

## Integrated marketing

If you are don't get the right message to your potential customers at the right place, the right time and the right cost then you won't have a successful business.



That has become far more difficult of late as markets have fragmented and technology has speeded up this movement. It's easy to see – 2 TV channels to over 200. No internet to over 90 million websites.

So making sure that you have an integrated marketing plan and that your customers get the same message and visual clues in all the marketing you do so that you maximize the return on your marketing budget is more and more

essential. Successful integrated marketing brings together a whole range of channels into one blended campaign all sharing the same message.

To produce effective integration you now need to work on the basis that marketing is a conversation between you and your customers and prospects. It is not just one specific press release, pay per click advert, email or web page but how all of those (and more, including customer service, staff attitudes etc.) come together.

We are all bombarded with thousands of messages from thousands of advertisers every day. We are good at filtering out messages that don't appeal – whether that's going out for a cup of tea in the ad break or fast forwarding the recording, deleting the email etc. So you need to reach customers and prospects at a time when they are interested which means you cannot rely on any single channel as every individual is different.

With this increasing information overload there is strong evidence that customers and prospects are basing their purchasing decisions on what they perceive to be important or true rather than on solid, rational, detailed information. Perception is reality. It may not be correct, but... This "sound bite" approach means messages must be clear, concise, consistent and easily understood or they will simply be ignored.



So, increased channel fragmentation and "sound bite" perception mean that you must deliver more relevant, individualized "customer experiences" and messages.

What then are the main resources to achieve this at our disposal?

**Web site.** Assuming your website can be found easily by those searching for your product or service (so you need good search engine optimization or SEO and possibly some Pay per Click or PPC adverts) the web is a 24/7 marketing opportunity. Once found it needs to be informative, easy to use and well designed. If you operate internationally then also make sure it's in the right languages.

**Internet marketing.** SEO and PPC as mentioned, blogs, email, rss feeds, podcasts, virals, affiliates, extranet and social networks can all have a place in the mix. Your customers are online more and more and you need to reach them when they are and how they want.

**Direct marketing.** Email, direct mail, door drops, telemarketing (inbound and outbound), SMS, face to face (whether that be networking, a sales call or a trade show).



**Public relations.** This includes not only traditional press and media releases (online as well as offline these days) but also sponsorship, events, speaking, community relations and more.

**Advertising.** There are a whole range of possibilities. TV, radio, press, online, directories. Obviously the budget will affect which you may choose but it's vital to make sure that once the choice is made the adverts

mention your web site and phone number as well as your offer and brand and that the message is consistent across all the media.

**Collateral:** brochures, case studies, white papers. Your materials provide customers and prospects with important messages.

**Tools:** CRM system, online tools such as web-chat, ticketing systems etc.

That's not an exhaustive list and clearly there are loads of options (something like  $2.6525286 \times 10^{32}$  apparently just on the channels mentioned).

So how do you make sure that the process of integrated marketing works?

Well a lot of it depends on technology to enable integration. Technology is no panacea but it does make things easier. And there are three things that need to be at the heart of it all, your:

- customer database
- product or service database
- website

These two things allow you to automate and integrate all types of marketing activity. The website is the 24/7 inbound resource and the databases the basis of

outbound activity and customer segmentation. Bringing them together via automation allows you if you are, for example, a retailer to:

- accept orders at any time
- record where the customer came from to know which marketing channels are working best
- send relevant personalized and automated messages to customers
- allow customers to see the status of their order
- integrate with your stock control system so levels are reduced by the order
- integrate with your accounting and banking systems so payment is received and recorded
- integrate with your customer database so that you have a detailed record of who bought what when and enrich it with external profile or lifestyle data such as MOSAIC



But that is just the enabling. The crucial factors not mentioned above are creativity and design. You can analyze the past, but you need to design the future and that requires ideas. Ideas need to be treated as seriously as finance and raw materials and require creativity. It's that creativity that can ensure clear, concise, consistent and easily understood messages that will work in the whole range of media chosen.

That then has to be communicated in a well designed way and we have to ask ourselves:

"what will the customer experience when we do X?"

and answer that question with good design for the:

- information
- interaction
- graphic
- emotional
- product
- service

elements that make up the "customer experience".

Now we have an integrated marketing programme and all that remains is to cost and deliver it.