

FROM IDEAS TO ACTION

*Why Marketers Must Evolve Great
Brand Stories into Stellar Experiences
for Customers*



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OVERVIEW

If ever there were a profession suffering from motion sickness, it's marketing. Upheaval from a sea of constant change is truly the new norm. Sure footing is a thing of the past. As we look to deliver value within our organizations, we find that our arms need to span greater breadths and depths. First we thought alignment with sales was big. Then we took on technology. Now we see another progression as conversations expand into creating experiences for customers. It's no longer enough to tell the story of the good you deliver. Now, brands have to pony up on that expectation at every touchpoint with uber relevant experiences.

We've seen great companies make the transition from traditional marketing into content and bring

it to life through stellar storytelling. That's still comfortably within the realm of expectations for marketing's responsibilities. But there's more looming on the horizon and we're picking up speed fast.

Marketers must take our deep understanding of customers and use that to take action to drive revenue. In this case, it means opening up our arms to embrace all the experiences that customers have with our brand. From awareness to customer retention, from sales to service - the interactions that people have are prime considerations in every marketing channel. Reviews of a company's performance trump claims in high-priced advertisements. This creates brand value - not just product value - reach and awareness. This is

the difference between the brands that commit to serving customers first and foremost verses those that only want to sell products.

The emotions people feel when they interact with a brand is the emotion they attach to the brand. Happy. Sad. Frustrated. Relieved. It's the sum of digital, social and face-to-face connections that determine whether someone becomes a customer and how long they stay. It's no longer enough to tell the story of why a brand is different. It's time to put ideas into action and organize around creating stellar experiences that are separate and distinct from the products and services that we sell. This must be our core strategy for creating and growing the value of brands.

THE EXPERIENCE EVOLUTION

“Turn and face the strange ... ch-ch-changes.”

— David Bowie

Where do you begin? Wherever you are in your marketing journey today. If you're smart and want to stay employable, you've already come to the realization that your role has changed drastically over the last few years. The 20 percent of marketers who think their job will basically stay the same through 2020 have their heads in the sand. Don't be one of them.



Traditional marketing

Since the dawn of marketing companies have been selling in a seemingly sensible way: trumpet features and benefits, advertise prices, argue the value prop and, of course, location, location, location. It's what Michigan State University professor Edmund Jerome McCarthy summarized in 1960 with his idea of the Marketing Mix, which we know as the classic 4 Ps of marketing – product, price, place and promotion. While revolutionary at the time, the 4 Ps are woefully outdated in today's digital world where pushing products does more to push audiences away than it does to attract them.

Classic marketing tactics won't go away completely, and that's OK. They do, however, need to adjust for today's digital world. Marketers must bring classic tactics under a more integrated strategy that connects all functions of the business. That's where many marketers still fall short.

Content marketing

Consumers took hold of the traditional world of marketing. They skip TV commercials and ignore magazine ads. The odds are higher of getting struck by lightning,

winning the lottery or surviving a plane crash than getting someone to click on a banner ad. This has led to the sensational growth of content marketing over the last 10 years. The idea is that content, not just products, solves problems. Building trust earlier by helping people solve problems leads to deeper relationships that drive greater revenue and loyalty.

Relevancy is key here, and when that happens results are far beyond what brands experienced with traditional marketing. When Julie Fleischer served as the director of data, content, and media for Kraft Food Group, her team realized four times the ROI using content marketing than with traditional marketing investments. This is why businesses are shifting more of their marketing budget toward content marketing. Research on content marketing trends for 2016 from the Content Marketing Institute shows that the best B2B marketers commit 42 percent of their budget to content marketing and B2C dedicates 32 percent. That's up 5 percent and 7 percent respectively from the previous year.

Xerox reported stellar results from one of their content marketing programs aimed at connecting with decision makers in their top 30 accounts.

They partnered with Forbes to create a magazine that delivered relevant business tips. A phenomenal 70 percent of targeted companies interacted with the microsite, growing readership 300-400 percent over anything they had experienced in previous email campaigns. They added 20,000 new contacts to their subscription base, generated more than 1,000 scheduled appointments and turned up a whopping \$1.3 billion in pipeline revenue.

Source: TopRank Marketing



Brand storytelling

Storytelling isn't a selling tool, but rather a way to build relationships with customers and passionate supporters over time. A strong brand story conveys the type of value delivered and helps audiences easily remember what that is. It's an important aspect of content marketing that's usually overlooked or not done well. Storytelling is particularly important in complex B2B buying decisions that involve dozens of people over several years. It's how you move beyond talking about what you sell (products and services) and talk about the difference you make in the lives of your audience.

Stories have characters - heroes, villains and mentors. They have a setting. They have plots that unfold

over time. And they have themes. The same must be true for story's function in marketing. Brands that make themselves the hero of the story waste opportunities to become relevant to their audience. Customers' worlds revolve around the customer, not what a brand sells. Companies need to evolve stories that help customers identify their problems, find a solution and help their wishes come true in the end.

It's only through a solid storytelling foundation instilled within an organizational culture that companies can springboard into creating stellar experiences for customers. But there's a stark contrast between the stories brands tell and the experiences they create.

“The story-making process enables us to simplify complex information into the core essence of understanding.”

— Y. Gabriel
Storytelling in Organizations

“Customers equate brands with experiences. From customer service to the digital journey to retail ambiance, our association with a brand is based on how it makes us feel.”

— Forbes writer Daniel Newman
Forbes

Customer experience

One of the reasons marketers have a hard time shifting into an experience mindset is because they don't understand the totality of what they need to think about. Marketing automation brought the spotlight on moving prospects through a buying process. But customers don't care where they are in your organization's structure. They care about the interactions they have with your brand. Instead of demand gen and MQLs/SQLs, marketers need to bridge silos and create rich experiences for customers that make them want to come back for more content that's valuable, entertaining and inspires continual engagement.

More and more, the customer experience is seen as the major competitive differentiator in every industry. By consistently delivering personal and memorable experiences, companies can create a distinct offering that engages customers and creates advocates and loyalists.

Accenture points out this growing trend in their report, 2015 B2B Customer Experience. While “we're B2B” has been a scapegoat for performance, B2B companies are being impacted by expectations that customers bring from the B2C world. This is why...

86 percent

of B2B executives consider the customer experience provided during sales and service interactions to be very important.

41 percent

put the customer experience at the top of their list of strategic priorities.

79 percent

are convinced that a differentiated sales and service customer experience has a direct effect on business results.

78 percent

believe it provides a competitive advantage.

This is something that global manufacturing company Emerson understands. CMO Kathy Button Bell and her team put market research front and center in understanding customer needs and expectations. By beginning everything with market research and development - what Button Bell calls "Stage Gate Zero" - she took the voice of the customer (VOC) and backed it up to research and development, the beginning of everything the company creates and delivers. This wasn't marketing looking to improve marketing's performance. It was marketing driving how the company performs by putting the experience of their customers first and then understanding how to drive value around their needs.

Button Bell knew the stickler with many B2B companies is that they wait until stage five or six - when they've started producing a product - before showing it to customers and asking for feedback. But that's too late. At Emerson, she wanted to instill VOC into the earliest stages of product development for a more innovative approach to delivering stellar experiences to customers. Many of the answers to their customers' problems weren't product-focused anymore. For example, customers may want a single invoice for a complex bundle of products and solutions or a way for Emerson to deliver better service.

Button Bell then took a step back for a bigger perspective to understand what challenged Emerson's

customers the most - a talent drought. Realizing that without an infusion of young talent, both Emerson and its customer base would struggle to bring new ideas and innovation to the industry. This 125-year old engineering-driven company saw that it needed to take a deep dive into how it was perceived by engineering graduates who were being wooed with the likes of Netflix, Apple and other companies more enticing than Emerson. It also needed to entice more talent into engineering majors and keep them in the profession.

To connect with a younger generation, Button Bell partnered with internet star Hank Green. A relevant, wildly popular 'Geek-Chic' celebrity, Green and his brother started a video blog in 2007 called Vlogbrothers. Today, their YouTube channel has more than 2 million subscribers. Together, Button Bell and Green launched Emerson's #IloveSTEM (science, technology, engineering and math) initiative which sought to inspire and empower the next generation of engineers by connecting science to technological advances and modern convenience.

"Future innovators who will be our employees, our customers and business leaders need STEM education today," Button Bell said. "Emerson's STEM focus is influencing the company's marketing and recruiting efforts, and this first-of-its-kind campaign for the company is designed to entertain and inspire current engineers as well as a future generation of business people."



"As customers get savvier, especially in B2B, they look for things like efficiency, productivity and cost savings because financial demands are stringent. If you can make doing business easier for your customers, you're golden."

— Kathy Button Bell
CMO, Emerson

The Emerson.com/IloveSTEM site goes beyond storytelling and delivers a content-driven experience that brings a science-loving community together. Students use the video-rich site to understand concepts they study in class. Teachers draw on it to support one-on-one learning. Adults use it because topics are fun, covering everything from origami-inspired pop-up shelters to closing the gender gap in tech to recharging an iPhone using fire.

MARKETING, TAKE THE WHEEL

“86 percent of CMOs and senior marketing execs believe they will own the end-to-end customer experience by 2020.”

— *The Economist Intelligence Unit*

Just because B2B executives believe customer experience is the top differentiator, doesn't mean they know what to do. Accenture's report also highlighted executives' declining confidence in their ability to deliver a differentiated experience for customers - dropping by 8 percent in a single year to reach 32 percent in 2015.

Part of the angst is no clear picture of leadership; not every company had a dedicated customer experience team. That's where marketing steps in. Engagement, typically, was measured around brand love. While that's still

important, how that manifests is changing greatly. The Economist Intelligence Unit points this out in their report *The Rise of the Marketer: Driving Engagement, Experience and Revenue*. The customer experience is seen as key to competitive advantage. Because of that, marketers have, by default, expanded into managing customer experiences. But over the next three to five years, 75 percent of marketers say they will be responsible for the end-to-end experience over the customer's lifetime.

This only makes sense. Marketers get their hands dirty in data, monitor

social conversations, constantly tweak their understanding of customer voice and roll out content strategies. Marketing is the storyteller, the market research arm and often the face of the company. We're the promise makers around what customers expect and we must also train the promise keepers - our employees - to deliver stellar experiences. Marketers are tech-savvy and well-rounded. It's the only group that touches everyone across the organization, and its purpose is to grow audiences and create differentiating experiences.

DESIGNING THE EXPERIENCE

When it comes down to it, orchestrating experiences for customers isn't easy, but it's certainly doable. Companies that move beyond content marketing and storytelling do so by starting with the following process:

1

Work from the outside in.

Most brands start from the inside and work their way out. What's the branding platform for our company and then how do I get that message out to as many people as possible. This is backwards. Before you can create a great experience, you have to put the customer first. That means you have to work from the outside in - start with what matters most to your customers and reverse engineer that into the product or service you deliver. Instead of forcing what you sell onto your audience, start with what matters most to your customers - efficiency, minimized risk, business growth, etc. - and work backward into how to solve these problems. Along the way, you may find brilliant ways to tweak what you sell and differentiate your company from everyone else in the marketplace.

2

Second that emotion.

Start with the experience you want to create - put yourself in the customer's shoes - and what emotion are you trying to counter? If they're feeling angst and fear, then your experience must deliver confidence and peace of mind. Keep empathy for your customers front and center as you work backwards.

3

Collaborate across departments.

Marketing may be driving the customer experience, but the best insights and perspectives come from across the organization. You wouldn't develop and launch a product without involvement from research and development, finance, IT and so forth. Don't do it with an experience, either.

4

Let function trump form.

Look at the purpose of the experience. Let go of the temptation to let your product or service drive the story, and instead examine and evaluate the needs of your customer first. This should dictate the content and not the other way around.

5

Be agile.

Smart marketing in this day and age requires a release-and-adjust approach. Customers and markets change, and not everything you try will resonate. Those who are willing to pivot will win the day.

6

Listen up.

To truly dial in your approach, get feedback. Your sales team may be your best eyes and ears on the ground, and of course, the voice of the customer is the one that matters most. Social media can be a great tool here, as can face-to-face meetings during which listening, not talking or defending, is front and center.

7

Measure what matters.

We're looking for metrics that show the progression from meaningful experiences toward valuable contributions to the business. Set your goal using this framework: Contribution + Time Frame + Constraint. An example goal would be to increase qualified leads by 10% in 6 months with only a 5% budget increase. Now, work backwards from the number of leads and cost per lead to understand how many email or blog subscribers it took to get there (along with other indicators) plus what you learn from seeing the content that your audience actually likes, what they download and what they register for.

FROM EVOLUTION TO REVOLUTION

Modern marketing is all about creating contextually relevant experiences for customers. Customers move at different speeds and across different devices. Buyers are smarter and better informed. They have greater expectations for tailored solutions and how their suppliers serve them.

Companies that get content-driven experiences right rally advocates and evangelists to their brand. They convert loyal customers and let the voice of the customer influence everything from how the company sells to what it sells. Learning how to evolve from traditional marketing to content marketing to brand storytelling and then content-driven customer experiences has never been more critical to the livelihood of a brand.





CARLA JOHNSON

ABOUT TYPE A COMMUNICATIONS

Since 2001, Carla Johnson has helped marketers unlock, nurture and strengthen their storytelling muscle so they can create delightful customer experiences. As President of Type A Communications, she works as a trusted advisor at the highest level of blue-chip brands to establish open conversations, instill creative confidence and inspire an environment of receptivity that develops highly prized teams and stellar business results. Carla has worked with companies that include American Express, Dell, Emerson, Motorola Solutions, Mercedes Benz, Western Union and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on how to tap into a wellspring of ideas and unveil new ways to bring their brand stories alive in fun and captivating ways.

Recognized as one of the top 20 influencers in content marketing, one of the top 25 in B2B marketing and one of the Top 50 Women in Marketing. Carla's latest book, *Experiences: The 7th Era of Marketing*, teaches marketers how to develop, manage and lead the creation of valuable experiences in their organizations. Carla serves as the Vice Chair on the Executive Board of the Business Marketing Association (a division of the ANA). She previously served as the Vice President of Thought Leadership. Carla consults, speaks and trains on customer experience, brand storytelling, content marketing and creativity. Dig deeper at www.TypeACommunications.com.



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