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'What the Hell, Let's Try It!' Time for the Next Gen of Integrated Marketing

By Marsha Lindsay on Oct 17, 2011



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Like it or not, the '80s are over. And with rapidly evolving technologies changing the game every day, it's time for business leaders to innovate rapidly and obsessively with the hunger of a challenger -- or throw in the white towel.

The world has become so much more complex since the practice of integrated marketing was born in the mid-1980s. And an overwhelming case can be made that a new, "next gen" approach to integrated marketing is needed.

Unfortunately, the sour economy and priority for self-preservation has prompted many companies to view

integrated marketing as a means to cost savings and efficiency and not as a sophisticated marketing strategy.

Optimization is a side benefit, while the real purpose of integrated marketing remains growing your brand by inspiring and managing relationships in a way that drives timeless value in your customer's eyes.

A framework for this, customized for the challenges of the 21st century, requires:

- A master strategy, which focuses on creating a unique and timeless value proposition;
- A set of flexible tactical principles to deal with the changing dynamics of new touchpoints, competitive threats, new technologies, rapid convergence and emerging opportunities; and
- The talent and mindset to pull it off.

21st Century Framework for Integrated Marketing:

1. Re-evaluate your orthodoxies.

Double-check that the best practices and strategies you use to grow your brand are still true today. For example, the 80/20 rule that many hold dear (20 percent of customers provide 80 percent of your business) may not still be true. Research by the Ehrenberg Bass Institute of Marketing Science says that, rather than 80/20, it's more like 50/20, and that 20 percent of customers are not the same every year.

2. Focus on new customers as profitable growth targets.

So many plans prioritize current customers at the expense of getting new customers, when the latter are the means to profitable growth.

Forrester Research has argued that a brand's most valuable customer today is the one who spreads favorable word of mouth. Research discovered that customers who like and recommend a brand the most are in fact its newest customers. The longer people are with a brand the less they talk about it.

3. Create a role for your brand in your consumer's life.

Marketers who try to differentiate themselves with features and functions won't achieve a strategic advantage. Instead, psychology tells us that meaning is driven by a person's subconscious desire to become who they aspire to be. The universal needs that drive people to seek change are timeless. When brands identify a singularly meaningful role that resonates with one of these universal needs, the consumer will feel compelled to include you in their lives.

Create and organize all your products, services, channels, content, conversations, experiences, rituals and symbols around that meaning in order to make it authentic, true and memorable. For a marketer, this approach provides brand management with a system that integrates everything.

4. Connect this meaning to 21st-century trends.

Next, take the meaningful role your brand plays in people's lives and bring it to the forefront of people's consciousness by linking it to the culture, events and norms of today.

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5. Add a reality check to your ROI dashboard.

I started to count the brands I used in a day. Even before I went to work it totaled 47. I'll bet at least half have the ambition of getting me to their website, blogging about them, or liking them on Facebook. If I were to advocate or be in a "relationship" with half the brands I encounter in a day I'd not have time to do anything else.

Every brand will need more realistic objectives for how much it can expect from each targeted customer. To measure this, you'll want a dashboard that focuses on what's important and what's realistic, but also what WILL be measurable in the next two to three years so you can prepare now. Measure what actually makes your brand grow, not just what can be measured.

6. Consider yourself "always in beta."

Google's mantra has long been: Always in Beta. It's given them amazing growth, pre-emptive offerings, and perceived value in excess of their revenue.

Always in Beta is THE mindset for anyone marketing in the 21st century, because even the most successful among us can be pre-empted by others who are more hungry or innovative.

Let loose the creative minds at your company to explore, experiment, and find new ways to reach and wow your customers.

7. Have the hunger and guts of a challenger.

In today's global, fast-paced economy anything and everything can change overnight. This means we're all challenger brands now.

Challengers seek out state-of-the-art knowhow on what it takes to truly grow a brand today. They budget for what it takes to grow, beyond their current share.

For advantages, they focus on the edges of their category and society and design -- because that's where disruptive ideas for new products, services and business models can be discovered.

They innovate continuously, obsessively, quickly. They anticipate what's next, seek advantage, and then say, "What the hell: Let's try it."

8. To integrate, over-communicate.

When you think about it, "integrated marketing" actually means surrounding your targeted consumer -- as they live "in" the media. Over-communicating ensures that you're doing enough to actually change people's attitudes and behaviors.

Internally, over-communicating is the insurance you're doing enough to actually change the attitudes and behaviors of your co-workers and agencies on what needs to be integrated.

9. Be the agent of change you seek.

If not you, who? Make it your mission to be your team's Chief Integrator; your department's Chief De-Complexification Officer:

Become Chief Challenger of the Status Quo and make a case for the new framework of integrated marketing that can grow your brand in the 21st century.

What the hell! Don't just open people's eyes to the outdated orthodoxies they should unlearn, show your colleagues what's replacing them: Appoint yourself Chief of What's Next.

Are you up for it?

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