CMOs need to embrace new technologies and tools to build brand trust

By Paula Sartini

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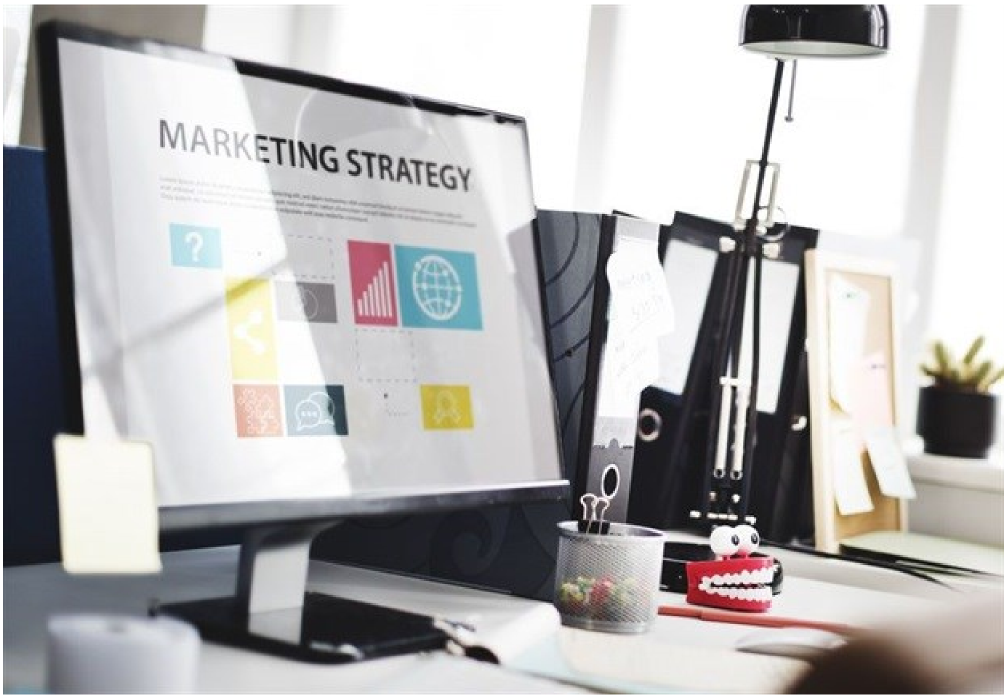
BrandQuantum recently hosted a marketing roundtable to debate the role of marketing in today's digital business environment and some of the key challenges they are facing.

From the discussion points, it was clear that marketing needs to evolve into a fully integrated role that owns the customer experience, embraces technology to meet the digital requirements of customers and has a seat at the boardroom table to drive and influence product development based on marketing insights.



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Even though digital isn’t new, several marketers are still grappling with it and, in many instances, it remains a separate function from the marketing department. Marketers agree that they lack the knowledge and skills to use digital tools and technologies to their advantage and need to upskill quickly if they are to own the customer experience. But who should own the customer experience? Who is responsible for making sure the customer experience is consistent? Should marketing be held accountable for driving the customer experience and generating revenue?

Customer experience, which is critical in giving businesses the competitive advantage, is a complex phenomenon that is greatly influenced by every customer engagement at every touch point, this ranges from the call centre handling customer queries through to the finance department. With so many touch points throughout an organisation, how do companies deliver consistent brand experiences that are not diluted throughout the process?

Integration is the key

The roundtable respondents agreed that companies cannot afford to not adapt to the new business landscape which is driven by customer’s requirements and regulatory changes. Organisations have restructured accordingly and marketers believe that an integrated marketing approach has to be adopted whereby various functions across the organisation work together as a team to collaborate and respond to customer needs quickly and deliver a consistent customer experience at every touch point.

A key challenge for marketers within larger organisations is legacy issues. While they usually have a strategic brand vision combined with brand strength and the necessary budget to develop and implement initiatives, they are often blocked by legacy issues, such as traditional processes and systems, these prevent them from being able to execute. Often these marketers have little option but to identify and focus on big impact projects. However, marketing should play a strategic role within an organisation and be able to plan long term campaigns, yet most admitted to having tight timeframes, often as short as three months, to plan and implement campaigns.

Smaller organisations, on the other hand, while they have the advantage of having teams in place to meet the customer expectations and keep up with the latest trends, don't have the brand strength that is needed to help them overcome potential hiccups or hurdles that they may encounter in building the brand reputation.

Both larger and smaller organisations agree that the business environment and marketing function are both evolving and it is the pace of change that is the biggest issue for larger organisations as they aren't able to adapt quickly enough to keep up with the trends. These include macro trends such as the PoPI Act, privacy issues and data protection which present new challenges for marketers as they can, for example, no longer outsource data to third party suppliers and now need to bring campaigns in-house. These marketers need tools to help them to be nimble and compete against local and global organisations, but also need to be able to bring the previously outsourced function back in-house without crippling the marketing department with the additional workload.

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Elizabeth de Stadler 21 Feb 2018

Adding to this, marketing departments are under pressure to demonstrate their value to the organisation. Today's marketers are being asked to marry marketing with sales functions and put measurement metrics in place to determine its output and the contribution to the company's profits. In some instances, marketing heads are shifting to the role of chief growth officer where they are held accountable for the company's sales success. With the right tools in place, marketers will be able to pull metrics that analyse their activity and show the success of various initiatives based on specific metrics.

A company's brand remains important

The roundtable respondents agreed that brand remains a critical component to the success of the organisation and while marketing is under pressure to deliver immediate results, its real value will only be seen in three to five years on the brand scorecard. As such marketing's success should be measured by customer experience over time and not just on the company's profits.

In organisations where marketing has a seat at the boardroom table, marketing insights drive and influence product development and determine how the company moves into the market, effectively positioning the company against its competitors. Marketers agree that regardless of whether they are targeting a business audience or a consumer audience, at the end of the day they are selling to people and a brand's values remains critical to driving a company's success. For this reason, marketers believe that the greater the brand trust and love the greater the impact on the income statement.

To gain greater brand love, marketing needs to embrace the new tools and technologies that are available to them. These should be used to supplement initiatives and influence the outcome of customer decision-making. Today the customer is king again and they are making decisions based on experiences and brand equity.

Getting the basics right builds brand trust

Brand equity remains a key driver of the success of any organisation. We've seen this when companies go through crises, those with strong brand equity come out of the situation fairly unscathed. Consistency and authenticity are critical to building the brand equity and can only be achieved if companies pay attention to the smallest details such as the tone on an email, the impact of an email signature and the transparency of company details on the letterheads.

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Equally important is having employees buy into the brand and the company culture. Often larger and well-established organisations have an advantage over newer or smaller organisations as the culture is already established and potential employees buy into it when applying for a position to work there. But it is important for both large and small organisations to take their employees along on the journey of building the brand and providing them with the right tools to deliver according to the company brand in all customer interactions. After all, if a company doesn't pay attention to the smaller details, how can their customers trust them to get the more complicated things right?

Overview of the key challenges CMOs face today

While the marketing landscape has evolved over the years, the chief marketing officer (CMO) is faced with a few key challenges that keep them up at night. Firstly, they want to understand the role that technology has to play in marketing today and believe that it is critical that they upskill in order to better understand the business landscape. The CMO needs to measure marketing activities and have ROI metrics in place to gain greater insights into the impact of campaigns and initiatives implemented. In addition, these metrics are vital to determine if the organisation is on the right path to achieve both its brand and business objectives.

Equally important is the challenge of achieving consistency of brand, from the visual elements through to the brand tone and the brand experience, since brand consistency requires alignment of the complete organisation and its value chain. It also requires an orchestrated and concerted effort from every employee to ensure brand consistency at every customer interaction. This is particularly true in service-based environments where the only differentiator is the brand and the customer experience.

ABOUT PAULA SARTINI

With over 20 years' experience helping leading organisations overcome various business challenges, Paula understands the challenges that companies face in delivering a consistent brand experience and the impact this has on their bottom line. An analytical thinker that strives to solve business problems with innovative solutions, Paula believes that technology plays a major role in solving critical business and branding challenges. As such, she established BrandQuantum to help businesses overcome their branding challenges in the digital age.

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