit in content. When you need to stand out among the sea of competition, you need to encapsulate audiences with new ideas. Being able to access that part of the brain and put a new spin on things can be challenging, but for writing (good writing, that is), it is a requirement. Being able to easily tap into conceptual ideas that you can visualize and communicate through the written word is something that sets apart one's work and resonates with people. It's what gives writers that coveted "flair."

That wraps up the value of writing today. Something many can do, but few can do well. While it can be learned, it is something that requires a specific type of thinking and a culmination of the skills mentioned above. Writing is a way of being, a way of living, and something that extends to every lived experience. The writers you work with hold immense influence on a brand, so be sure to choose wisely! Look for skill, creativity, and work ethic for a winning combination.



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