

A detailed miniature model of a London street scene. In the foreground, three figures are crossing a zebra crossing. To the left, a police officer stands on the sidewalk. The street is filled with miniature cars and red double-decker buses. The background shows more of the street and buildings.

All you need is **love**...

a modern marketer's tech guide



The arrival of new technologies has opened opportunities for marketing, but taking advantage of them requires a significant shift in modus operandi. In today's 'age of the customer' where consumers have easy access to a multitude of research tools, marketing is all about leveraging technology to gauge customer sentiment and build reputation based on honesty, openness and authenticity. Clare Coulson asked industry thought leaders how businesses should behave and where technology fits....

Image: Kradlum

Marketing has come a long way since Pear's Soap became the first legally registered brand in 1789 and French newspaper *La Presse* took the first paid advertising in 1836. Indeed it has come a long way from simple print ads, TV commercials and billboards. Today Kevin Roberts, CEO of world-leading advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, talks about 'lovemarks' not 'trademarks'; brands that touch the heart as well as the mind, creating an intimate, emotional connection with their fans.

He says lovemarks inspire 'loyalty beyond reason'. "Take a brand away and people will find a replacement," the Saatchi & Saatchi website proclaims, "take a lovemark away and people will protest its absence. Lovemarks are a relationship, not a mere transaction." In short, they are every marketer's dream result.

Love and mastery

Professor Simon Bell, professor of marketing & director of executive education at the University of Melbourne, refers to Saatchi & Saatchi's lovemarks when discussing the new marketing landscape. He says that today it's not the product but the engagement that sells.

"We've known for a long time that people value mastery and we are now seeing that that kind of need for mastery can extend in to the consumer space where the customer becomes a better customer, an educated one through participation and involvement.

"For a long time I think businesses have thought that they were the ones solely responsible for creating what is valuable."

A recent IBM survey of more than 4000 C-suite executives, entitled '*The customer activated enterprise*' showed that CEOs have noticed customers' desire to be engaged as individuals. They now see customers as a bigger force in driving company strategy than either company boards or their own internal strategy function. It's a massive shift and according to the study members

of the C-suite agree that there is an entirely new set of dynamics emerging.

"Customers and citizens expect to be treated as individuals, which means knowing what makes each of us 'tick': our values, beliefs, habits and quirks. That, in turn, requires much closer collaboration between organisations and the people they serve," the report says.

With the arrival of online self-service this



collaboration and interaction, which was traditionally achieved by human contact, must now also be accomplished via 'intimate systems' - technologies that create a sense of intimacy.

Good listeners

One way to gauge customer satisfaction is through a market research technique called 'Voice of the Customer' or VoC programmes. Alan Tong, Asia Pacific director of research firm Frost & Sullivan describes VoC as the perception of customer's needs and how they drive satisfaction. The strategy focuses on customer acquisition and retention by understanding what makes them happy.

VoC solutions collect data on customer needs from various customer touch points or interaction channels and use analytical tools to understand and prioritise them so the business can put the learnings in to action. Tong says anyone interested in setting up a VoC programme should have full commitment from the senior management in terms of resources, innovation, support and funding. "Build-in the entire VoC value as part of the

"It's really important to understand that social networks are both a destabilising and disrupting factor for sales people."

Tom Skotidas, director of Skotidas

organisation's business strategy in developing the customer relationship."

Hot new couple

Referring to the findings of the IBM report, Ian Wong, interactive experience lead for IBM A/ NZ, says the customer-activated enterprise will place significant demands on IT systems to build an ecosystem that is capable of supporting very complex customer interactions. For CIOs and chief marketing officers (CMOs) this requires a major shift in priorities. They need to act in concert on activities relating to customer experience management and new business development.

"We see the CIO and the CMO becoming an



increasingly important duo. The CMO and the CIO need to work in unison for the CEO to really drive the customer experience that they need to gain competitive advantage," says Wong.

Lies and heartbreak

An authentic and fulfilling customer experience is what sets one brand above another and customers are finely tuned to detect a fake.

Geoff Ross, creator of 42 Below vodka and it's cool-yet-inclusive brand vibe (and ex-Saatchi & Saatchi man to boot), explains: "All brands need stories. They need roots, credentials and a reason for being. The great thing about the internet is people can look into your backyard really quickly and if your brand story is not true and genuine you are going to be found out." On the up side he says, the internet has increased the speed of a brand's development. "Things can spread really quickly. Messaging is very scalable on the internet and that works for you when you have a really compelling and entertaining story."

Reputation management specialist Karyn Arkell, who has kept the gloss on the reputations of some of Australasia's biggest brands at Grace and Acumen agrees. She says the internet has

made everything faster and smartphones have put cameras and social media in to the hands of the masses. She advises that people, brands and businesses think carefully about the company they keep - the other brands they align or associate with, the environments they tell their stories in, and where, when and with whom they are seen. "What you say is heavily influenced by where and how you say it," she says. "Never, ever lie. Always act with integrity."

Share the love

Back in 1983 motorbike brand Harley-Davidson looked like it was on the road to oblivion. Thirty years later it is a top-50 global brand thanks to its decision to engage with its core group of fans and build a community based on the lifestyle, activities and essence of the brand. This was before everyone had email and long before web 2.0, social media and smartphones existed.

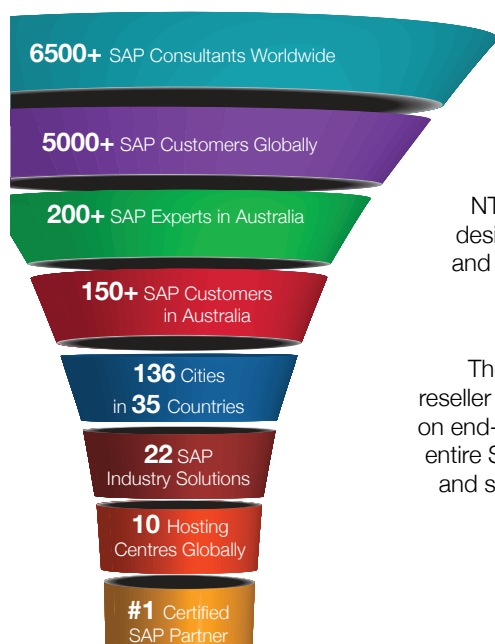
But Bell says that marketers today need to relax and "let the client into the kitchen". "That's why McDonald's has open kitchens - so that they could show off the cleanliness of their kitchen and the good behaviour of the staff. When was the last time we saw a kitchen in a restaurant behind a greasy

swinging door with a glass portal in it? It's chefs front and centre."

It is a hard thing to do for marketers who have existed for years on the basis of black box proprietary technologies and ideas that were guarded jealously, says Bell, but at the end of the day the evidence shows that people don't love brands for their products but for the communities they belong to by engaging with the brand. The clients themselves are part of the conversation about what a brand represents or means by interacting not just with the firm through Facebook and other online discussion portals, but also with other customers. Those conversations are going on well and truly outside of marketers' control.

Sales people are a valuable marketing asset and Tom Skotidas, director of B2B social media lead generation company Skotidas, says that social networks and the internet have changed the way B2B buyers treat sales professionals. "B2B buyers all of a sudden have a massive amount of information that they can rely on to self educate before they call the sales rep in. And there are studies at prove this: almost 60 percent of any decision has been made before a sales rep is called in," he explains.

"It's really important to understand that social



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networks are both a destabilising and disrupting factor for sales people, but at the same time, if sales professionals understand this they can actually arrest the buyer's attention and be part of their early decision making and buying process before it is too late.”

To do this sales people have to forget the sale, forget the money and become a respected part of the community their potential buyers frequent. They must become overwhelmingly focused on providing insights that solve the needs of their target audience, without any expectation of a sale. If they can do that, he says, they will build trust with the community and an associated perception of value, and the sales will come naturally.

In fact customer engagement carries such importance that Bell suggests Android will win the war over Apple. “Apple are very closed. They rely on their internal people being the smartest guys in the room, the ones that will come up with the solution to all problems. But Apple are still a minority. We think Apple are dominating but Android are killing them. In a sense it's because Android are an open platform, they are far more embracing of customer ideas, they publish roadmaps of where the platforms are going and Apple don't and I think it's to Apple's detriment in this regard.”

Pick your battles

Ross, says that discussions in open forums with customers can be enlightening but it can be easy to get carried away and influenced by customer views that, while they maybe irksome or exciting, are not actually influential. He suggests that looking at who else is following commenters is a good way to reference check how influential they are in the grander scheme of things.

“It's very easy for people to be a keyboard warrior; they can hide behind their keyboard and be pretty vehement and aggressive in their views but it's not necessarily what they would tell you in person and that's not necessarily what broader society is thinking either,” he says.

Skotidas says it is easy for companies to over-

estimate the negative impact of social media on their company and says people are generally quite forgiving, even in the presence of quite negative comments. Indeed, marketers should remember that not everything said about their brand will be positive but if they listen there may be lessons to learn about how customers really feel.

Ross warns managers not to let company strategy become unduly influenced or skewed by customer's online comments. “I think that's really dangerous because they don't have the context or the view or the future understanding or the intimate knowledge that you do”. At the end of the day he says you should always act with honesty and be prepared to know what to listen to and what to ignore in social media.

Hooking up

As polarising as they are, social media and the internet have been significant enabling factors in building brand communities and engaging with customers authentically, but they are by no means the only technology-based tactics available to marketers today.

There are the traditional CRM platforms and email campaigns, and the more sophisticated marketing automation platforms, location-based mobile marketing and loyalty cards integrated with the point of sale solution. Increasingly there is targeted digital signage, personalised apps and digital wallets that attract, convert and smooth the path to payment. Underpinning the efficacy of all of these is analytics – real-time analytics, reported analytics, behavioural analytics etc.

Arkell says she has seen development in this measurement and reporting area. “We've moved on from things like press clipping services to integrated brand monitors that give you real-time monitoring of online conversations.” To get a more sophisticated and accurate read of a brand's total market reputation, however, you need to layer what your brand research is telling you against what people are saying on social media, how engaged they are, how much they are sharing information etc. “If you layer all of those three things together

you get something that tells you what your total market impression is like, as opposed to looking at these things in not only an outdated way but also in isolation of each other. That's the area where progress is being made,” Arkell says.

She admits, however, that it can be a challenge to get people to invest in these tools despite the value she believes they offer. Skotidas suggests that if social media listening software and sentiment analysis tools are too pricy then free Google alerts, industry newsletters and an employee or two that are active on social media provide adequate substitutes.

Intimately linked

As Arkell says, there is little point in approaching each type of marketing and customer-related activity independently and systems need to be integrated to offer the best result.

“You need to try to actively integrate it [online and social media platforms] within your communications marketing plan. I think that the best companies and the best relationships with customers are born out of intimacy. These can be supported by back office CRM platforms so there is another technology that needs to be integrated,” says Bell.

He warns, however, that technology solutions are not just a bolt-on that automatically result in loyal customers. “It's really the other way around, you have loyal customers based on what you do, and the value you create, and CRM platforms are more a way to make that easier – a facilitating device,” he says.

Perfect match

The brands we are loyal to are the brands that we love. Love comes from intimacy and intimacy in the marketing world comes from technologies that facilitate conversations that are personal, meaningful and authentic. Any technologies that facilitate intimacy with customers will be the ones that underpin genuine brand loyalty. Perhaps, at the end of the day, all we really need is love... and a little bit of tech. 