



BRAND LEARNING

Marketing Re-Mastered for The Digital Era

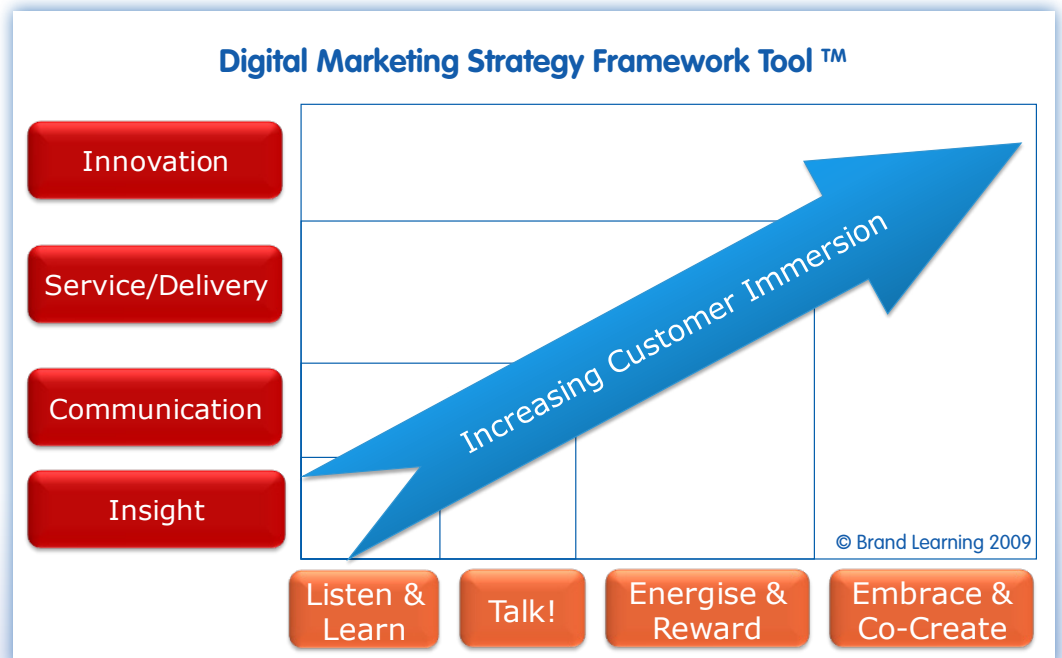


This article by Bruce Levi, Marketing Capability Director at BRAND LEARNING, explains how marketers can take a proactive approach to the evolving digital world and provides a practical framework to help align your digital strategy to your marketing objectives.

As the opportunities for us all to connect, communicate and interact in an expanding and more literate digital environment increase at alarming speeds, the opinions and actions of customers in their online communities are taking centre stage and creating massive ripples across the marketing community.

Marketers can't stop the onslaught of the digital world, but they do need to radically shift their mindset from one of 'command and control' of their brands to one of 'shape and manage'. This means marketers need to learn to engage in, shape, prompt or sometimes lead multiple conversations and activities on all fronts—not just in their brand communications.

But where do you start and how do you do this in practice? Most of the media coverage and much debate on the 'digital challenges' focuses on the latest technology or software. For those without a clear strategy for digital marketing, a common reaction is to jump on the 'technology band wagon' and reactively start multiple fragmented activities like Facebook fanpages or promotional offers on Twitter—yet this is, at best, an ineffective way to operate.



The opportunities and challenges of effective digital marketing today cut right across the key marketing fundamentals; how marketers identify untapped opportunities through deep customer understanding; develop their products or services through inspiring innovation; engage and communicate with their customers to build enduring relationships; and effectively deliver or service the brand or business to their customers.

To help marketers navigate their way through developing an effective digital marketing strategy Brand Learning have developed a simple and practical framework linking the four core digital objectives to the key marketing fundamentals (see above).

Listen & Learn!

Uncovering great actionable customer insights should be at the heart of everything and marketers can learn to do this more effectively—the start point being listening attentively to customers and learning more about their needs, wants and motivations. The digital world allows marketers to listen and learn like never before—to hear peoples' opinions, get instant feedback, uncover deeper insights and react more quickly.

Simple monitoring of the online chatter or 'buzz' will yield both the positive and the challenging or even negative views about any brand, e.g. '@ xxxx Sucks' is a Twitter account any brand should pay close attention to. Equally brands can create their own communities. For example, Mattel faced a product recall in the run up to their busy Christmas sales period. Fortunately, they already had a private online community of young mums with whom they regularly sought their opinions and feedback. These mums provided Mattel with valuable insights into their concerns and the proposed response plan, allowing Mattel to adapt their final recall plans.

Talk!

Listening is relatively straight forward and low risk, but once marketers start listening they inevitably want to start talking back—communication after all is at the heart of a marketing role. The challenge is to decide who to talk with, where and when to have those conversations and what type of conversation to have. On Twitter, @ EasyJetCare, tweets (messages posted using Twitter) are monitored and in real time Easyjet pro-actively respond to individuals with both good and bad experiences of flying with them.

Too often, marketers feel the need to own or lead the dialogue with their customers (such as in advertising), whereas now marketers must learn to engage, participate and build two-way relationships and conversations—not just to broadcast! P&G have been very successful with their 'beinggirl.com' sites which provide young teenage girls with a community where they are at ease and P&G provides useful but not heavily branded advice around feminine care.

Energise & Reward

A step beyond the art of conversation is to energise or encourage customers to actively advocate, endorse and support a brand and to reward their loyalty. Providing customers with the option to review and rate products and services is one simple approach which can be a great source of customer insight. Most e-commerce sites provide this option and there are businesses such as 'TripAdvisor.com', that have made this service the heart of their business offer—aggregating and rating individuals travel experiences.

Technology companies have been relatively quick to connect with their customers and turn that to their commercial advantage. A very significant number of Dell computer questions and issues are resolved by support forums where the main problem fixers are loyal and enthusiastic Dell users. People will often go to extraordinary lengths to help others and their motivations are rarely financial. The emotional income they derive can be one of generosity (just happy to help), respect from their peers and/ or an outlet to demonstrate their knowledge and experience.

Embrace & Co-Create

The final step in harnessing the digital world is to fully embrace customers so they become an essential part of the core marketing processes and to co-create innovations in the organisation. This is most clearly demonstrated in the case of product, service or proposition innovation and in the increasingly common term 'open innovation'.

'Crowd sourcing' is a technique being tried by marketers to source creative ideas from the general public or from independent specialists as opposed to their usual advertising agency. One of the best examples of integrating customers is Salesforce with their 'IdeaExchange' on their community support site. Not only do users of their software post their suggestions but they can vote on each others' ideas. Salesforce go the extra step of informing their community of those ideas which they are actively considering and those ideas they have implemented—ensuring users feel listened to.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve and become even more integrated, these communities of common interest and the technologies they use to communicate and collaborate will play a larger and more central role in

how marketers listen, talk to, energise and embrace their customers. And as marketers become more skilled in this new way of working marketers will learn how to operate differently and to discover new insights, significantly improve brand communications, provide better services or delivery and innovate.

The core fundamentals of marketing haven't changed as a result of the digital revolution but the approach and tools available to marketers are rapidly evolving. The next time there is the urge to jump on the technology bandwagon, we recommend marketers and others grappling with the issues of digital marketing pause for thought.

Before acting, first ask if you have sufficient skills in the digital marketing arena? Are your teams equipped with the latest processes, tools and techniques to make the most of the new opportunities it presents? Do your teams understand the digital challenges and opportunities facing the brand or industry? Are they actively listening, talking, energising and embracing or is an initiative in place to understand why not and what are the blockages?

Once the business objectives and strategy are clear and a clear digital marketing strategy has been defined—the technology choices needed to deliver on these will become extremely clear. Marketers can then stop worrying about reacting to the multiple choices available to them and instead focus on building the digital marketing capabilities they need to learn to make the most of the multiple and exciting possibilities the new digital world presents.

BRAND LEARNING has partnered over 50 multinational companies in helping them to build their marketing excellence and is leveraging that deep expertise in marketing and in capability development to help organisations and the people within them to excel at customer-centric marketing—using both conventional and digital technologies

Additional Sources:

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