

Customer is still king in the new digital world

Digital marketing is unquestionably the fastest developing area of marketing. In most lines of business, benefits can be reaped through reviewing the opportunities that digital technologies provide and how they impact customer behaviour and their online engagement.

Any online approach should always begin with the customer. Understanding who the customer is, how the marketplace works, and how they use the online channel is just as critical to making a success of digital marketing as it was for traditional marketing.

But in many cases, businesses aren't sufficiently agile to take advantage of these new digital opportunities. The frustration is caused by many factors. In particular truly understanding how the web can help listen to the customer and leverage the insights revealed.

To successfully manage your company's digital channels to market it is worth being aware of the current trends in digital marketing, trends that endorse the premise that customer is indeed still king in the digital world:

1. Customer-centricity and customer insight – catering for all customer types and following trends and measuring satisfaction
2. Customer engagement – increasing how many times the customer interacts with your online brand
3. Digital marketing optimization - improving the efficiency of your digital marketing through reaching more of your target audience at a lower cost, and converting more
4. Web 2.0 and customer participation and conversations – using the newest technology to help listen to and help customers achieve their goals.

Increasingly it has become a crucial role of the digital service industry to communicate the significance of these trends to industries that are less digitally savvy.

Developing how your company uses the web for marketing research and as a customer listening tool should also be considered. The use of websites and email communications are a convenient means of soliciting feedback, essentially representing sales insights from the 'front-line' - insights which can effectively help shape a company's future services.

For those who have adopted digital marketing, there are some basic questions to ask in assessing whether your online activity is customer-centric:

- How satisfied are my visitors? Do I know ?
- What are my visitors at my website to do?
- Are they completing what they set out to do?
- If not, why not? If yes, what did they like best about the online experience?

Sam Decker, formerly E-commerce manager at Dell, who helped develop the customer-centric strategy for Dell's \$8 billion US consumer business, has stressed the importance of this activity by referring to 'customer oxygen'. He says

"Your company needs to breathe 'customer oxygen'. The word 'oxygen' is important, because it reflects the idea that the customer's perspective should infuse just about every business decision you make each day. This oxygen should flow from the CEO and beyond, as a customer-centric culture affects every division, department and function."

So it may come as some relief to know that even in the new digital world, human experience and listening skills are still key to making a success of digital marketing and delivering positive customer experiences.

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