

5 Ways to Improve Your Digital Marketing Programs



I'm often asked to give talks on digital marketing. At the beginning of each session I ask the audience to raise hands if they are delighted with their digital marketing programs. A hand or two may be seen, but not always—there are times when all hands stay down. So, I then ask for a show of hands of those who are just satisfied. You know the situation—the marketing programs are working okay, no big complaints, but it could be better. This generally produces a smattering of hands, but usually no more than 30% of the audience feels delighted or even satisfied with their marketing activity.

It's a bit of a shocker. A few years ago companies were embracing digital content marketing like there was no tomorrow. Yet, today a majority of companies are dissatisfied with the results they see. My anecdotal findings are confirmed by a number of studies:

- More than 70% of marketers fail to deliver the business results expected by management.¹
- Only 30% of B2B marketers say their organizations are effective at content marketing.²
- Only 22% of businesses are satisfied with their conversion rates.³
- 51% of marketers told Forrester their content marketing efforts are only somewhat effective.⁴

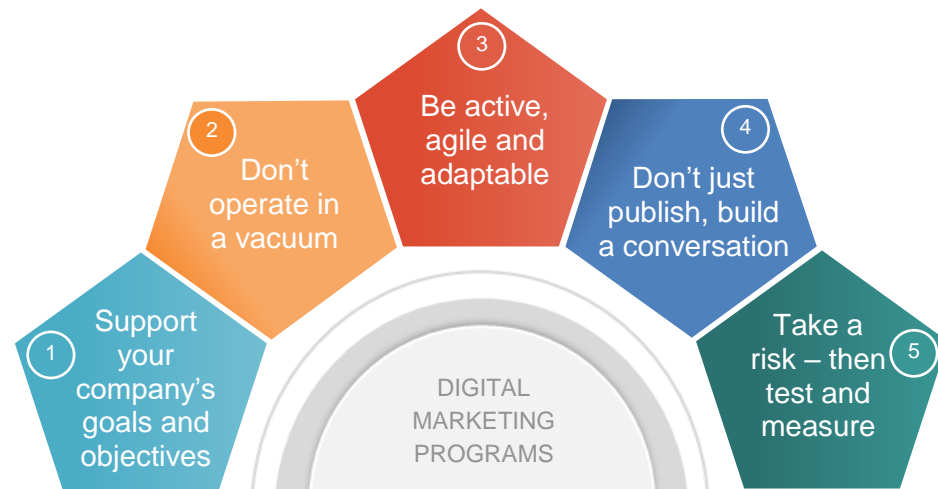
¹ Fournaise Marketing Group

² http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2016_B2B_Report_Final.pdf

³ <https://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics>

⁴ <http://adage.com/article/btob/marketers-struggling-content-marketing-results/294138/>

Most companies understand that they need to have a great website, engage through social media and share great content—but many are not reaping the rewards they expected. Here are some things you can do:



1 Support your company's goals and objectives.

Seventy percent of marketers lack a consistent or integrated content strategy.¹ Random acts of marketing supported by wide-ranging tweets and posts do not a strategy make. The headlong rush to deploy marketing activities without a solid strategy often confuses rather than enlightens the market.

So often I hear "...we published an ebook, but really didn't get much response". The adoption of marketing technologies has meant that organizations can now blog, post, tweet, share and like with great speed—but unless this is coordinated and linked to a clear strategy what generally happens is a confusing mishmash of unrelated information.

For success, your marketing strategy needs to align and support your corporate goals and mission. Marketing needs to be part of the corporate team and play the same game as the rest of the organization. Sounds obvious—but in the past 10 years I have rarely seen a marketing organization refer to a company's mission statement, or use corporate goals, as the foundation of its marketing activities. An uncoordinated post, a random publication or an unanchored email campaign runs the risk of sending contradictory messages to the market and fragmenting the brand image.

If you work for a large public company, understanding the corporation's vision, mission statement and goals is easy since it's often published. Amazon's vision, for example, is "...to be earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online". What marketers worth their salt wouldn't want to run with that one!

¹<https://www.prophet.com/thinking/allimeter/>

Salesforce annual report states: “We are in the Age of the Customer, where powerful technology forces driven by the cloud, social, mobile, data science, and the Internet of Things have opened a door for every company to transform their business models and customer experiences. Salesforce is uniquely positioned to bring our customers into the future”. It makes your fingers itch to start keying out a blog post on “The Age of the Customer”, doesn’t it.

But not everyone works for a public company with a clearly defined vision or strategy or inspiring mission statements. In many organizations, these may be missing, not fully documented, or just plain vague. So how do you build a strategy when one doesn’t exist?

In our workshops, we run an exercise called Welcome to the Future. Obviously, we need the leadership team in the room to do this—because we place them in an imaginary time capsule and send them hurtling into an imaginary future. Their mission (should they accept it) is to create a report describing a highly successful year from the perspective of one year from now. The scenario is—it’s been an outstanding year, the company achieved everything it planned and more! From that vantage point, the leadership team describes this incredible year, reporting on:

- Revenue growth over the past year
- Number of new deals
- Number of new customers
- Markets focused on—and new markets broken into
- What differentiated you from competition
- The value you delivered to customers
- What customers say about you
- How your brand is perceived in the market

Capturing all this on a video and then building a marketing strategy and plan to meet these goals is a superb way of aligning marketing activities with your company’s goals and objectives.

But, if you don’t fancy sending the executive team into the future, consider the tried and tested SWOT analysis conducted with the team. Documenting the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is another way of anchoring your marketing strategy in corporate reality. Building a marketing plan that leverages the strengths, capitalizes the opportunities, eliminates the threats and addresses the weaknesses is a great foundation for your plan.

But, the real value these exercises provide is to get marketing in the same room as the leaders of the organization to start a dialogue around the role of marketing to ensure that the strategy you develop is marching in the same direction as your company.

2 Don't operate in a vacuum.

Getting the leadership team in a workshop setting is a great first step, but that doesn't mean that the marketing organization can then go and work in a vacuum.

"Can you run an onsite workshop for the marketing team?" is a question I love to hear. When I reply that it would be a pleasure and then ask for senior management, sales, customer service and any other customer-facing roles to be present, I often hear "Oh no. This is a marketing project".

Working in isolation from the rest of the company is one of the chief reasons marketing departments fail. It's not enough to just touch base with the sales team when there's a new lead, or meet with the product development group whenever there's a new release or with senior management to deliver periodic updates and request funds. The whole company needs to be involved on an ongoing basis.

You don't just do digital marketing—you become a digital marketing organization.

For that to take place, you need the engagement of others—long after you've completed the time-travel exercise or the SWOT analysis. Bear in mind, marketing is not an island.

Here's how it should work:

- The sales team is working hand-in-glove with marketing. They are deeply involved in building personas, supporting account-based marketing initiatives, helping craft the message to market and staying on message when meeting buyers.
- Product marketing is engaged with the marketing team from the earliest design phase right through to product release.
- Customer service is in daily contact sharing the latest needs and concerns of customers. The marketing team uses this input to build personas and create messages to market.
- The CEO is tweeting and posting on-message (wouldn't that be nice).
- And even those in finance, H/R and operations are retweeting, reposting and joining in the conversation.
- All departments feel a responsibility for promoting and advancing the company's brand and working to ensure that the right messages are being delivered to the right audience.

This doesn't happen by itself, old habits die hard. It doesn't take much for sales to sit back and wait for leads, or for the product development team to say, "That's a marketing problem".

For marketing to be a success, company-wide processes need to be implemented and supported by those in power, communication channels need to be opened keeping everyone informed and involved—and a shift in the culture of lead generation needs to be facilitated.

3 Be active, agile and adaptable – change is a constant

Your target market, the segment you focus on, the accounts you plan to engage and the buyers you seek to reach are in constant flux. Unfortunately, market changes do not occur on quarterly cycles or coordinate with annual marketing plans—they're relentless.

There's much written on agile marketing and the need to adapt and change your approach to the market based on the rapidly changing needs and requirements of the buyer. One way of preparing for this is to develop agile personas.

Generally, personas are two-dimensional. The first dimension is the persona itself—the demographics, goals, challenges, ambitions and other buyer characteristics. The second dimension is time—this is represented by the buyer's journey and features the kind of information buyers need at each step of their decision-making journey. ***An agile persona has a third dimension.***

A few years ago we wrote, published and promoted an ebook for a client that provided data recovery and backup services for IT servers—and something unexpected happened. We obviously hadn't planned this, but the day we published followed an evening of severe storms in New England; storms that knocked out a slew of data centers and brought many businesses to a standstill.

The storms prompted untold numbers of data center managers (at least those with power and internet connection) to research disaster recovery solutions—we just happened to publish an ebook on that subject that very day. The response we received was overwhelming.

Since that day, we've always included the third dimension in our persona builds—and that is the stimulus likely to motivate the audience. So, we ask the question: what changes in the market place, the economy—or even in the world—will affect our target audience and how do we prepare for this?

Buyers are not passive recipients of information. They are agents—or actors—who interpret and respond to the world about them. A blog or a video may go completely ignored one day only to be read by hundreds the next. A well-publicized and high-profile security breach may have chief information security officers swarming to your website if you have information they need to secure their systems. It's hard to predict these things—but it's easy to prepare.

On a recent project for a client that delivers cloud-based supply chain solutions we asked the question: what events or stimuli are likely to make your target buyers sit up and pay attention? We then converted these “motivational” events into keyword search terms such as: “disruption in international trade”, “China trade talks”, “commodity prices”, “currency fluctuations” and “economic uncertainty”.

We fed these terms into our newsfeed and once a newsworthy event occurred we published a content piece in response to the news. Writing just-in-time blog articles, posts and other forms of content can be incredibly effective.

Viewing your buyer as an active “actor” rather than a passive “persona” is the foundation of agile marketing. Seeing your buyer as an ever-changing living being rather than a two-dimension persona will help you engage in new, more meaningful and vibrant ways.

4

Don't just publish, build a conversation

Most marketers understand the buyer's journey and the idea that different types (and forms) of information are needed at different times in the buyer's decision-making process. But, in many cases, little thought is put into building a conversation that feels alive and natural to your audience.

Scatter-shot content blasts often masquerade as content workflows—a promotion of an infographic, followed by an invitation to view a video and then an offer of a product demo with little theme or storyline does not build a conversation or progress buyers forward in their decision-making process.

One company that I know of launched a great top-of-funnel piece to engage buyers in the early stage of their buyer's journey and attained great conversion rates only to put all these early leads into a random drip marketing program that over time lost the interest and enthusiasm the original piece generated.

One way to build a content conversation that feels natural and engages and encourages the audience to take the next steps with you is to list all the questions buyers are likely to ask as they progress from their earliest inquiry to a point where they're ready to buy or upgrade. You'll need to engage your sales, customer service and other teams in your organization to build this "inquiry road map". It's worth the effort because this now becomes the foundation for your conversation with the market. And don't forget – as you build out your content plan, leave space and opportunity for those "agile" engagements described in the previous section.

5

Take a risk – then test and measure

We've all worked with people whose first reaction to a new idea or a creative piece of marketing is to find all the reasons that it won't work. I truly believe that many great ideas are killed in infancy because people have fixed and firm ideas that don't keep up with the changing times—and that's one of the elements that cause companies to churn out safe, but bland, content by the bucket load.

This tendency to auto-audit what's new and novel is the killer of creativity, the foundation of mediocrity and the enemy of great marketing.

At the same time, your marketing budget cannot be spent on every hare-brained idea that comes along. Here's where testing can play an important role. Taking a risk, pushing the edge (or even stepping over the edge at times) is essential for great marketing. Trying new ideas, testing, learning and revising are essential to keep content fresh and separate you from the crowd.

Marketers must be willing to explore new tactics and take risks—and then they need to listen, measure and monitor the response. A/B testing, multi-variant testing—or just measuring the clicks and conversions—will help refine and refresh the way you engage with your audience.

Conclusion

“Marketing has changed—and changed fast—leaving marketers adrift without the foundation, mindset and skills they need to master the dynamics of digital engagement”, so says Ardath Albee in her great book ‘Digital Relevance: Developing Marketing Content and Strategies that Drive Results’.

It’s true. Many marketers are *adrift*—and they will remain so as long as they continue to bring old habits to new situations and work in relative isolation from the rest of the enterprise. If you’d like to explore ways of improving your digital marketing activities—[click here!](#)

About Espresso B2B Marketing

Founded 10 years ago, **Espresso B2B Marketing** is one of the first agencies to focus solely on digital content marketing. Since then, we’ve run more than 250 projects for companies that include Autodesk, Capgemini, IBM and ServiceNow - plus hundreds of midmarket companies and raw startups.

Specializing in marketing strategies for software, services, SaaS and cloud companies, we’re a full-service B2B digital agency committed to delivering holistic programs to enhance your brand, build your market and meet your revenue objectives.

With every project we bring experience, energy, enthusiasm and a creative sparkle that will differentiate you from others.



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