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Stephen Priestnall has a history of leading agency roles and game-changing executive positions. He worked in global telco Cable & Wireless in the UK and Bermuda for 7 years, before joining CRM specialist Brann as Planning Director and Client Principal for 5 years. Six years as MD at WPP Internet outfit Syzygy included an IPO on the Neurmarkt and clients like Mercedes-Benz, Mazda, Disney, Boots, Lloyds TSB and The Met Office in the UK and across Europe.

He founded multi-channel technology comms agency oomph in 2005 where, as well as leading the agency, Stephen was also interim CMO for cloud computing global payer, nivio. In 2011 he teamed up with Jeremy Braune as co-Director of research software outfit Clarite, focusing on technology and platform for the product.

Technology-powered B2B marketing – Dream or reality?

The task of understanding and exploiting the opportunities that optimal use of data and technology can bring to B2B marketing is invariably undertaken for one of three reasons:

- Because leads are drying up – it's a distress purchase
- Because there is a sense that you're missing out on something – again a distress purchase
- It's part of an on-going developing marketing programme – an operational, day-to-day decision

This chapter examines these scenarios and advises on the pitfalls and opportunities of each, including where technology delivers key value-adds that can be included at different stages of B2B marketing development.

Technology and data options include CRM, research, web and behavioural metrics and marketing automation. However, what is rarely evaluated is the dramatic and often-disruptive impact that a technology-powered B2B marketing strategy can have.

To get a better idea of this impact and what to do about it, let's first look at the scenarios driving use of technology-driven marketing.

Business growth when sales are falling

For the business world that exists outside of cosy, long-term, single customer dominated relationships – and I think you'd recognize that as most of us – the lifeblood of not only growth but ongoing survival is lead generation. Finding the time and techniques to hunt and farm new business opportunities is a task that has forever dominated the waking thoughts of CMOs and marketing professionals.

Those fortunate enough to have the resources that allow them to employ a Sales Director then have the vicarious task of assessing whether they are a stand-out performer that ensures their company gets the best shot at the best leads out there. Heading up a B2B sales function in today's competitive marketplace is not for the faint hearted.

Outside of the corporate world, it's also true that sales growth isn't always the objective for small to mid-size enteprises. Experian, a global information services company, published a report in 2010[1] which indicated that only 10% of the UK's 4.8 million SMEs are likely to drive growth in the UK. Some key findings of its research include:

- The 10% of SMEs that become champions grow at more than 20% a year for three years and more than double their weight in terms of contribution to all those employed in the SME sector
- Of the remaining SME population, 20% grow at a slower rate, while 30% are 'stable and able' firms that remain the same size. Around 40% of SMEs decline or cease trading

[1] 'Tomorrows Champions: finding the small business engines for economic growth', Experian, 2010

- Analysis of 2003 to 2006, the last benign economic period before the downturn, shows that the slower growing firms created around 860,000 jobs, while SMEs that declined or ceased trading lost around 3.7 million jobs
- Start-ups added a further 2.7 million jobs, but of those start-ups that survive the majority do not grow further, staying the same size

It's important to understand what typically drives a move towards using marketing technology and data to more effectively drive business growth.

The first scenario is clearly when the pipeline starts to dry up - pressure on the balance sheet increases as fixed costs start to take an undue proportion of revenues. Survey reports[2] show that this is a common scenario, with more than 60% of marketers polled saying their greatest marketing challenge for 2012 is generating more leads. Nearly two thirds reported that their marketing mix either doesn't meet sales demand or that they're unsure of whether their mix is effective.

Faced with the option of cost reduction and downsizing or re-establishing turnover levels, the first step is invariably to search for new ways of finding new business opportunities. Because of the context of the need to drive sales and fast, it's often light on planning and high on energy, with lots of backwards-looking questions around 'how did we do last month?' rather than 'what will we achieve in the next four quarters?'. We all know the day-to-day pressures of delivering quality sales leads to support an ailing pipeline, but this distress-driven push for sales growth is more likely to fail than succeed. At this point the reality is that technology and technology-powered marketing are unlikely to solve the problem. But why, surely this is where low-cost, quick and measurable returns can be made?

The challenge is that in all the areas where technology-powered marketing can be effective there is a 'start-up cost.' This is measured in man-hours and attention rather than dollars, but unfortunately time is a commodity that often isn't easily available from senior managers. Driving an effective eCRM programme means you need a data plan and a platform for distribution. You need someone who can write and maintain content, there needs to be an operationally effective follow-up programme and a lead tracking system. And you need a measurement strategy that allows you to switch off or dial up levels of activity depending upon performance and cost. For these reasons, distress lead generation does not typically lead to effective technology and data adoption.

Catching Up with Technology and Data

Not all CMOs however are hunting new sales to keep the business running. With the comfort of a stronger pipeline, CMO attention often turns to evolving and innovating. The next challenges they face is typically a consequence of organically grown marketing teams where resources are hired in to do a particular job rather than fulfil a strategic vision for marketing technology. As a consequence, organisations outside of high-tech sectors such as media, tech and biotech, may have no real experience of the use of leading-edge technology.

While increasingly personal use of cloud-based services such as Gmail, LinkedIn and even Amazon is introducing more people to the use of technology in business, expertise at a corporate level is lacking. The Cloud Industry Forum indicates there is now a 56% adoption rate of cloud based services in the private sector[3]. This also means that almost half of businesses have no adoption and therefore zero experience of how this technology may be of benefit. The expectation for these inexperienced companies is usually mixed between it being a cheap way of working –17% of companies cited cost savings as a reason for adoption – and trepidation, because it will be complex to implement.

In these circumstances, when a business leader can sense the opportunity but the organisation has no experience of the implementation, success will come from a gradual change programme to introduce technologies. Rather than jumping straight into social media

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[2] Crain's B2B magazine, San Francisco, March 2012

[3] Cloud Industry Forum, UK based on 300 respondents 2012

platforms and intensive blogging, which often then tails off, a re-evaluation of web assets, development of a customer email newsletter and perhaps a webinar or two will provide learning for building and evolving a workable database and allocating resource to a coherent content strategy.

Technology and data as B2B DNA

To really achieve successful use of data and technology-powered marketing, the company needs to live and breathe it as a concept. Every contact, transaction and conversation is part of the approach, if fully adopted, and the ideal is to establish the use of the appropriate tools and techniques as second nature within the business. Here is an example of how and where this might work:

A regional business based in North West England has great traction in selling interactive screen technology into the education sector. Whilst business was steady in the last 12 months, the sales team was introduced to salesforce.com CRM as a product (it could have been Capsule or Highrise) and subsequently measured performance purely on reports output from the CRM system on a weekly basis. Over six months this became the only currency for lead discussion and tracking of conversations.

The MD facilitated a couple of LinkedIn groups and quickly identified a contributor – a college Principal – that cross-referenced to an ongoing prospect conversation in the CRM system. He tracked the conversation to the original call and dropped a direct LinkedIn message to introduce himself, hooking this contact into the CRM system via a Dropbox widget. Polite introductions done, the following week one of the sales team spotted the group discussion in a daily review of new lead content and picked up the phone to her contact, the Bursar. In the meantime a member of the marketing team had been tracking Pinterest and picked up images of a recent college event with an alumni group that had been filmed and pinned in a vintage car show, one of the personal interests of the Bursar.

The rest you can guess – with a bit of good fortune thrown in. Bottom up and top down connections with the College resulted in an interactive screen trial for three months and subsequent implementation. The MD gets the business, the salesperson gets the bonus, and everything is tracked and measured in real time as part of day-to-day business, so no admin overhead is perceived.

How realistic is this technology-powered marketing DNA?

This link into social media is admittedly a deeper example of embedding technology-powered marketing within B2B DNA – when social media research is part of day-to-day activity across the sales team and not just left to a single 'social analyst' or, equally frequently, a frazzled CMO. Having a qualified perspective on what is coming in on Twitter feeds, filtered Facebook pages, LinkedIn groups and Pinterest can be of real value, and can be tracked into the CRM system. There is a mutual benefit between internal staff, and even to customers who can build a trusted relationship. Independent planner Tom McKnutt[4] cites in his blog:

- "It's an amazing source of natural insight. Social media is free from 'research effects' and in real-time. It overcomes many of the criticisms of traditional research.
- It complements (not substitutes) other forms of research. It provides a layer of social context to help explain and add colour to other research.
- People will accept their posts are in public and freely available. They know companies could listen to their tweets and blog posts. Most would rather their views are heard than ignored."

McKnutt also considers the concept he describes as 'Mutualistic Planning,' which identifies issues with deployment of social media, in a paper that took a silver award in ADMAP 2012:

"Social media has allowed the sharing of views and content to grow exponentially, resulting in power shifting away from brands and media owners that once controlled the production and

[4] feelingmutual.com

dissemination of content. People now have the tools and ability to capture and retain each other's attention and Facebook is predicted to be the biggest content distributor by 2020 – 52% of all media sharing is already on Facebook. So it is vital for companies to get their branded content into people's social networks.

"But brands tend to overestimate the extent to which people want to interact with them online – often up to three-fold. They often force an above-the-line strategy into social media and fail to create experiences people really value and want to be associated with. Online content has such a low latency period in social media that traditional methods of content production are insufficient to keep people engaged. Mutualistic Planning is about creating ideas that generate valuable content socially, in ways that are true to the brand."[5]

So arguably it is realistic to start building these processes into B2B DNA, as the potential value is there but it does require a shift in time allocation. For new things to happen, old habits may need to be given up.

More new ideas – new wine in old skins?

Having cited the use of social media and CRM in direct customer interactions, there are less obvious areas of the marketing spectrum where technology is coming to the fore – notably within the marketing process. To quote Jeremy Braune, founder of Clarite Research: "The area of qualitative research has been lacking in serious innovation and now, with quantitative research using gamification techniques and new online models, it needs to catch up." Technology for marketing continues to evolve and CMOs need to stay current. For instance, 'Mass qual' research is a new methodology for gathering widescale insight quickly and cost-effectively which is now possible through harnessing the best of agile and web-based development.

An example of how new technology tears up the rule book is a traditional financial services organisation with a responsibility to report on Treating Customers Fairly to the FSA – within a 10-day deadline. By using Mass Qual, within 72 hours a survey was published, and 12 hours later 80 qual responses with over 1,000 data points had been recorded, which the client could access and report to the FSA with a positive outcome. All of this occurred within one week of the research briefing, having spent 40% of the cost of traditional focus groups.

This sort of technology can open up opportunities for corporate and smaller marketing teams in the B2B space to help them better target, test and engage audiences with new campaigns.

Measure, measure, measure. How BIG can data get?

At the Aprimo Marketing Summit 2012, a poll by Lisa Arthur found that just 12% of respondents reported they were using 'Big Data' – that is, the ability to harness the rapidly growing pools of customer and market data available from social networks and advertising frameworks to drive marketing strategies. This finding was surprising – as in, the number seemed high. It raised eyebrows much less to learn that around 15% of respondents didn't have a clue what 'Big Data' was.

Big Data needs a business to be mature in the way it collates and organizes its customer, sales and marketing data. Big Data can start coming to life when good measurement techniques begin to paint a clear picture of performance, to replace techniques that previously seemed like a black art. Putting a dashboard together to evaluate email, display, affiliate, search, social and mobile campaign activity using automated tools can suddenly bring to life what was a maze of complexity. From this point executional plans can be made that start to reflect this technology in B2B DNA.

For example, a key concept in measurement often talked about in the media world – but not yet sufficiently at the business end of operational activity – is whether media is earned, bought, or sold. Significantly, selling off media space on your assets may be attractive but may damage the brand, while earning media by content distribution may seem cost effective

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[5] 'Planning 3.0. The feeling is mutual' ADMAP Silver award 2012 – Tom McKnutt

but may suck a company's time into a vacuum. Buying media may just be the most ROI-friendly way to get traction. It's likely that you'll mix and match according to tactical and strategic planning needs.

Measuring the outcome of all of these media channels in a single, coherent way can bring clarity to decision-making that would otherwise be very cloudy.

A journey in time and technology

When challenged with whether you're adopting new technology too slowly or simply because you're blindly jumping on the back of the latest fad, it's often interesting to do a wind-back and wind-forward exercise. The CMO should step back 12 months into his or her personal history, then 24 months, then 5 years and then 10 years, and evaluate your own experience of changing marketing activities to which you have been exposed. Now pick the more progressive companies or brands in your own personal portfolio – would you have named Google, say, 5 years ago? – and evaluate how dramatically different they behave compared to another business in a previous time period (Nokia anyone?).

It'll be clear that the pace of change and impact of technology has increased not in a linear but at an exponential rate. You probably knew this already. But looking backwards helps to bring clarity to forward thinking.

Now try a similar exercise and project forwards over the same time periods. If you project the same pace of change can you imagine what techniques may be being deployed? How about face-to-face marketing techniques being primarily deployed virtually via VOIP technologies – like our good old, familiar Skype. Another example could be pension and life assurance policies having their values enhanced as people agree to have a chip inserted to monitor their weekly health and report it back to a central data source – pretty scary stuff. What about the FSA re-emerging as the Financial Intelligence Monitoring Service and taking a lead in qualifying whether data used for financial purposes has been collected validly and with integrity.

The very existence of organisations like Google, Facebook, Twitter, Groupon, Pinterest and Linkedin is based on exploiting and filling in this imagined world. B2B marketers must decipher whether they are catching the wave, getting drowned by it, or watching the surfers from the comfort of their deck chair. Just for fun check out the Google Project Glass [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9c6W4CCU9M4] and see how familiar this future world really is.

And finally,

So is it only high growth, risk-comfortable entrepreneurial marketing organisations that have the time, focus and energy to use technology in B2B marketing as a disruptor? Or is there scope for the majority of organisations to borrow a bit here and a bit there, to take a small chunk of 'Big Data' and marry it with a deep dive of social media and then integrate it with a business-friendly CRM system? Having examined these scenarios and seen the pitfalls and opportunities, including where the key value-adds can be at different stages of B2B marketing development, it is certainly possible.

The dramatic and often disruptive impact that a technology-powered B2B marketing strategy can have is worth an investment in time, and money. The goal needs to be to build it into the B2B DNA and acknowledge that implementing technology for B2B marketing tends to move the cost from a currency of dollars to a currency of time – though this time investment will still return net positive ROI.

The reality is that most businesses find it easier to deploy cash rather than time to effect change. Understanding your appetite for changing this dynamic is fundamental to getting the best out of technology-powered B2B marketing.