

Is "marketing" and other terminology creating a silo culture?

By  Dave Nemeth

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The meaning of 'marketing' is technically described as: *The action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising...*

Having recently sat in on a round table discussion with some of the countries leading marketing directors and executives, as well as consulting to a host of top brands, this idealistic interpretation has bombarded my psyche to such an extent that I need to vent my opinions on the issue, which I am strongly opinionated about.

As much as I believe we need specialists within positions, technological factors as well as the ever-changing attitude of the consumer mean it is vital that we start having more generalists that understand the bigger picture. We need to create a collaborative culture and start to clarify the role of brand building to a consumer, who at present is inundated with a huge amount of noise across a multitude of mediums.

So to start with, the term 'marketing' needs to be replaced in many instances by something like engagement and customer experience management - although marketing itself and the term will probably actually never die or disappear, companies may be forced to take on 'new' terminology to truly get the best out of their staff in these departments. Other terms that should be excluded and which are heavily overused are: Below the line, above the line and omni-channel.

Just like being "eco-friendly" is no longer a trend, so omni-channel should be embedded in a company's customer engagement DNA and not create a lengthy discussion around the boardroom table. Using these terms creates specific silos and the results are generally seen in the way a company communicates with its audience, often with a non-cohesive message.



Other silos... © Jaroslaw Baczewski – 123RF.com

There are still really large corporates going out with press releases stating they have an aggressive omni-channel strategy. That's like saying they are considering having a website.

What we are currently seeing is companies splitting up ad spend across all the various channels and the various teams responsible for these outputs going back to their secluded silos and pulling on their "thinking caps". They will have to show an adequate return on the budget they have been given, so the R200,000 allocation for Facebook, will need to show some sort of measurable return, as will print and other mediums. It is a huge mistake to allow each specialised area to work in isolation with only a measurable return as the carrot and the KPI as the stick, because the overall company message can very likely end up as a blurred mix-match across all these platforms.

Don't get me wrong, there are companies out there that do get this right. However, at this stage, they are few and far between. Many ad agencies - please note use of the word '**many**' - are more interested in putting another award into their reception cabinet than in creating a meaningful relationship or engagement between client and consumer. Whilst we are on the issue of innovation and creativity, why is it that most ad agencies look the same? The norm seems to consist mostly of creative slogans and typographic overkill, with colour blocking and creative boardroom names, with as much use of glass as possible. The way of work is changing and these agencies should know and be at the forefront of this paradigm shift. Once again, note that some of them really are getting every aspect right.

I do believe that we need to start by changing the entire culture around this age-old way of "marketing". A good start would be a name change where applicable, to create a company dynamic that will assist in understanding the task ahead. When we are suddenly called an 'engagement and customer experience' manager, we start to focus on the importance of bringing all the aspects together, as well as the need for great content, without having the word 'content management' thrown into the mix as well. We will now realise that all the different channels lead to one really strong message across the various groups we are targeting - or in some cases, multiple messages. We also start to realise that certain mediums will not necessarily show a measurable return, but rather be part of the message journey, which will hopefully show great results as we tell an entire story. We will continually be striving to lead our customer on an exciting and engaging journey, which will provide loyalty as long as we are doing this.

Our engagement and customer experience department will understand the brand so well that they will be able to give such a specific brief to the ad agency they won't run astray with irrelevant bells and whistles, which really do nothing except inflate the bill. This doesn't mean the ad agency can't be creative, it just means the parameters and the goals are clear. We need to understand that ad agencies are not retail specialists, or tile specialists or lingerie specialists, so it is always advisable to also consult with professionals within these industries. Often even at store level or at the point where there is contact with the customer where possible, which will assist both parties and ensure the content is relevant and enticing.

This process and new outlook needs to begin at the top, as this is just one area within a company's structure that needs to move into alignment with current times. It also doesn't mean throwing out the baby with the bath water and getting rid of staff, but rather empowering them to think differently and to work together. It is necessary to have a better understanding of budget allocation and to realise that not every area is the golden goose but to rather have a cohesive strategy, which will ultimately have a greater return on investment.

Educational institutions need to quickly get up to speed with these real-world changes as well as the changing face of consumer attitudes. We need to engage and enthrall our customers instead of just selling them product. Those days are gone.

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ABOUT DAVE NEMETH

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