Applying Modern Digital Strategies to Business-to-Business Marketing

January 2016

Introduction

Marketing strategies have transformed quicker over the past five years than in the entire last century thanks to the evolution of Web 2.0. The use of social media, digital advertising, mobility and big data is disrupting traditional marketing methods. By emphasizing user-generated content, usability and interoperability, businesses can create memorable customer experiences across a constantly changing sea of digital platforms.

As marketers attempt to keep up with these advances and create relevant experiences for their customers, many challenges can arise, particularly in the business-to-business (B2B) sector. Today's customers have high expectations when it comes to the how, when and where of marketing messaging due to the digital innovations of business-to-consumer (B2C) brands.

Implementing digital marketing best practices can be challenging for a B2B organization. It requires marketing leaders to be more agile with a greater focus on data and customer experience than ever before. However, failure to adopt a digital strategy can cause a business to lose relevance in the new market.

As a consumer brand, Dell is known for its progressive marketing programs that utilize cutting-edge technology, big data and social media. With proven success in the B2C sector, Dell executives realized the need to transform the B2B marketing program to gain a competitive edge.

The Services Marketing team worked with consultants to develop a plan to implement a customer-centric, digital-powered marketing model. We hope our findings on digital marketing best practices can help you identify potential barriers to digital transformation (and how to overcome them) on your path to customer-centric marketing success.

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Moving beyond traditional marketing methods

Digital techniques can accelerate exponential growth in your customer base and increase brand awareness. The difficulty lies in how to effectively integrate these technologies to demonstrate healthy pipeline growth and higher conversion rates.

Some of the key challenges of implementing digital marketing initiatives are outlined below.

Customer experience design
Is end-to-end management of the customer experience important for a B2B organization? It's interesting how customer experience is often thought of as purely a B2C concern.

However, that isn't true. The B2B customer journey is complex, unique and requires a great deal of planning to orchestrate successfully. In fact:

- B2B organizations often have multiple influencers for buying decisions, calling for more comprehensive research.
- B2B buyers are sometimes influenced more by downstream demands and economic factors than by their own preferences.
- B2B companies are frequently required to maintain a global-local ecosystem, which requires effort to maintain a consistent global brand and customer experience — while staying flexible enough to meet local needs.

These complexities make it even more essential to manage the customer experience from end to end. However, there are a few challenges on the path to understanding customer expectations better, including:

- While discrete interactions are captured at customer touch points, they aren't always used to create a comprehensive view of customer interaction.
- A personalized customer experience across the buying journey can help increase customer loyalty — but without the knowledge and analytics required, this is a difficult ask for B2B companies.
- Failure to anticipate the needs of a customer using touch points along the consumer journey demonstrates an inability to meet customer needs overall.

Content is king
Developing effective content for B2B marketing is on everyone's to-do list these days. Whether your organization's goal is to gain traffic or increase leads or sales, sound content marketing tactics attract customers, keep their attention and build trust. But creating high-quality content that delivers results is not an easy feat.

In order to create effective B2B marketing content, you need:

- A well-defined content strategy with automated content preparation and reporting processes
- An abundance of content with a process for employees to participate in content generation
- Access to innovative digital platforms and techniques, such as video briefings and mobile, to increase customer engagement
- The ability to generate dynamic content specific to viewer preferences
- Analytics and data to determine the effectiveness of content

Customer data types

Engagement profile
Data primarily generated from digital engagements, such as from purchases, research, inspiration or employment and education records

Psychographic profile
Data primarily generated from social interaction, including personal expression, likes, needs, wants, affinity and clout

Physiological profile
Data generated from objects that are worn for specific lifestyles — wearables such as glasses, watches, fitness trackers and smart textiles

Consumption profile
Data generated from devices that are owned, such as mobile devices, automobiles and home entertainment (also called the Internet of Things)

An in-depth view of the customer: A critical milestone for actionable insights

A 360-degree view of the customer takes all available and meaningful information about the customer into account to drive better engagement, return on investment (ROI) and long-term loyalty. But organizations are still struggling to effectively collect, analyze and act on this data. Without this capability, it is difficult to intercept the customer early in their journey and, in turn, influence the buying process.

Shifting measurement to customer success

With the tools available today, there's no excuse for not being able to measure the ROI of digital marketing investments. Yet, it can be relatively easy to lose sight of what is important to a customer. When tying customer metrics to overall marketing metrics, you need to be able to answer the following questions:

- How focused are you on collecting a complete view of customers? Is there potential to dig deeper to learn which of your products or services are resonating with customers (and why)?
- What outcomes are your most profitable and loyal customers looking for?
- How do you measure and manage newer segments of marketing, including social media?
- Should you focus solely on revenue from your marketing activities or also consider the benefits that can be attributed to value-based marketing?

Approaches and benefits

While all organizations have varying degrees of digital maturity, there are four areas to focus on to ensure digital marketing success: measurement and reporting, organizational change, lead management and marketing mix. Whether you're reaching prospective buyers outside your organization or looking to improve communications with internal audiences (for example, your sales staff), evaluating these areas can help you build a roadmap for integrating digital initiatives into your marketing programs.

Measurement and reporting

To gather audience insights, understand content performance, set benchmarks and track key performance indicator progress, you need a strong measurement and reporting program. Otherwise, gathering actionable insights can be cumbersome and time consuming. You can improve your organization's measurement and reporting capabilities by considering the following options:

- **Social media listening and influencer tracking:** If your organization is active in social media or building online communities, a social media listening tool can help you monitor conversations about your brand on a variety of social media platforms. If you don't know who is talking about your brand or about issues in your industry, it is near impossible to engage potential customers in conversation. It's also important to gather insights into your audience's preferences. Tracking relevant brand conversation can help shape your marketing strategy and create a more personal experience for your customers.
- **Streamlined reporting:** Compiling reports can quickly become a full-time job, but it doesn't have to be an overwhelming task. You can easily automate your reporting process using dashboards that display various data streams. A central dashboard that updates in real time can give your entire team access to critical data and enable them to tailor programs based on the results.

Organizational change

The implementation of new technologies is not enough to transform your marketing strategy for the digital age. A complete shift in the cultural mindset — from the top down — is needed. Training is important to ensure team members have the skill sets necessary for managing and utilizing your new technologies and programs. A few ways to enable cultural change include:

- **Participate in industry events:** Learn from your peers. Identify conferences, webinars and local meet-ups where marketing professionals are gathering to discuss digital marketing trends. Making thought leadership and learning opportunities a priority in your marketing budget can help your staff (from leaders to management) embrace digital trends.
- **Make strategic hires:** Don't be afraid to hire well-known subject matter experts to manage new digital marketing initiatives. A few strategic hires can give your organization the in-house expertise needed to develop and run a digital strategy, train staff and bring new ideas to the table.

- **Utilize gamification and empower your employees:** A successful modern marketing team thinks digitally. It's important to motivate staff to embrace this new way of thinking and shed old behavior. Invest in gamification techniques that make new processes and learning fun. Find ways to empower employees to take on thought leadership projects and help shape the company culture.

Lead management

If your marketing team wants to increase ROI for your digital programs, an effective lead management approach is essential. Though the initial buying journey is largely in customers' hands, as they use the internet and social networks to research options, there are still a few areas you can address, including:

- **Lead verification, routing and nurturing:** Your digital marketing programs should be attracting potentials buyers. But how are you capturing and verifying leads? What happens to a lead once it's captured? How will you close the deal? It's not enough to put content out there. Your team must also gauge how well it's generating leads, the viability of those leads and what you can do to convert leads into sales based on your knowledge of the customer.
- **Customer relationship management (CRM):** It's likely your organization has a CRM tool, but is it being used effectively? To ensure the right data is captured, resulting in reports that can help you tailor communications to your prospects' specific needs, you need to consider all your customer touch points and how your CRM will help you build a 360-degree view of the customer from that data.

Marketing mix

The right technologies will help improve your team's efficiencies and effectiveness, while also offering insight into your target audience. But evaluating your marketing mix is also necessary to meet the needs of your customers. This includes:

- **Paid media mix:** With increased audience knowledge, you can improve your strategy for ad investments. Social media advertising, native ads, mobile ads, search and digital display are just a few vehicles for delivering your messaging to prospective customers.
- **Personalization:** While ample content is key to customers finding you in search and on social networks, targeted content can improve the overall customer experience. For every step of the buying journey, you need to create content tailored to your customer by utilizing data gathered during the lead management process.

Conclusion

Our approach to modern marketing adoption for B2B organizations is by no means definitive. That's the best part of the discipline and the underlying technology: Companies are so different, and there is no one-size-fits-all fix. It takes learning through doing to find what works best for your company and employees. Through internal consulting, we were able to pinpoint the barriers to fully transforming Dell Services Marketing into a best-in-class digital marketing organization, and the solutions to overcome these challenges.

While we were able to find what works best for us, we hope your B2B organization can use this as a starting place to explore your own digital capabilities. Digital transformation does not happen overnight. You need to invest in solution sets based on your organization's unique challenges and current state to lay the foundation for long-term ROI.

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About Dell Digital Business Services

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For more information please visit Dell.com/DigitalBusinessServices or contact a Dell representative.

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