



The 8 stages of digital marketing success

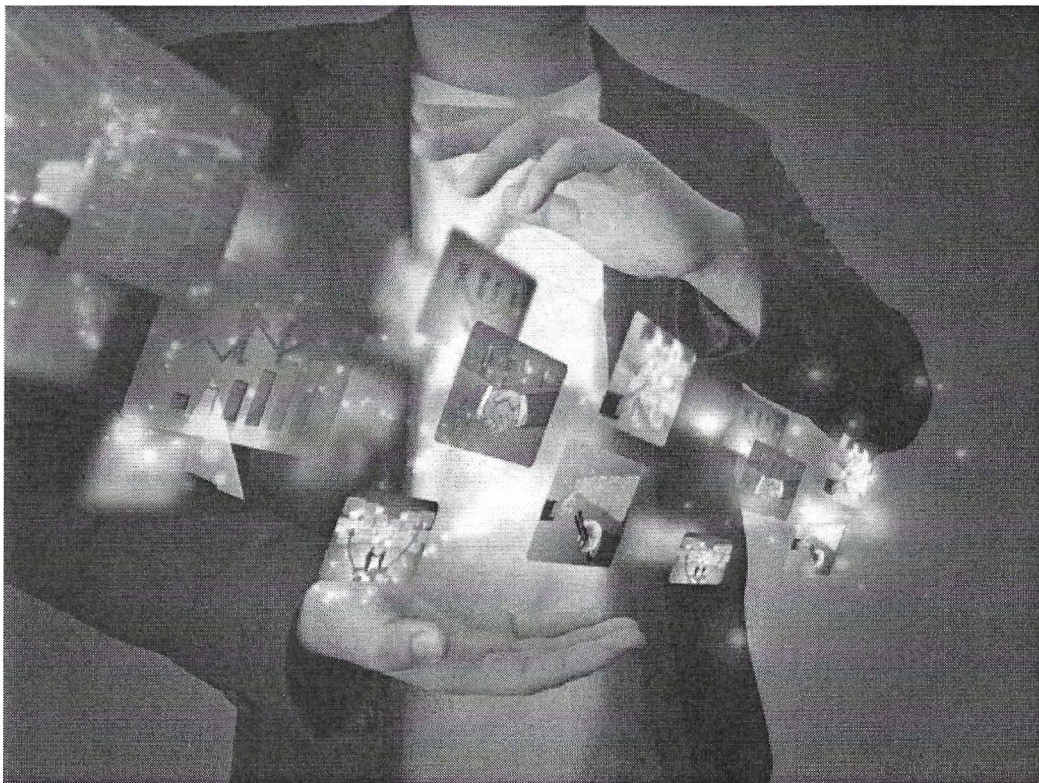


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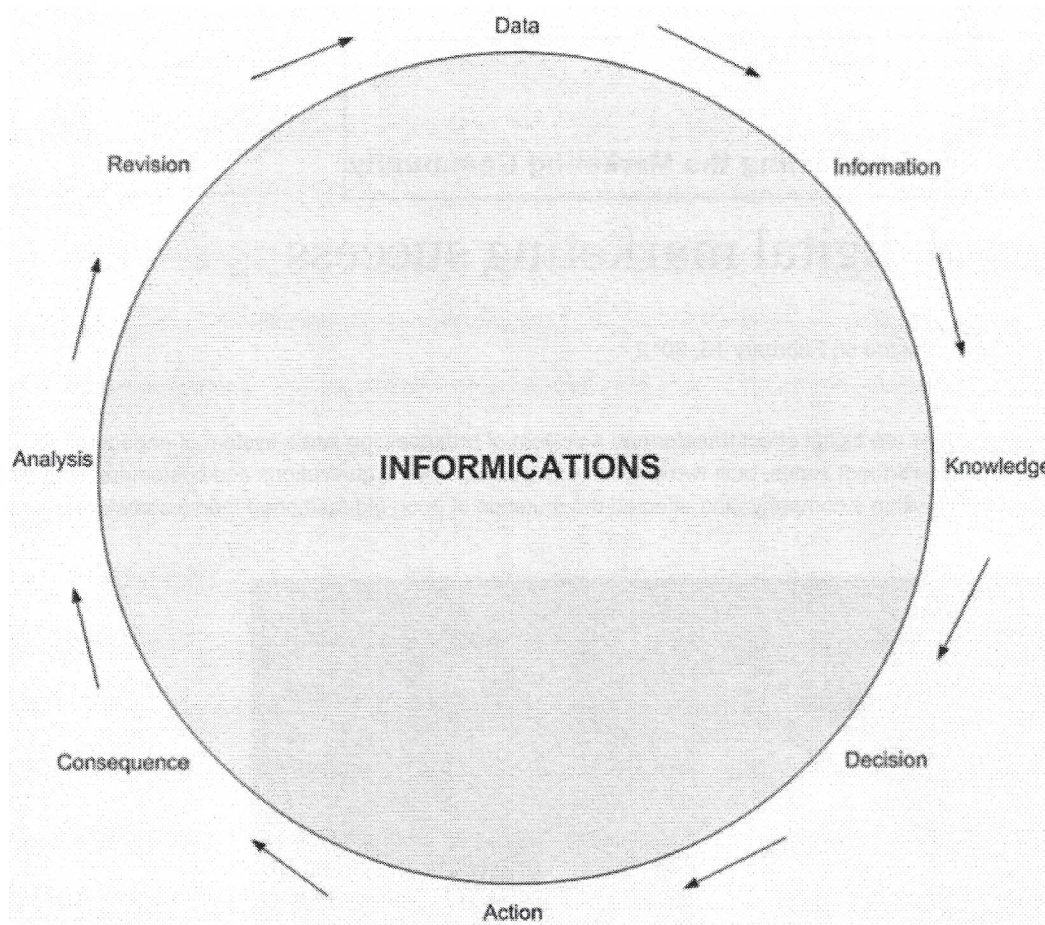
I'm not the first person to tell you how the digital effect transformed a system of broadcasting into a system of engagement, converted boundary lines into empowerment zones, built two-way info bridges between organizations and customers, spawned partnerships between departments within a company, and effected the mutation of good old-fashioned media communications into "Informications."



So, what about digital? Why the confusion and panic? Obviously, change first springs to mind: rapid technological change and its societal expansion, abrupt changes in occupational and organizational roles, and the need for a more collaborative environment at all levels of the business ecosystem.

How do we as marketers approach such disruption? We do it with the right balance of structure and flexibility. First, we apply flexibility by learning to go with the pitch and change our marketing perceptions to recognize the new and improved empowerment model that's now shared. One in which we can participate in and benefit from, ultimately seeing the vast opportunities for all parties in the short and long run.

However, while we go with the pitch, we shouldn't let the bat fly out of our hands by diving into a particular medium or technology just because everyone else is. This is where structure comes into play. We need to embrace our goals, objectives, research, intuition, and business mission. We need a digital marketing roadmap; an Informications roadmap, if you will.



Data

Data, from someone's birth date to how many units sold at full price, are vital elements of a roadmap. Effective business intelligence (BI) and online analytical processing functionality applies mathematical models and algorithms that combine, define, process, and present quality data, and transform the data into meaningful information and knowledge for quicker, better marketing decisions and results.

However, keep in mind that the risk of intrusive practices is particularly high in the relational marketing and web mining fields. Therefore, BI functionality must be ethical and respect the personal rights and privacy of the individual.

Information

It's here where a marketer builds and continually manages two-way info bridges with prospects and existing customers, while leading them to the knowledge stage and beyond. Within this digital infoscape, content "in motion" (conversations, blogs, tweets, forums, Facebook postings, etc.) is usually more valuable (and current) than stagnant, recorded content (brochures, data sheets, press releases, slide shows, etc.).

Being a major traffic intersection on the Informications roadmap, the information stage not only allows for what those on the tech side call "push" (organizational- and consumer-based publishing, online conversations, social befriending, relationship-building, etc.) and "pull" (access, search, QR codes, etc.), but also "capture" interfaces (consumers' smart phone photos and videos, blog excerpts and tweets incorporated into online documents, scanning, etc.). This is where blending official company marketing content with high-quality social content and crowd sourcing can take place.

It's no secret that one of the most powerful marketing effects is word of mouth, but marketers tend to focus too much on the short-term, dialog process. A major force to positively affect a marketer's word-of-mouth profile requires a medium- to long-term plan - and it's simple: excellent product and service quality with great customer service. Sometimes marketers need to let their product

do the "talking," with less trash talk before the game and excellent performance during it. In digital, customers do the real talking - and people listen.

Knowledge

If data represents a codification of single primary entities, and associated forms of information is the outcome of processing meaning for the marketing domain, then knowledge is someone perceiving this meaning clearly enough to make an intelligent decision.

In most cases, the prospect consciously deliberates about deciding one way or another, thinking about the process and product of their intuitive understanding, which feeds into and forms their knowledge. This kind of thinking is not calculative and cannot be captured in features or rules of analytical and information processing models.

Informations recognizes that people seeking knowledge by learning prefer concrete information, even gossip, speculation, and hearsay, versus abstract summary information from a business report or marketing brochure. Occasionally, if a person can afford the time (and the amount of information for knowledge), a decision will be put off until something is learned that leaves only one action that is intuitively compelling.

Marketers can take advantage of the digital world by presenting information in the form of realistic examples and simulations, even allowing prospects to test drive or solve problems by using products or services online or via trial downloads. Many important elements that influence a prospect to make favorable decisions for the marketer are situational, learned through examples and simulations, not from formal, global definitions in terms of context-free features. Enabling prospects to form their own observations and experiences, and allowing them to virtually acquire product skills is a powerful way to reinforce the knowledge stage for positive perceptions and confident, informed decisions.

Decision

Knowledge shares many qualities with information: accuracy, currency, sufficiency, scarcity, overload, relevance, coherence, and clarity. However, unlike information, knowledge passes the baton to the decision stage -- to act in one way or another, to defer, or to not act at all. In other words, it's how the knowledge is delivered that counts.

Most people reach decisions using their intuition, such as experience and knowledge of their specific domain, but this may not be enough when dealing with unstable conditions and frequent changes. In digital marketing, decision makers may examine and compare several options, selecting among them the best decision, given the conditions at hand (i.e. context).

When strategizing messages and engagement for knowledgeable decision-making, marketers need to understand not only a recipient's particular needs at any point in time, but also their situational context (physically, visually, and cognitively), delivering contextual, relevant, and personalized "information shadowing" every step of the way.

For example, a busy mom may be consuming advertising content for diapers from a laptop on the kitchen table while her baby sleeps. Or, with a minute left in the basketball game, a teenager is using his smartphone to look up the cheapest place to have a pizza with his girlfriend. On the other hand, an executive, using her iPad while on a plane to Boston, searches for the latest quarterly results and product reviews of a prospective vendor she'll be meeting tomorrow at an industry conference.

In addition to context, easy access to content that's profiled appropriately for the particular viewer, of the right amount, in an effective format, and appropriate to the output device, is an important part of effective information delivery for optimal decision-making results.

Working closely with information architects, content managers, and information designers with experience in XML publishing, Darwin Information Typing Architecture, Sharable Content Object Reference Model, "component" management systems, native XML databases, etc., marketers will be able to create reusable "Lego blocks" of very personalized content. Such content is reusable for different products/services, audience profiles, demographics, languages, and marketing platforms, and can be readily "localized" for a specific language while explicitly formatted for each output device.

More importantly, this type of native XML database technology can provide search and access capabilities at a very granular ("tweet") level (versus "document" level), thus increasing search relevance, and reducing latency (processing time), which decreases the consumer's transmission costs for mobile devices.

Action and consequence

You've built your kite, now let's see how high it'll go -- if it flies at all. At first glance, the action stage seems to be quite simple, but it's the job of the marketer to study exactly why a particular action (or non-action) was taken, which feeds into the analysis stage.

Consequences have a direct relationship with action outcomes: cheaper, better, easier, total disappointment, law suits, rebates, missed opportunities, etc. They surface in the form of customer testimonials, online social dialog, customer support records, trade show conversations, questions -- the list goes on. Again, it's the job of the marketer to address consequences at every turn, and to know how to channel them back into the Informications loop.

Analysis

Some marketing executives have a penchant for analytics -- as if it's the only factor in their marketing equation. The output of the analysis stage is to identify the most critical and relevant analytical results vis-à-vis your short- and long-term business objectives and well thought-out performance metrics.

And, it's more than that: Executives, managers, and consultants have a wealth of true business expertise that only comes from years of concrete experience in real situations. This invaluable source of business savvy and intuition must not be supplanted by analytics entirely -- it would be a huge mistake to do so.

Marrying human intuition with software analytics and business agility is the best recipe for your digital approach to marketing communications.

Revision

When it comes to revising strategies and initiating marketing campaigns, experienced managers should not attempt to understand familiar problems and opportunities in purely analytical terms by using calculative rationality, but realize that detached deliberation about the validity of current, real-life situations and their intuitions will improve decision-making.

However, even when an intuitive decision seems obvious, it may not be right. Executives may be too deeply involved in the situation -- viewing it from one perspective and holding certain expectations. Wise managers are collaborative ones. They'll ask trusted aides for their perceptions and consider their input as a valued factor in their final equation.

By mixing analytical results with business savvy, "what if" analyses are carried out to evaluate the effects on the performance determined by variations and parameter changes. If applicable, brick -and-mortar analytics can be added as a factor, along with semantics as to why customers purchased or did not purchase.

Case management software may be able to help management decide on optimal revisions and directives. This type of software can provide valuable guidance at each step of the decision process. It's capable of building an ever-growing knowledge base of best practices, and, where applicable, can be configured to baseline mistakes.

Based on what has and has not worked in the past, expert managers should not form their decisions solely on formulas applied to facts, as they did as a novice or even as a competent manager. Unquestionably accepting recommendations from web-based analytical tools would most likely degrade an expert's decision-making.

Info Bridge

Building and maintaining a two-way "info bridge" with your customers and prospects is the centerpiece and foundation of Informications.

When teaching voice delivery, I ask my voice-over students to visualize themselves by asking the following questions: Who are you? What is the purpose of your info bridge? Is it knowledge transfer? Instructions? A conversation with a trusted friend? Hard sell? Soft sell? Participatory? Customer service? Responding to complaints?

After the preceding questions, I ask: Who are you speaking with? I then suggest they visualize a "back story" for the sender and receiver of the message, thinking not only of personas and scenarios, but of the demographic, psychological, and physical contexts.

In summary, don't drown in the incessant waves of socio-tech and the techno-buzz. It's not about that. It's about people, process, and objectives. It's about empathy.

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