

Picking the evolution winners



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My son is mad for dinosaurs—you've heard me say that before. He loves to watch dinosaur videos and will stomp around like a dinosaur all day long. This strikes me as quite harmless for a little boy, though I do wonder what will happen when we have to explain the concept of extinction to him.

To most of us extinction might seem to be the natural order of things. When a species no longer thrives or adapts in changing conditions it loses its place on the evolutionary ladder. But to a boy who has just cottoned on to the idea of 'squashing things', the natural selection process may seem overly complicated. How will he grasp the notion of his favourite animals dying out because they could not sustain their place?

In the same manner marketing has to evolve in order to maintain its place on the ladder. In an era of enormous change consumers have unlimited choice and unprecedented access to information. If we marketers are to sustain our place in this new environment we must also be prepared to adapt.

Many early adopters of digital technology have wholeheartedly embraced each

EVOLUTION IN MARKETING IS THE FAST TRACK TO SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS. BUT IT HAS ITS OWN DANGERS WHEN NEW TECHNOLOGIES APPEAR TO REPLACE TRUED AND TRUE PRACTICES. PICKING THE WINNERS IN THE BATTLE OF TECHNOLOGIES REQUIRES MORE THAN A BLIND BELIEF IN THE NEW.

JOANNE DOUGLAS TAKES THE LONG VIEW.

channel as it appears; web, social, mobile. This is a wonderful thing. I am a great advocate of every additional marketing opportunity that technology provides for us. I will be equally supportive of the next new channel that opens up, provided that it is in line with our business strategy and we act as responsible marketers by applying best practice.

At the same time, let's be careful not to consign all conventional marketing practices to extinction too hastily. While we should implement and test new tactics, is it right to assume that tried and true marketing channels have outlived their purpose, and can no longer earn their place in any comprehensive or strategic marketing programme? Are traditional marketing methods the dinosaurs of our industry?

Change is the constant

As someone who has worked in marketing for many years, I regard change as the one constant in our field. The flexibility required to maintain a competitive edge and keep up to date with industry best practice alone demonstrates our very potential for growth. The best of us adapt and adopt new strategies as they arise.

Doubtless the world has changed, and continues to do so with each new technological development. Adherence solely to the marketing practices of ten years ago would be foolhardy when much of what worked then is now inadequate. Long gone are the days of those impersonal and ineffective blanket campaigns.

Sometimes new technologies replace their predecessors. Just look at the machine on which you work daily. Once computers entered the office environment the humble typewriter was quickly phased out.

But it is not always the case. Though people now interact with any number of screen devices on a daily basis, the television has not been rendered redundant. Instead, we have reallocated our viewing time on televisions that continue to evolve with us. Our full-colour flat screens are already a world away from

S the chunky black and white boxes that once dominated family life, and 3D TV has become a reality.

Similarly, the manner in which our media is delivered continues to progress. Where once it only took three broadcast television commercials to reach 80 per cent of an advertiser's target market of 18 to 45-year-olds, today it takes 100. As marketing and advertising shift to become more addressable, thanks to digital capabilities, this should be echoed in our customer communication. Yet recent studies suggest that, though 42 per cent of consumer media consumption is online, only 11 per cent of media spend is allocated to online media.

Marketers and advertisers today can do so much more and know so much more. To succeed we must take the approach of narrowcasting to our target audience and that audience alone, applying the multidimensional insight that is now accessible to us.

What is the value of a customer?

We have long understood the necessity of integration for any organisation that communicates with customers on a personal level. From customer information to CRM platforms, there can and should be integration across every possible customer touch point. Forrester Research has shown us that a customer who engages with our business through multiple channels is four to five times more profitable than a customer who appears in a single channel. We can't afford to be unaware of this invaluable information about our customers' worth.

By determining the relative value a customer brings to our business we can decide if, when and how we should market to them, apply precision targeting methodologies, and test each strategy as we implement it.

It is the very wealth of information available at a marketer's fingertips today that promotes customer integration. A corresponding integration of marketing strategies would seem to naturally follow. In some cases, however, there seems to be less emphasis on integration of marketing strategy than there is on technology that provides instant click-through rates.

Our need for one-to-one customer engagement is forefront. We need to identify our customer as quickly as possible,

meeting her wherever she appears at the moment she connects with our brand.

Digital communication channels have facilitated the immediacy of engagement and measurability that stakeholders, board members and marketers have longed for. Yet there is more than one way to market to a customer base. For all the accountability of SMS and web offers, how do we measure those customers we are missing out on? At times customers will fall through the cracks that exist between digital channels. And if my customer has not provided a mobile number, has opted out of email contact and has historically responded well to a direct mail piece, then guess how I want to market to her.

Marketers of fast moving products who track and analyse the sales spikes immediately following an advertising or marketing campaign can assess the performance of those campaigns. The even better news is that new forms of addressable marketing that enable communication with a far narrower audience, comprising just the customers you want to target, will save a significant percentage of advertising spend that is currently wasted. Those with high value products or longer sales cycles face the challenge of applying market research and revenue mapping to deliver accurate return on investment.

Marketing is a delta

I consider myself an equal opportunity marketer. There is a strategy to everything we do, a strategy behind the new elements we integrate, and a strategy behind how everything fits together. But I have noticed that some companies in today's market have a tendency to focus on new channels to the exclusion of marketing best practice.

My marketing plan includes all kinds of channels, from printed DM to online to everything in between and beyond. We assess new channels that become part of the greater marketing ecosystem and apply them where appropriate to that marketing plan. Key to this is the question of what we hope to achieve in the context of our overall business.

When appraising new channels, digital or otherwise, it is ill advised to embrace it to the exclusion of all other marketing platforms. Remembering that today's customer controls how and when she is marketed to, it should never be a question of the channels in which you prefer to communicate to her,

but rather her chosen channels.

I would argue that a single channel or marketing strategy, taken in isolation, presents a narrow view. Customers do not operate from a siloed mindset, and neither should marketers.

Concentrating solely on the activity within one channel transmits incorrect signals about customer behaviour. While we must avail ourselves of that information, let's remember that perspectives change according to channel and media, and will certainly vary with time. The picture a single channel presents is incomplete, lacking the multidimensional insight that is so valuable.

If we should recognise our customers, regardless of the channel in which they appear, surely we should recognise clever marketing as clever marketing, whatever its channel. Should an eye-catching campaign that promotes brand awareness with a clear and compelling call to action be dismissed because it appears somewhere other than a hand-held device, or because it does not come furnished with a delete key?

True integrated marketing requires a well-defined strategy. Each new channel and delivery method is included within that overall strategy, enhancing rather than replacing those still central to the marketing and communications plan. We shouldn't deny the potential of comprehensive marketing simply because it includes some channels that have existed for longer than a decade, if that's what works.

My years of marketing have taught me that marketers must be able to evolve to keep pace with those technologies and methodologies that will continue to revolutionise our industry. At the same time they remind me that brand recognition and confidence is built over time, through all channels. The mediums that some risk labelling irrelevant can still play a critical role in a comprehensive marketing plan.

There's life in this marketer yet. I'm not ready for extinction. ☉

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Joanne has almost 20 years of B2B marketing experience, primarily in-house within the IT sector.