

THE W2 COMMUNICATIONS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES:

WHY YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY ISN'T WORKING - AND HOW TO FIX IT

If we traveled in a time machine to a long-ago era – say, the beginning of the 1980s – we'd see a marketing world far removed from that of today: Advertisers feared that an increasingly popular product called the VCR would make their TV campaigns obsolete. Tim Berners-Lee would not invent the World Wide Web until the end of the decade. In the absence of online connectivity a big, thick Yellow Pages book served as the “search engine” of the day.

Yet, even then, visions of the future – specifically how new technologies would redefine marketing – abounded. Experts predicted that advancements such as touchscreens would leverage real-time insights to drive personalized, cross-device engagement throughout different platforms, according to MarTech Advisor. They envisioned interactive ads which would “travel” from screens to mall kiosks to wristwatches, interweaving real-world and digital experiences. They anticipated the capture of big data and the profound impact of “science fiction” artificial intelligence solutions on campaigns.

Today these technologies are omnipresent, and marketers must incorporate them and other innovations into their strategies. At the same time, lines are blurring that once distinguished blogs, news articles, longform reports/papers, creative content, social media posts and advertising, and companies now need to combine storytelling and both historical and predictive data to craft seamless, multi-channel customer experiences. Not surprisingly, the inherent collision of delivering millennia-old storytelling techniques and our human desire to “become immersed in a good tale” with the competitive advantages afforded by cutting-edge technologies, results in organizations struggling to create an optimal customer journey.



In its State of Digital Marketing¹ survey report, the research/consulting firm Altimeter indicates that the scaling of marketing innovation across business units has emerged as a top challenge, as cited by 54 percent of surveyed digital marketers. Other top challenges include validating the business impact of digital marketing (as cited by 47 percent) and producing customized content based on customer data (33 percent). When asked about marketing technology challenges specifically, survey participants ranked integration efforts as #1, as cited by 31 percent of respondents.

These professionals must effectively respond to the challenges to accomplish their top goals: Using more data to create customized content that serves the customer journey (51 percent); investing in technology that enables real-time delivery and personalization of data (50 percent); leveraging more creative skills to scale content in new, interactive forms (48 percent); integrating multiple software systems to share customer data (41 percent); and taking advantage of better techniques and technologies to measure the impact of digital marketing (39 percent).

“As the role of digital marketing continues to expand, marketers are faced with a continuous reevaluation of their roles and capabilities,” according to the Altimeter report. “Customer expectations have increased the pressure for companies to be present on many digital channels, delivering personalized, positive experiences on every single one...As these goals evolve, so does the definition of ‘digital marketing excellence,’ which today is radically different from what it was even a year ago.”

At W2 Communications, our Digital Marketing team works closely with clients every day to help them meet their goals. We also see the inherent problems and missteps that result in the top challenges specified in the Altimeter report. Let’s examine them in more detail to illustrate why so many of these efforts fail:

Scaling Marketing Innovation Across Business Units and Validating the Impact of Digital Marketing

These challenges are rooted in the same core issues: Companies are attempting to scale campaigns without the right measurements in place to validate which campaigns are successfully generating leads and conversions, and which are not. You should not attempt to scale what you are not measuring properly in the first place.

For example, our team worked with a large, enterprise client that set up its digital marketing initiatives in scattered internal silos – one for web, another for organic social media, another for paid social media, another for cost-per-click (CPC), etc. Yes, they “talked” to each other. But, for the most part, they operated individually. Consequently, there was no overarching vision of attribution, and why it mattered. If they earned a “big win” by landing a new client with major revenue potential, they did not know which of their digital campaigns (the website, organic social, paid social, etc.) “earned” it. Without this precise level of business impact validation, they had no idea which



campaigns to scale up with additional investment because they were producing tangible, ROI-driving results, and which ones to fix or jettison entirely because they weren't. In other words, not only do you need to determine the efficacy of a campaign before you invest in it further, but you also need to be able to accurately determine your cost-per-lead (CPL) metrics.

For this to happen, teams need to work as a consolidated, integrated whole and not in separate silos, collaborating closely on a unified strategic business vision and following up with granular validation to make better decisions about scaling. Marketing messaging in content, social media and advertising will also benefit in the process with improved consistency, which plays a critical role in the customer journey: If a paid ad promotes a paper that is going to tell the intended target audience members how to avoid identity theft, but the paper is actually about promoting a particular credit card, then there will be significant disconnect in that journey. This results in a lost conversion, creates brand confusion and, worse yet, brand distrust/abandonment, which is most likely unforgivable.

Difficulties in Producing Customized Content Based on Customer Data

Here are the very fundamental insights you should seek from customer data: How did they find us? What were they searching for, and what key terms did we use in our landing pages, social posts, ads, blogs, articles, webinars, podcasts and papers to get in front of them? What are our long-tail and short-tail keyword bundles and how can they be incorporated into customized content, only to be reevaluated next month?

This is where you take a deep dive into tools like Google Analytics to gain insights into the search terms that people are using as well as their flow through your site. You may find, for example, that pages promoting "human resources" products end up much lower in search results than those that offer "HR" products. That's because people are far more likely to type "HR" in a search than write out "human resources." This may sound like a simple thing. But you'd be surprised at how many companies never do the research to make these discoveries. Instead, they make the same mistakes, over and over again.

Comparing your own keyword strengths (and weaknesses) to those of your competitors helps too. Via keyword gap tools such as SEMrush, you can analyze where you may be falling short of the competition – what words and phrases are they using to get better results than you? Fortunately, because the content is digital, you can easily customize it by adding the best and most current keywords and phrases that your analysis efforts produce.

Advanced tools such as Google Tag Manager afford the opportunity to measure the effectiveness of actual page-level assets. For example, with triggers you can tell how far down a page a visitor scrolled, how much of your video was watched, which buttons in a hero section carousel were pressed, etc. Analyzing these behaviors allows you to quickly adapt your web pages for more optimum visitor experiences.

Failure to Integrate Marketing Technologies

Digital marketing can be a vast, unwieldy ecosystem; but it doesn't have to be. You have an abundance of platforms and toolsets. Many of them can to interconnect but, too often, they are not. When the digital marketing team sits down and looks at everything, it is so difficult to assess all of the disparate data to answer a very basic question: How did we get this particular customer? Which campaign delivered sales, and which did not? Which aspects of this enormous data set can actually shed light on our KPIs?

Inevitably, the team will grow frustrated...“There are too many tools...I don't know how to get the intelligence I need out of them...I'm tired of sorting through endless haystacks and never finding the needle.”

Every goal of a campaign – whether brand awareness, lead generation or something else – requires different tools and techniques. This, of course, contributes to a sense of overload and helplessness. So it's critical to leverage analytics that will reveal the impact of each campaign and the solutions behind it, i.e., which marketing initiatives helped us meet strategic objectives for the current quarter/year and which kept us from doing so? With this, you more readily focus investment, streamline the ecosystem and integrate everything so that it all drives toward the achievement of overarching goals.

We Can Help!

At W2 Communications, we understand that successful strategies need to integrate shared, earned, owned and paid media (your website, blogs, product reviews/recommendations, social media posts and shares, bylined articles and advertising) with creative content and advanced creative design and digital capabilities. As PR, marketing, content and advertising continue to evolve and become more integrated, we help you build a strong brand, elevate awareness, drive engagement and inspire action by connecting your message throughout all of the channels where your customers seek information.

Our experience and capabilities in digital strategy ensure our clients will have a trusted partner to comb through the data, discover and develop key insights, provide clarity for cross-channel deployment, maintain proper functionality and keep your initiatives visually stunning, highly engaging and measurably effective. It's extremely unlikely that you can do all of this on your own – even if you are part of a large enterprise with many resources to invest. It's not a matter of affordability; it's about “doing digital marketing right.” So we welcome the opportunity to learn more about your goals, and collaborate with you to eliminate your digital marketing blind spots and build results-producing campaigns. Contact us to find out more about how we can help you succeed!



About the Author

Stephen Mackey, Chief Creative Officer



A dynamic public speaker and Telly-award winning producer and director, Stephen brings to W2 Communications a keen ability to assimilate emerging technologies, enabling W2 to deliver effective, relevant and profitable solutions for our clients' successful business initiatives.

In 2012, Stephen was named "Entrepreneur of the Year" at the Loudoun Chamber Small Business Awards. Outside of W2 Communications, Stephen is active in the Northern Virginia business community and has served on the board of directors for a number of organizations, including the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce and Loudoun County Economic Development Commission.

Stephen is also the co-founder (with his wife, Shannon) and internationally award-winning wine composer and brewmaster for Notaviva Craft Fermentations, the world's only brand that pairs craft beverages with music. In 2016, he published his first book, "Dream. Build. Believe.," which is a memoir on the founding of the winery, and in 2018 he produced and directed the award-winning feature length documentary, "This Business of Autism," which has been selected for fourteen International film festivals including the Entr'2 Marches in Cannes, France.

Earlier in his career, after earning a bachelor of music/music engineering technology from the University of Miami in Florida, Stephen worked as an audio engineer and event producer, traveling to six continents with entertainers such as Matchbox20, Bon Jovi, Garth Brooks, Amy Grant and Julio Iglesias. He has conceived, coded, patented and brought to market a wide array of digital media, web and multimedia solutions.

About W2 Communications

W2 Communications is a strategic, integrated marketing communications firm serving clients on the leading-edge. We build differentiating campaigns across a breadth of technology, government and retail markets, blending the latest tools and approaches with senior-level expertise and deep market knowledge. From strategy to execution, we create the messaging and story that drive your most strategic outputs, from clear positioning to market engagement.

References

¹<https://www.prophet.com/download/the-state-of-digital-marketing/>