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Digital marketing changes campaign execution

THE PANDEMIC IS THE 'COMING OF AGE' FOR DIGITAL MARKETING







HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

(full version available to Propolis members only)

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Want to get even more depth and insight on this topic?

On Propolis – our exclusive community for B2B marketers – you can download a larger version of this report, which also includes:

- *Insight from our Propolis Hive expert for Execution & Campaigns, Steve Kemish, on how to deal with the changes in this field.*
- *An interview with Skip Fidura. Our lead analyst asks Skip which areas of technology have seen the largest investment this past year, how to avoid making customer insight appear creepy, and more.*
- *Steps you can take today to ensure your campaigns are as effective as possible in this new environment.*

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SECTION 1

Digital business transformation changes the role of marketing



PETER O'NEILL,
lead analyst,
B2B Marketing

Readers of industry analysts' reports like this are used to being alerted to 'change' and being advised (hopefully) about what to do about it. In my 20-odd years in the role, I have published scores of such reports. In the very old days, I wrote these for IT professionals about the trend to distributed or client/server computing, noting that the IT service department was no longer managing pieces of IT equipment, but full 'business services'; and, of course, the advent of cloud computing. More recently, for B2B marketers, I was one of the first to point out that the role of sellers will change ('Death of the B2B Salesman' in 2015), the rise of ABM and, most recently, marketing's change-in-purpose from the loyal hunter and gatherer of leads to an orchestrator of customer engagement and experience.

But this time, things really have changed: dramatically, drastically, radically, and probably forever.

1.1. COVID-19 IS THE ACCELERANT FOR DIGITAL MARKETING TRANSFORMATION

No business can now afford to ignore the need for digital transformation. The prevailing arguments in some B2B organisations, such as 'We know our customers well enough', 'Our buyers do not work digitally' and 'Nobody buys our solutions over the web', are no longer valid. In fact, the reality of working during a pandemic has proven those objections to be false. It has finally forced many marketing organisations to respond to the pressure of digital transformation, overcoming a logjam of institutional resistance.

Furthermore, the whole post-Covid business world is clearly going to be one driven by overwhelming societal changes, which will result in new working practices, as well as major economic and market shifts. And these changes are already reflected in new B2B customer or buyer behaviour and preferences. That should be enough to make marketing react, but the probability is that many businesses will need to engage in a much more holistic radical re-thinking about their products, services, channels, processes and go-to-market approach. All of which could, ultimately, result in a fundamental re-examination of the role of marketing itself.

1.2. PARAMETERS OF CHANGE

Indeed, some business leaders are already looking for marketing to step up and lead change. They're looking down a new type of funnel and have realised that their customers have different expectations, and now expect marketing to drive a different demand generation programme through more impactful and relevant campaigns and a seamless, cohesive customer journey. The 'big picture' includes the following six possible parameters of change:

1. The offering

Some products became redundant, or demand dried up (e.g. retail, hospitality, travel and leisure), creating a need to quickly innovate new revenue streams and adapt to changing customer needs. But new markets for existing products were also created overnight (e.g. PPE/3D printing). Many products are being replaced by services, with organisations turning to a recurring revenue model. 'Value' is being redefined by customers, and transparency is becoming normal in some B2B markets (e.g. software licence to SaaS).

2. The target markets

The geography of business is one of the biggest shifts challenging businesses: whether that's changes in international supply chains, geopolitical shifts and natural disasters. In addition to this, demand has moved from offices to home offices, changing the marketing and sales interaction and exposing new buyer expectations in style and tone. In a digital world, choice is easier than ever (search), so how does a B2B brand invest to be positioned as the brand of choice in its chosen market(s)?

3. The brand

CX has increased in importance, requiring the brand promise to be evident from end to end, across the entire customer lifecycle. The desired brand purpose in most sectors has also changed, with buyers looking for more honesty, transparency, helpfulness, experience, belief and reflection.

4. The role of marketing

Marketing's lead-generation output is no longer enough. Businesses now see lifecycle and relationship marketing as gaining new emphasis as the long-term engines of growth. In B2B, the 'primary ownership' of a customer often sat with sales, but with more data insights, advanced smart-tech stacks and a preference for ecommerce interactions, those responsibility principles are being redefined.

5. The buyers

As work and home have merged into one space for many, how has this affected business buyers' thinking and behaviour? Amazon and Deliveroo were not just delivering consumer purchases, but meeting the needs of office workers at home too (from laptops, to rewards for working late), all the while demonstrating a new style of interaction and customer experience. The prediction is that flexible working from home, or the total use of the home office, will probably become the norm.

6. The engagement

The importance of 'word-of-mouth' or community/social influence in marketing has spilled from consumer marketing into B2B. That means more than a website revamp – it affects the complete style and purpose of marketing. Agility is usurping sequential marketing processes, just as the waterfall or funnel has been replaced by the buyer cyclone. Long campaigns seem outdated and irrelevant when the pace of change is so quick. Always-on campaigns enabled by marketing automation became a burden (not an asset) for many businesses in a crisis when they really needed to turn down promotional communications.

The complete 'big picture' of change will be discussed in the Strategy & Evolution Hive report later this year. If the engine room of marketing is now marketing operations (see our Marketing Operations & Process Hive report), and the probable aspirational goal for marketing is customer experience (see our CX Hive report), then the current functional focus for today's marketing organisation is executing campaigns.

That is the focus for this report: execution and campaigns – building marketing programmes that will engage audiences to change how they think and feel. It is exactly those items – 'engage' and 'how they think and feel' – that have now changed so dramatically.

The questions we will try to answer in this report are:

1. What has changed and how?
2. What will stay changed forever?
3. What lessons have already been learned in the last 18 months that can be leveraged when planning for the next marketing calendar?

We did not run a quantitative survey for this report, but, as an analyst working on various projects for marketing software vendors and agencies, I have been surveying and interviewing marketers for over a year now about their reactions to the pandemic and what has changed. These experiences will feed into the report. We also interviewed several senior B2B leaders for a deeper insight into some the trends that were discovered.

"The pandemic's most enduring impact will be as an accelerant. It initiated some changes and altered some trends, but the pandemic's primary effect has been to accelerate change already underway in marketing."

STEVE KEMISH,
Propolis Hive expert for Execution & Campaigns

SECTION 2

What has changed for marketing campaigns and execution?

B2B marketers have been feeling like agents of change for quite a few years, and the imperative 'move to digital' was perhaps already a common adage. Coming from the roots of corporate identity marketing and sales support, most marketing organisations were well set up as a somewhat-reliable generator and manager of qualified leads to be passed to their sales forces, but less so as multi-disciplinary masters of multiple technologies, persona prioritisation, buyer journey messaging, data, analytics, digital-first creativity and content experiences... the list goes on and on.

Most B2B organisations of any size or level of ambition were also on some kind of digital transformation journey, although each company's plan has different trajectories, directions and speeds. But the arrival of the Covid-19 crisis has driven a coach and horses through many organisations' digital transformation plans. So many things needed to change almost overnight specific to campaign execution. These included:

- Customers' (read, people's) need for human connection and experience has become extreme.
- Companies' need to build relationships in a fully digital context has also become extreme – and extremely daunting.
- Marketers' need to use all-digital channels to replace F2F and other analogue channels has created tremendous opportunities, but also the emerging obstacle of digital saturation.

2.1. THE TARGET AUDIENCE FOR MARKETING

A major consequence of the pandemic is that many companies have needed to be better at developing and understanding buyer personas to target in their marketing campaigns. This is the result of an overall desire to reduce the number of speculative promotional email campaigns. With an audience working from a home office, often under space and/or time duress, it was not suitable to continue bombarding prospects with 'buy my product' statements. The adoption of ABM processes was accelerated so that campaigns could be more tightly targeted than they were previously (a rise in investment that has been confirmed by nearly all ABM software vendors).

"We have adopted a more targeted approach to promote a cross-section of propositions to maximise our engagement with key accounts."

SARA KILLINGWORTH,
head of marketing, The Institution of Engineering and Technology

Some companies have reported that they now focus much more on their existing customer base and target new opportunities in those segments. Again, ABM methods were deployed for this activity. Instead of routinely just promoting upselling offers to anyone who opens an email, companies have realised that they must be more considered, and so they have taken the opportunity to learn more about their target audience before marketing to them with messaging that is more relevant and useful.

"Previously, the business was very focused on upselling. However, we now do persona analysis on the contacts we know in those companies so that we can tailor marketing better and discover new opportunities within larger businesses by reaching different people."
EMMA RAW, director of digital marketing, Foundry

2.3. AN EXECUTION PROGRAMME REMIX

Marketers have a long list of campaign execution programmes they can leverage. A clear reaction to the pandemic has been a change in mix of these execution options. Feedback from various surveys and the interviews show that the following programmes have increased in importance for most companies and are seeing an increased investment:

› Content marketing

Marketers in all B2B sectors are all striving to be noticed as providers of interesting and useful content outside and beyond their product or service offerings. This reflects the new world that buyers are spending more time researching on the web.

› Email marketing

This medium has become more important, though marketers have also changed the type of information they send in their emails. Many marketers have also assisted their sales colleagues to use this medium more productively.

› Webinars/virtual events

The most immediate consequence of the pandemic. Nobody could attend physical meetings or events, so everything went virtual. The signs are strong that the future will be a hybrid of virtual and physical, with more emphasis on the former.

› Advocate marketing

There has been a marked increase in the deployment of formal advocate programmes, recognising that peer-to-peer marketing has a high value.

› Lead nurturing

Deploying digital channels to share useful information to potential buyers has been an important replacement for the missing sales calls.

The two execution programme investments that were reduced the most in the past year were conferences/trade shows and outbound calling.

"We have focused on running virtual events both on our own and with partners, to reach our target audience. We have also invested further in specific, tailored content, giving further consideration to our clients' journey and experience with us."

CATHERINE DUTTON,
deputy CMO, Atos

PROPOLIS

This report is only half the story...

To get the full report and to fully understand how to use digital marketing to transform your marketing and your business you need to be a member of our B2B community Propolis.

> *In order to drive our business and global marketing team forward, we knew we would benefit from an international professional membership, which is exactly what Propolis with B2B Marketing gives us.*
>
> *Now more than ever, the need to come together as a community of B2B marketers isn't just relevant, but necessary*

CAT DUTTON
global deputy CMO, Atos

Propolis is the global body giving B2B marketers the clarity to solve real-world challenges – through instant access to unbiased experts, resources, training, and support. Together, we can help you navigate change, master a multidisciplinary environment, and drive business growth.

Propolis is designed for the way you really work, to help you find answers quickly and tackle the day-to-day challenges of B2B marketing life – by the people who know better than anyone what makes B2B unique. It's a global community of real marketers – from many of the biggest names in B2B – supported by a bank of experts with hands-on, practical experience.

As one B2B marketer put it: *"It's the membership you'll actually use."*

Contact propolis@b2bmarketing.net for further information on how you can be a part of the evolution of B2B marketing.

SECTION 5

The 10 new truths about marketing

The changes discussed in this report are the result of some fundamental shifts in the meaning of the marketing function. 2020 was a year like no other, and 2021 will certainly not see marketers revert back to the 'old normal'. There are 10 ways in which the pandemic has challenged critical truths about marketing and gave us a new set of rules moving forward:

Each of these 'new truths' apply to B2B marketing and affect how B2B marketing organisations execute their campaigns in the future. They express: increased concentration on knowing and understanding the buyer or customer; focusing more on engagement or relationship than a transaction; and adopting organisational flexibility and agility. They also stress that the new role of marketing is at the centre of the c-suite. Each new truth affects different aspects of campaign and execution.

	OLD	NEW
1	Marketing begins with knowing your customer	Marketing begins with knowing your customer segment
2	You are competing with your competitors	You are competing with the last best experience your customer had
3	Customers hope you have what they want	Customers expect you to have exactly what they want
4	Courting customers is just like dating	Courting customers is just like online dating
5	Customers must sit at the heart of your marketing strategy	Customers must sit at the heart of your customer journey
6	Relationships matter	Relationships are everything
7	Agility is a technology process	Agility is a modern marketing approach
8	Your brand should stand behind great products	Your brand should stand behind great values
9	You need the right tech stack to drive modern marketing success	You need the right balance of factors (including your tech stack) to drive modern marketing success
10	Marketing is important for growth	Marketing is at the centre of the growth agenda for the full c-suite

Source: BALIS, J., '10 Truths About Marketing After the Pandemic', *Harvard Business Review*, (10 March 2021).

EXECUTION AND CAMPAIGNS COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK 1.0

	BUSINESS CONTRIBUTION	1. BUILDING	2. DEVELOPING	3. PERFORMING	4. IMPROVING	5. EXCELLING
Integration of digital channels	Is there an integrated, multichannel strategy?	No multichannel campaigns deployed, with no integration of martech tools.	Efforts to develop a multichannel approach, with some integration of martech tools.	Most campaigns follow a multichannel approach, and there's a roadmap to integrating all martech.	Everything is multichannel and integrated. The only thing missing is a single customer view.	Every campaign is multichannel, with channels selected for best-fit. All martech integrated, with a single customer view enabling personalisation.
Campaign resource planning	How skilled are the team, and how robust is the campaign briefing process?	The team's ability is an unknown quantity, and there is no formal campaign briefing process.	A 'skills versus gaps' programme has been implemented, and a briefing process is being formalised.	Key gaps have been identified and are being filled. A consistent briefing process is being followed for most campaigns.	A comprehensive team improvement programme is underway. The briefing process is always adhered to, with lessons starting to be learned.	Gaps are regularly flagged and filled using either internal or external resources. The briefing process is used for all campaigns and continuously improved.
Campaign management and integration	How integrated are both campaign execution and campaign content?	Not at all. Siloes and unintegrated timelines are evident.	There is some coordination in terms of cross-channel content and campaign execution.	Most campaigns use consistent content and integrated planning.	All campaigns use consistent content and integrated planning.	All campaigns are integrated, with lessons learned for future. Content is not only consistent, but optimised for the channels used.
Calendar management	How integrated is the campaign calendar, and how is content scheduled?	Both the campaign and content plan are completely ad hoc.	Campaigns are planned quarterly. Content scheduling is evident, but in isolation.	Annual campaign plan, with some joined-up campaigns. Content schedule is centralised.	Annual plan, with all campaigns/initiatives joined up. Content creation and curation are centralised and measured.	Fully integrated and 'updateable' campaign plan showing all activity. Rolling content schedule which everyone can access and utilise (i.e. social selling).
Attribution management	How are campaign measurement and attribution conducted?	There is no (or very little) measurement or understanding of whether campaigns have delivered or not.	Metrics recorded, but not reviewed. There are plans to model campaign attribution.	Metrics recorded and reviewed, but KPIs non-existent. Attribution expectation is assumed, but not scientifically based.	Metrics and KPIs both in use. ROI on all marketing campaigns is tracked.	Metrics/KPIs are reported upon in a centralised hub, enabling optimisation. ROI/attribution can be reported for all marketing activities.
Cross-organisational coordination and communication	How developed is sales and marketing alignment, as well coordination wth other teams?	No (or very little) dialogue between marketing and sales, or with any other department.	Cooperation is starting to happen, but it's ad hoc. Sales and marketing are looking to establish goals.	Sales and marketing's goals are measured, but in isolation. Marketing is now having regular meetings with other departments.	There are agreed and shared goals between marketing and sales, as well as with other departments, for all projects.	Marketing works side-by-side with sales and other departments, regularly reviewing goals, strategies and tactics. SLAs in place.

As the business world begins to calm down over the rest of 2021 and into 2022, one of the major tasks for you, the marketers responsible, will be to determine how campaigns will need to be executed in the new environment. Many things changed in the discipline of marketing campaigns and execution over the last 18 months, and now it's time to consider and discover which of these changes will recede, continue or even accelerate in the next few years. We now need detailed answers to the following questions:

1. What will be the preferred method of communication across organisations' customer base?

2. How will the role of the next sales force change, and what does this mean for marketing campaign execution?

3. Will organisations need marketing outcomes around a growth strategy, or will they be focused more on a customer engagement and lifetime value business model?

CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS RESET

Answers to the first two questions are needed for campaign execution planning. They are also required to inform decisions around the third question – a question that will be discussed and resolved in the coming months internally, as your organisation puts together its business strategy for the next planning cycle. It is important to note that business leaders will be seeking input from marketing around these topics.

ABOUT

B2B Marketing and Propolis

Powered by the community, for the community.

Established in 2004, B2B Marketing is now the number one go-to resource for B2B marketers across the globe.

Right from the start, we had a clear mission that remains as strong and clear today: to provide marketers at business brands with the tools, insight and inspiration they need to grow and succeed – as both individuals and businesses.

To do this, we need to continually evolve to make sure we are delivering what you need.

This is why Propolis was born – our community for B2B marketers.

We're proud to serve as the focal point for the B2B marketing sector, and to be a force for greater connectivity, enabling marketers and leaders to share experiences and learn from one another.

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