



Marketing Management In A Web 2.0 World

| A collection of online marketing best practices |

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Forward:

MARKETING MANAGEMENT IN A WEB 2.0 WORLD

As much as I love a new good marketing book - and am indeed presenting one here - I always have a hard time buying one as, I feel like I'm being suckered. I look at the titles which proclaim that the revolution is here, and that I'm somehow missing out on some "new rules" or that there's a "big secret." I feel like it's marketing on top of marketing on top of marketing.

This is why I continually turn back to the classic Marketing Management, by Phillip Kotler. This is the book I wore out in college and still sits on my bookshelf today. Forty years after its initial publication the methods for managing marketing are still as relevant as ever.

This book is always ranked among the top 200 titles on Amazon.com - and has been named among the 50 best business books of all time. In fact the latest edition (the 12th) is due to come out in 2008 - and you can bet that I'll be purchasing it.

Having said that, there's no doubt the world has changed since Kotler wrote his seminal work. The Internet has (as the cliché goes) changed everything.

Now, I've only got 13 years of doing this, so I'm a relative noob. But, all but three of those years have been focused in the Internet space. And in my experience, success in online marketing is not a huge secret. There is no revolution. And, there certainly isn't a list of rules that guarantee success.

The only thing that changes is the customer, and the tools we use to communicate with the customer. This mini-book is a collection of articles I've written this year, most of them published to imedia Connection. While certainly not comprehensive, there are hopefully a few nuggets of goodness that you can actually apply to your organization.

And, if not... Well, at least you can say that you didn't have to buy it....

Introduction:

I think we can all agree that, at this point, the term “Web 2.0” is overhyped. In fact, in my “2007 Predictions” article for iMedia Connection, I said this would be the year that it jumped the shark.

As digital marketers, we’re being told that we need to (by tomorrow COB) develop a blog, produce podcasts, provide mechanisms to rate our content, accept user comments and create the new mashup of digg/YouTube/del.icio.us and wrap it all in Ajax. And, these days, we can be in such a hurry to implement these new technologies that we forget the fact that they should actually serve some function. In other words, we spend all our time getting the house ready for the party, and we forget to send the invitations.

As stewards of our online messaging – whether through a website, email campaigns, advertising, blogs, et cetera – we are faced with a seemingly endless barrage of new technologies. Heck, I plead guilty to suggesting a few of these new technologies myself. Now, many of these new technologies can indeed take our online marketing efforts to the next level. And our customers are going to come to expect these capabilities from us in the near term.

But, just as important is our ability to deliver on the promise of Web 2.0. Don’t forget the over arching lessons of Web 1.0 circa 1997 to 2000: Don’t build technology just because you can (in fact, you shouldn’t really “build” technology ever again, but that’s a different book). Also, don’t expect people to come just because you build it. Finally, and most importantly, don’t build Web 2.0 technology until you are ready to support it with the effort and, maybe even more importantly, the content it will require.

What follows are a series of articles that discuss various challenges that we have as online marketers in a Web 2.0 world. From working with the IT group on developing new technology, developing an ROI argument for our finance people, to working with new types of vendors and agencies.

In short, it’s a brand new world for online marketers – and we’re setting out to discover it.

Going Micro for Macro Results:

Originally Published: March, 2007

What You'll Learn: Campaign or partner-specific niche-oriented sites can be more effective at driving conversions than corporate or brand sites.

During the Super Bowl this year, I was struck not by the game (ho hum) or the half time show (better than ever and no wardrobe malfunctions), but by the sheer number of advertisers that were finally "getting it" and guiding me to their websites to play off their commercials.

I know this sounds like "duh, isn't everyone," but in fact very few marketers have been doing this. According to a study by Reprise Media, at last year's big game the only advertiser to audibly mention its website was Blockbuster. This year, though, everything was about the web, video and user-generated content.

There are two trends here that really interest me. The first is simply the sheer focus on getting users to go to the web. This isn't any big surprise for us digital marketers, as we are being asked to justify our marketing spend and the web is a sure way to measure our effectiveness.

But the second trend is really interesting, and speaks more to how the web is becoming much more a "platform" for marketing than a vehicle to drive visibility to a corporate website. These new sites are campaign-specific. They can even be "spot" specific.

More than ever, the trend is toward more, smaller websites designed to leverage an experience for the consumer and to drive a specific conversion. Certainly this trend is evidenced by the new types of corporate blogs that seem to pop up all over the place. But even more distinct now are the new designs, content platforms and even brand extensions. For the Super Bowl advertisers, microsites worked in varying degrees. On the positive side, Chevy advertised a contest prior to the big game inviting users to submit ads that would run during the Super Bowl. The company set up a blog-like website at chevycolleaguead.com and received what it called an "overwhelming response."

On the negative side, Snickers set up afterthekiss.com featuring the aftermath of two mechanics that found themselves on the wrong side of, well... let's just leave it there. After an overwhelmingly negative response (or is all publicity good publicity?) the candy company decided to take the site down.

The important point is that both are excellent examples of the importance of employing an easy to use and flexible set of website management tools.

It's not about sites any longer. As the drive for boosting ROI through the web is focused on what kind of reach we can get, websites become less about overarching brand vehicles to which we publish gigantic, ever-disparate HTML pages, and much more like a platform that we leverage to drive specific campaign-oriented content in varying formats.

Take the Chevy campaign microsite for example; that website utilizes YouTube video to show off the video, Technorati tags to appeal to the bloggers and an extraordinarily simple design geared to let users get to the content quickly and

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effectively. Chevy's marketers made it easy for them to publish content, and they made it easy for consumers to add to the site and build the site. In essence, they created a user-generated marketing campaign.

And on the other side of the coin, having the tools to immediately and effectively "retire" a site that doesn't perform well, like Snickers, is a powerful way to maintain control over a brand.

The key is that these microsites can drive conversions that sometimes a corporate site cannot. They also provide a way to distance yourself from the corporate brand and test a concept or a campaign without having the risk of using the corporate URL.

Another side of this is, of course, catering specifically to your customers and partners. So, for example, publishing customer-specific extranets for your largest customers or designing unique microsites that take advantage of a partnership-specific solution are extraordinarily effective ways to provide for effective, targeted content, without breaking the bank or re-architecting your entire infrastructure.

As you look to expand beyond your corporate website, and launch campaign-specific resources centers or campaign-based microsites, look to add these kinds of capabilities to your website management toolkit:

- ▶ Consider technology solutions that enable you to act extraordinarily quickly (within a week or less) to a great idea or opportunity to launch a microsite. Your technology should never be in the way of launching new sites.
- ▶ Consider website management solutions that allow you to integrate with other Web 2.0 applications. For example, can you publish a video on YouTube and easily integrate that into the homepage of your site? Can you schedule this video to change every day?
- ▶ Consider a Web Content Management system that can really be the hub of your online marketing efforts. Consider a CMS that can simultaneously publish HTML content along with your RSS feeds and integrate your content into an email campaign management system. Make sure your CMS can directly import content generated from the users of your website.
- ▶ Consider email campaign management systems that can do more than just send email, but can also enable you to create customized demographics and filters, and that can integrate search results or other types of dynamic content directly into the body of the email.
- ▶ Consider adding the ability to accept open-ended content from your website users. Ask questions that allow them to communicate with you.
- ▶ Consider adding the ability for customers to rate content and add comments to content in order to let the users determine the value (or lack thereof) of the content.

If Web 2.0 is teaching us anything, it's that producing niche-oriented sites that are campaign or partner-specific is becoming easier, not more difficult. As we all start trying to creatively think about how to differentiate ourselves and become more effective, it can sometimes help to have the ability to publish and market "outside of our corporate box." Just make sure you're ready with your tools in case you need to act quickly, either because you're so overwhelmingly successful, or because you... well... get the "kiss of death" ...

Can Web 2.0 Ruin Online Marketing:

Originally Published: April, 2007

What You'll Learn: Review some important Web 2.0 capabilities and some safety tips to help you decide when and how to deploy them.

Let's look at a few Web 2.0 capabilities and some helpful safety tips as you decide when and how to deploy them.

PODCASTING

By its very definition, podcasting refers only to "a media file that is distributed over the internet using syndication feeds for playback on portable media players and personal computers." However, the unwritten rule is that podcasts should be updated frequently. For podcasts to be successful, you need to be prepared to produce them on a regular enough basis that whoever is subscribing will see updates often enough to keep subscribing. Publishing one audio file every few months is not a podcast. If you have an audio file (or several) you would like to make available to your website users, by all means publish them out and link them from your website like you would any other media on your site. But don't market your "podcast" until you're really ready to contribute frequently to this.

National Public Radio offers an excellent example of the benefits to podcasting. NPR now makes all of its shows available via podcasts. Available at any time for listener convenience, NPR now has a much larger audience for niche shows like "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me."

BLOGS

Blogs have certainly become the buzz du jour on the internet, and have really become a favorite staple for marketers to increase their "content footprint" for their websites. Blogs are an excellent online marketing tool for generating search engine optimization, cross-linking and site expansion. However, before you launch your blog, remember that, not unlike a podcast, your users will expect your blog to change frequently. I'm not suggesting that your blog has to change three times a day, but publishing one post every couple of months is not going to give you the traffic you think it might. When committing to a blog, commit to a regular update and stick to it. Additionally, be prepared for your web users to comment on blog postings, and for you to reply to comments. A blog is a conversation, not a soapbox. Make sure you have the tools to monitor the user-generated content on your blog, and to take action on them.

Torn from the headlines, Al Roker's blog is an excellent example of the power of the blogosphere. On the "Today Show" itself, Roker was diplomatic and jovial; yet, in his blog post he called for the "firing/resignation of WFAN/MS-NBC morning host Don Imus" "He and his morning crew referred to the Rutgers Women's basketball team as, among other things, 'nappy-headed hos.' Ugly racism and sexism at its worst," Roker posted on April 11. His initial blog post received a flood of comments and led to a brief on-air comment. What he could not say on the air, he wrote in his blog, thereby adding to the user experience and generating a great deal of visitor interaction.

USER-GENERATED RATINGS & CONTENT

Giving users the ability to do many things related to the content on your website is growing in popularity. Whether it is rating content in the customer help section, posting comments to articles or generating their own original content, given the opportunity your customers are investing time in your brand and trying to communicate with you. If you aren't ready to affect change on content based on its rating, or respond to user-generated content directly, then don't launch it.

User-generated content is the cream of the crop. One only need to look at the new VH1 show, "Acceptable.TV," to see that a YouTube-like interface of user-generated video is providing content on the television network. The show is also integrated on the network's website, so users rate the content and determine which "episodes" will air the following week.

UPGRADING FROM WEB 1.0 TO WEB 2.0

As pointed out earlier, new technologies can exponentially add to your online marketing efforts. But there are a few things you should consider as you start to plan for these upgrades:

- ▶ Consider web content management tools that can manage content both outbound to the website, and in bound from the website. Enabling the content to come into your content management system and integrate with workflow means comments from customers won't get lost in the corporate email shuffle.
- ▶ Consider website management solutions that integrate with other best-of-breed site management solutions. This is really the heart of what I like to call, "The 2.0 Business Web." Software delivered as a service (SaaS) plays a role here. But, more importantly, it's about being able to react quickly as new capabilities come up, and not having to replace an entire solution based on one new technology.
- ▶ Consider tasking one or more of your internal personnel with being the "voice." Whether it's an executive in marketing, the customer service group or members of the web team, assign an "owner" to the content that's going to need to be generated, edited and published to the website for all of these new Web 2.0 capabilities.
- ▶ Most importantly, remember: technology is only as good as your understanding of its benefits. Keep your features in check with your capabilities, and never let anyone allow flashy gadgets, terminology or hype to outweigh the basic tenets of good marketing practices. Remember, Web 3.0 is less than 200 days away, and we haven't even started our shopping list yet.

Proving ROI – Made Simple:

Originally Published: June, 2007

What You'll Learn: How a good technology solution should be an important part of the ROI dashboard you're presenting to your management team.

Okay, I admit it, I watch "The Gilmore Girls." I'm disappointed that the show was cancelled, and I don't care who knows it. There, I said it, and I feel a lot better.

Now, you all have things that you do but don't want to admit. A good number of you male readers actually use skin care products. A high percentage of you female readers actually do read Maxim magazine. And all of us leave our empty popcorn boxes under our seat at the movie theater.

As digital marketers, there is one thing we all say we do that none of us actually does. When we bought technology to manage part of our website or online marketing operations, we justified that purchase with the promise that the solution "proves ROI." But guess what? None of us ever actually go back and measure it.

To be fair, this affliction isn't just endemic among marketers. It's actually one of the dirty little secrets across all software sales/purchases. These days, almost every vendor you speak with will lead with "our software can provide you with ROI." The promise is you'll either be more efficient, more productive or less everything negative. But ask yourself (or any of your colleagues for that matter) how many have actually gone back six months or a year later and measured ROI? I dare predict you'll find few, if any, compelling numbers.

There are two reasons for this. First, we're very, very scared of the answer we might get. What if the technology solution actually didn't save us any money? Then we actually might have to do something about it.

The second – and I believe much more common reason – is we simply get caught up in the daily tasks of our jobs and never really have time to do the analysis. When we do perform ROI analysis (and let's be honest, we really would rather be working on the next version of the website interface), we continually look at high-level trends to measure our ROI. We look at web traffic, SEM, SEO, lead nurturing, marketing and advertising investments. We never go back and look at what we paid for the software tools to manage those things and actually see if they were worth the money we spent.

Ignoring the cost of technology means we're missing a tremendous opportunity to deliver good news, and every marketer I know likes to deliver good news. Measuring your technology's impact on your strategic business objectives can be an extraordinarily productive exercise. I think you'll actually be surprised at the good news you can generate. Believe it or not, those sales guys are actually on to something. A good technology solution or outsourced service actually can generate tremendous ROI, and it should be an important part of the ROI dashboard you're presenting to your management team.

When you're looking at website operations or online marketing technology solutions, you're probably already challenging yourself with these types of questions:

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- ▶ What are the strategic business challenges we are looking to solve with this technology solution?
- ▶ What will success look like? Should we save 20 percent with this solution? Should we increase revenue by 10 percent? Or, should our cost per lead go down by a third?
- ▶ How much will this particular solution contribute to that particular metric?

Then, if your vendor uses an ROI pitch to sell you the technology solution, challenge them with these questions:

- ▶ How does your solution help us deliver against these specific business objectives?
- ▶ What are you willing to do to help us achieve these business objectives?
- ▶ Can we depend on you to deliver this ROI and help us with the ongoing improvements to either deliver against it or to continually improve on it?

As you start to develop your strategy for deploying various technology solutions and services for your website operations, consider developing an ROI SLA (return on investment, service level agreement). This might be something as formal as a technology charter outlining in great detail the hard benefits, the monetary ROI and the “soft” benefits to be achieved by the technology and services. Or, this may be as casual as a simple list of business objectives that you can measure progress against. This SLA is something you can give to your team to provide benchmarks for your technology solutions. As you review these solutions, consider a few other things:

- ▶ Pick vendors that understand life begins after launch. Arguably the most important feature of any technology solution is how well it reacts to change. Your website will change, and your solution will need to change with it. SaaS vendors definitely play an important role here, as they are inherently invested in your success. But with any solution, you’ll want to identify the responsibilities for managing the solution. Your goal as a marketer should be to market your company’s product or service, not manage technology.
- ▶ Match the tactics, the tools and the ROI metrics. Once you’ve developed your website management and digital marketing strategy, the software systems should align with the tactics you expect to use on an ongoing basis and the business objectives you want solved. A content management tool, for example, can manage assets across websites, online ad landing pages, banner campaigns, rich media email, affiliate marketing, digital asset distribution, online street teams and electronic press kit distribution. If these tactics figure into your online plans, a content management system that publishes and manages these assets for you and your partners can make tremendous financial sense, especially if you align this with metrics such as marketing effectiveness, efficiency in publishing, et cetera.
- ▶ Leverage the tools, and the success metrics. Adoption is imperative. Making your internal team comfortable with online marketing tools and how they work is essential. Whether you pick a best-of-breed strategy or a marketing suite, consider end-user training for all of the tools you’re using. Also consider getting everyone (including the vendor) invested in the associated success metric for those specific tools.

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- ▶ Actually measure the effectiveness. Perform a quarterly check-in with your team (including your vendor) to determine the effectiveness of your website operations solutions. What's working? What's not? How can you change the current infrastructure to help expand what's working and eliminate what's not?

Looking beyond the ROI of your media buys and toward how technology solutions can help you meet strategic business objectives has long been the promise of the technology salesman. By admitting this is an important part of the marketing equation, you too can feel better and deliver on the true promise of digital marketing ROI.

Win The Battle For Web Operations:

Originally Published: May, 2007

What You'll Learn: In today's digital marketing landscape, you can use efficient web operations to build a better marketing engine and more opportunity for your business.

Okay, let's be honest. Marketers hate math. But you need to do a little math to ensure your website redesign gets the infrastructure it needs.

Now, I know some of you direct marketing database geeks are out there right now delighting over the decimal point of your latest survey. But, for the most part, we hate math. As a general rule, we'd much rather work on the creative aspects of our new campaign and wring our hands over whether the headline looks more "organic" in Arial or Helvetica font.

And, I have a big secret to share: Everybody else in your organization hates math, too. Well, except for the guy in the corner who freaks out if you mess with his red Swingline stapler. But that's right, you heard it here first: Everyone hates math, and specifically, marketing math. If you don't believe me, try this experiment:

Walk around your office and try to put together a committee to look at your web analytics reports to determine whether the open rate, clickthrough rate or conversion metrics are trending, and which trend is most significant. Then, walk around with new website designs in your hand and ask for opinions. The old cliché is right; everyone has two jobs: their own and marketing. That is, unless you want them to do math.

Why is it so easy for us to get stakeholder and executive buy-in to do a website redesign, but so difficult to get buy-in to acquire the tools necessary for us to manage the website we're about to redesign?

The website has a huge emotional pull for everyone in the organization, but in today's world, we have to be a bit savvier about how we structure our new web operations. From adding new Web 2.0 capabilities like social networking, blogging and RSS feeds to other management components like content management, email campaign management and web analytics, we need to build the business case for why these technologies make sense. In short, we need to do the math.

So, ride the coattails of presenting your website redesign project, or even after you've launched, and consider a few tips that can help make your case. You'll certainly have to do some math initially, but I promise you, if you do it now you'll not only be more successful, but six months from now you'll have significant ammunition to change that flaming, spinning logo the CFO loves.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR YOUR WEB OPERATIONS

Adding technology to your website operations can feel a bit like installing new electrical and plumbing in your house. When it's all done, you've spent a lot of money and you can't see any of it. But the fact that you're saving money on electricity, the shower works and you don't have a flood in the basement is a definite ROI. And your house is so much more valuable for having done the internal improvements.

So, there are two tactics for building the business case to purchase web operations technology. The first, of course, is the tried and true "efficiencies" that are created. This is the "saving money on electricity" argument. Let's just use a simple example. If it currently takes you 10 staff hours at \$50/hour to get a press release live on your website, then it's costing you \$500 to post each press release. Using a content management system to empower the business users to do the same task in three hours (approvals included) is a 30 percent savings. At 15 press releases per year (and we're only talking about press releases), that's a meaningful savings in just press release production.

However, the lesser of the two arguments explored in building a business case is how much more valuable your new website is by having added management technologies. And this, frankly, is where it starts to get interesting. I think you'll get no argument from anyone that the web is an enormously efficient way for us to expand our business, regardless of what our "success conversion" is. Whether it's a new customer, a qualified lead, a satisfied site visitor or a banner ad impression, we all realize that the web is important. If it isn't, why are we spending so much time trying to figure out how to re-design our sites?

So, if it is that important, then it follows that we should continually find ways to optimize it. Inherently, this optimization means that we will drive more success conversions.

WEB OPERATIONS SOFTWARE DRIVES MORE SUCCESS CONVERSIONS

It's a bold headline, but it's true. Using a content management system to drive your website content enables you to be much more flexible about A/B testing of landing pages, publishing your new blog and adding RSS feeds. Any good content management system should also make your site more search engine optimization friendly. A good CMS allows you to optimize the content based on user experience, and it allows you to continually drive more and more content out to your website, which creates more "Google food" and drives more traffic.

Then, creating loyalty programs using email campaign management systems and RSS to communicate with your customers will also drive more conversions. By feeding relevant content to your frequent visitors/customers, you'll create more "customer evangelists" (to borrow from Guy Kawasaki), which drives more success conversions.

Finally, utilizing web analytics to measure and segment all of that traffic is the key to completing the 360 degrees of the content lifecycle. And, today, good web analytics, email campaign management systems and content management systems work together so you can automatically take action based on how users are utilizing your content.

OKAY, NOW IT'S TIME FOR SOME MATH...

Certainly your own mileage will vary, but let's say you can generate even a modest 15 percent lift by using web operations technology. This is a significant bump to your success. And, I bet you can easily beat that number. Add to that the argument (above) that you are 30 percent more efficient, and you've now got an amazingly compelling argument. You can walk into the presentation and say, "With this re-design and new web operations software, we can boost success conversions by 15 percent and be 30 percent more efficient." Any executive – whether they hate it or not – understands that math.

So, when the request comes down that says, "Let's redesign our site," take that opportunity and build your business case for adding in a new operations center.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER – SOME ADVICE TO GET YOU STARTED:

Consider operations technology from a "best-of-breed" approach, rather than investing in a one-application-fits-all approach. Software should and will be the least of your concerns from an investment point of view. The biggest expense to consider when building your business case will be the services needed to support whichever solutions you choose. So, by diversifying your investments, if one aspect (e.g. web analytics) doesn't meet the needs of your organization or ends up costing too much to support and maintain, you can replace it.

When considering Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions, or open source solutions supported by a third party, make sure there is support, maintenance and SLA that guarantees your costs over the life of the contract. While no one can predict the next time the CEO will want to redesign the site (therefore introducing new unexpected costs), any solution provider should be able to guarantee all upgrades, patches and maintenance costs for the life of your software support contract with them.

Don't forget that internal resources also cost money. When building your business case, it's often easy to fall into the trap that, "Bob, the developer, is a sunk cost so I can't count that." That's true, Bob is a sunk cost, but Bob's "value" is variable. So, when Bob is hand-coding HTML pages for a press release, he's not nearly as valuable as when he's building a new web application that gives your organization a competitive edge. The cost to the organization for not maximizing the value of Bob is just as real as hard dollars out the window.

The bottom line is, as you build your business case for web marketing operations, you don't always have to rely on the argument that you can be more efficient. In today's digital marketing landscape, you can use efficient web operations to build a better marketing engine, and that creates much more opportunity for your business.

Make Failure Part of Your Website Plan:

Originally Published: July, 2007

What You'll Learn: Why you can't increase ROI without some experimentation.

Consider the following question recently posed by a vice president of marketing at a web technology conference: "I have tried to figure out which online marketing tactics will give me the best results. I've looked into email, Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, traditional banners and contextual advertising. Now, I don't know where to put my money, because I might fail and management expects me to keep improving ROI."

The answer for this particular person may seem obvious. But, at the heart of the question was something many of us who cut our teeth on the reach-and-frequency school of marketing face on a daily basis: With the continuing challenge of delivering improvement to our marketing investment, how do we know where to place our bets so we don't screw it up?

So, whether you're a grizzled veteran of a failed set of email marketing campaigns, or struggling to find one more tactic that works as well as your online banner ads, there is a set of best practices I've experienced that seem to work well.

LET'S FIRST LOOK AT WHERE WE STARTED

I'll be the first to admit that I came out of the reach-and-frequency school of thought. Using that model as a marketer, you built an expensive soapbox, you climbed up on top of it and you yelled your message as loud as you could. Then, you built another expensive soapbox down the street, and ran down to it and screamed it again, hoping the same person would be walking by.

In his classic book, "Permission Marketing," Seth Godin draws the metaphor that this model is like the marketer walking into a bar with a wedding ring. He asks each female patron if she'd like to get married. Of course he's destined to fail. And, when he fails, he blames the suit maker, the ring maker, the bar; everybody except himself. Godin suggests instead, why not try dating?

So, the key here is that it is expensive and risky to build soapboxes. And we've come to expect a "low conversion percentage" as just a marketing rule of law.

WHAT'S THIS THING CALLED "PAPER CLICK"?

Then along comes online marketing, and the rules change. Unfortunately, for many, while the tactics have changed, our outlook in how to manage them hasn't. Many online marketers still bring the reach-and-frequency attitude to the online marketing toolbox.

While we use email marketing, we're still not tracking what the recipients do on our websites, and using that to refine personalized messaging. While we support Search Engine Marketing, we're not continually testing the messaging, landing pages and offers to make it efficient. And, most importantly, while we embrace online marketing, we're not experimenting with different types of tactics, funding the ones that work and killing the ones that don't. In short, we're still bringing a Marketing 1.0 philosophy to a Marketing 2.0 world.

SO, WHAT NOW?

If you're wrestling with this whole notion of how to build an online marketing engine, consider a few things from a philosophical shift:

Get permission to fail:

Work with your management team to allocate your marketing budget and success based on continuing improvement over a longer term, and with the understanding there will be a learning curve and experimentation which may or may not bear fruit.

Hedge your bets, but make some:

Definitely keep your successful core tactics, but allocate a certain percentage of your budget to experiments. With most online tactics (especially performance-based PPC or PPA tactics), you can run experiments based on budgets.

Use a stair-stepping methodology:

First, focus on establishing your base, from which you can measure anything you do. Make sure your website and landing page infrastructure is solid, and that your analytics and lead measurement is in place. Then, focus on the experiments: the outreach. Whether that's SEM, SEO, email or even offline events, make sure everything comes back through your website and can be measured. Finally, tie all that back into your top five metrics (whatever they may be). Measure like crazy, and then fund the experiments that are working and cut the ones that aren't. Be patient. Give yourself at least a quarter or two for any tactic.

Stop thinking in "campaigns":

If the word campaign appears in your online marketing strategy, rethink it. Online marketing isn't like old warfare anymore; it's like special operations. You will certainly have broad-based creative that you apply to your strategy (just like special operations is driving toward an overall goal). But using smaller, strategic tactics is less risky and develops success that grows into permanent investment.

HELPFUL SAFETY TIPS

Return to make a philosophical shift. After you have developed an online marketing strategy with room for failure and a reasonable timeline to review results, consider the technology you need to support your online marketing engine. Here are a few helpful safety tips:

Content management is the key enabler of your online marketing message

You should be able to manage the content for your website and email messaging from one tool. You should be able to review the messaging and quickly change your landing pages, your website and all of your content. Every piece of content should (ideally) be a champion and have a challenger, waiting to take over if it gets better results. Nimble web content management solutions offered as SaaS play an important role here. Look to solutions as diverse as CrownPeak to Visual Sciences and Hot Banana as options.

Analytics is much more than how many page views you get

Make sure your website management strategy has the ability to track individual users, especially those that are coming through different mechanisms. The key here is establishing the relationship users have to your content. If you have 100 people hit one page and go away vs. one person hit another and convert to a customer, guess which messaging is working and which isn't. Basic web analytics won't tell you that. Consider solutions that allow you to track those users. Most of the primary vendors, from WebTrends, Visual Sciences, Omniture and Core Metrics, are offering these capabilities.

Email is a communication tool, not a campaign

Make sure you're delivering relevant messages to your targeted audience. The message itself should contain some value to your intended customers, so they are enticed to commit just a bit more by visiting your website. Then, hopefully, they commit just a bit more by signing up for the next step, and so on and so on until they are your customers.

Consider email solutions that do two things: first, they allow you to personalize your messages based on demographic; second, they tie into your web analytics and web content management systems (above) so that all three provide for a complete, closed loop marketing engine. Again, look to SaaS vendors to play an important role here; solutions such as ExactTarget, Responsys and EmailLabs.

If Web 2.0 is teaching us anything, it's that experimenting and communicating with our customers on a one-on-one basis is becoming easier, not harder. The vision that "Permission Marketing" laid out in 1999 is now less expensive, less risky and easier than it has ever been. As digital marketers, we can truly experiment with different tactics and learn to fail early and often. And "success," as Winston Churchill appropriately said, is "going from failure to failure without a loss of enthusiasm."

I wish you a lot of failure on your way to true success.

Take The “Geek” Out Of Your Web Strategy:

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What You’ll Learn: What matters most for marketers is not the totality of features offered on websites, but the frequency and quality of the conversation.

When I was a teenager, my grandfather, a Scotsman, would scoff at me as I walked by with my headphones on. He would literally yank them off my head and then regale me with stories about life during the ‘20s and ‘30s.

“You dinna hae’ any of these new fangled contraptions,” he would say in his thick brogue. “Nothing like yer fancy wee walkabouts.” (He meant my Sony Walkman.) “In our day, we hae’ a radio that filled the wall in the living room and tha’ was it.”

So, just a few days ago, as I was holding one of the new iPod Shuffles in my hand – amazed at its sheer lack of anything resembling size – I found myself saying to its owner, “You know, I remember when these things were the size of bricks.”

Thankfully, I caught myself before I actually became the embodiment of my grandfather, wistfully explaining the audio quality differences between a 60- and 90-minute audio cassette.

Since its launch in 2001, the iPod has taken a mere six years to completely transform the music business. Before the iPod existed there were scores of other MP3 players available on the market from myriad providers. Say what you will about Apple marketing – the strength of its user interface and everything else – at its absolute core, the iPod is just a portable harddrive that plays a variety of music, images and (now) video codecs. Yes, the true reason for Apple’s success is because it simply took the geek out of digital portable music.

Interestingly, Apple may have found itself at another tipping point with the iPhone. Combined with the explosion of social networking, this device, and others like it, may (and “may” is the operative word) have the ability to take the geek out of how we use mobile devices to access web content. The evolution of interfaces to web content has fundamentally changed the game for digital marketers who manage websites, but maybe not in a way that is immediately evident.

Arguably, managing websites and digital content has become much easier in the last two years. From web content management systems, integrated email campaign management tools, bid management tools, search systems and analytics that actually measure user interactions, the solutions to help us talk to customers through our websites are now plentiful and economical.

But, just when we thought we had a handle on what was going on, along comes this Web 2.0 and AJAX, XML, MOSOSO, RSS feeds and social networking stuff, and now we’re back to square one. We’re asking our geeks to explain what it all means before we sally forth with a web strategy that supports our business.

► Marketing Management in a Web 2.0 World – A collection of online marketing best practices

I've been recently exploring the depths of social networking solutions. I kid you not, I currently have a list of more than 50 companies who can "provide an AJAX-based, wicked cool solution for RSS, Forums and other 2.0 on-demand social networking tools."

I remember back in the day when all this was simply called "community."

Here's the conclusion I've reached: the same technology evolution that has made it easier for us to manage our digital marketing activities has also made it easier for customers to decide how they want to be marketed to. For every ExactTarget, Salesforce.com and DoubleClick (now Google) out there, there are mashed-up Firefox extensions and Web 2.0 sites waiting to find a way around it.

But this explosion in social networking and web content tools for the user, ironically, is where the game is profoundly changing for us as digital marketers. We can no longer afford to simply talk to our customers – we must engage them. And, maybe more importantly, let them engage with each other.

The key here is that technology itself is quickly becoming (or should quickly become) a non-issue. What matters is not the totality of features we offer on our site, but the frequency and quality of the conversation. Who cares if we can offer personalized content for a user if the content itself is meaningless; they can't access it using their chosen device, or worse, it's not even in their native language.

As digital marketers, we need to completely change our paradigm and get out of the "we're all publishers" mindset. Even if we are literally the publisher of an online magazine, we're not publishers. Publishers talk and desperately hope that people like what they are saying. Today, we're more accurately (and simply) stewards of information. The internet and our web strategy (not just our site) makes it easier for us to communicate more effectively and profitably with our customers. It should, more importantly, enable our customers to easily communicate with us either implicitly or explicitly. So, like any good friend, we should be good listeners as well as good talkers.

HOW DOES ALL THIS APPLY IN THE REAL WORLD?

As we continue to formulate our digital marketing and website management strategy solutions, consider a few things:

Get out of the homepage, top-down, hierarchical site structure paradigm

I've talked about this in previous articles, but start thinking about your "website" as a wellspring of content your customers will enter from many different sources. They may first comment on your blog, subscribe to an RSS feed or link from elsewhere on the web in order to satisfy a "need," and then visit your site through a deep landing page to offer up their information to you as a way to continue the conversation.

Two things here are key: First, have a way for people to continue that conversation (e.g. a link for more info or to subscribe) and second, follow through with that request. It's your job to continue to add value to the relationship throughout their lifecycle as a customer.

In 2007, it's about understanding

Unless your business model is in global page impressions, aggregate traffic is not nearly as important as understanding who is visiting your site. Consider solutions that allow you to track the relationship of your users to your content.

Effective web content management goes well beyond presentation

Along with the decentralization of content on your website comes the addition of social networking and content that lives outside your site. This may come in the form of a MySpace or YouTube strategy – or simply developing relationships with external bloggers. Additionally, users may be contributing content, which you should be able to manage through your content management system and reuse. Also remember, whether it's through blogs, publishing RSS, other syndicated feeds, wireless or other formats, making your content easy to consume by these other sites is important.

Managing your website is a process – not a product

Your team is much more important than your tool. Look to add expertise to your team, not features to your software application. Best-of-breed and/or Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) solutions can play an important role here – not suites of products.

The web is quickly realizing its potential as a unified computing platform, and content and functional integration is becoming easier and easier. There's little reason to not approach your solution using best-of-breed solutions and expertise for whatever you're looking for. A specialized social networking tool vendor understands managing relationships with customers. An email campaign management vendor spends considerable resources to maintain ISP relationships to ensure mail deliverability. A strong web content management vendor has considerable expertise in terms of translation workflow, landing page management, SEO and information architecture expertise. No single company can be great at everything.

Like my comment about the iPod and my grandfather's comments about the radio before it, within a few years, you might be reminiscing to someone about how you can remember when AJAX and social networking and RSS feeds were all the rage. Then, as you change your web strategy to fit the fact that more people access the web using their super newfangled HiDef-capable personal PDA connected to their flying car, you have the flexibility to do so.

Just remember to take the geek out of your web content strategy. Technology doesn't communicate to your customers, you do.

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