

Customer intelligence key to marketing initiatives

In a SAS Institute Inc briefing in Sandton last week, the organisation's executives outlined the future of marketing, highlighting new market demands and the strategies needed to address them.

They indicated that integrated marketing management (IMM), spanning technologies, communication channels and enterprise ecosystems, will be key to the success of marketing initiatives in the future.



Rene van der Laan, director: business advisory at the SAS Centre of Excellence for Integrated Marketing Management in the Netherlands, noted that IMM is not a set of products or tools, but rather a strategic approach to marketing that spans all solutions, technologies and departments. It ensures that strategy, planning, information and analytics, orchestration and interaction and customer experience initiatives are coordinated and deliver true business value.

"Marketing has changed significantly in recent years," van der Laan said. "In the 1960s and 1970s, market was simply about advertising and brand awareness. Now, the challenge is for the CMO to illustrate a return on marketing investment. In addition, the market is always connected and social media has a massive influence on consumers. This presents both challenges and opportunities."

Social media swings sentiment

Among the challenges are the fact that social media results in rapid swings in customer sentiment and brings with it large amounts of unstructured data. However, it presents a new marketing channel and the ability to analyse and gauge customer sentiment as it changes.

Social media also delivers the 360-degree view of the customer that has long been the goal of marketers. With timely information and advanced tools to analyse this Big Data accurately, organisations can now achieve contextual insights into customer behaviour, respond appropriately and even predict future customer behaviour.

However, in an environment with numerous marketing and communication channels, consistency was crucial in the company's marketing and communications. Ensuring this consistency required a central marketing hub spanning the enterprise - from sales and services to marketing. This hub should synchronise and formalise the marketing message to flow out via the various channels and it should be able to deliver insights and enable new strategic decisions in real time.

Louis Janse van Rensburg, Johannesburg director at digital agency World Wide Creative, cited Nike's digital initiatives as a good example of integrated digital marketing that delivers an ROI. Not only did the sportswear firm develop a tight-knit online community, it also produced apps that are of value to customers and at the same time, enabled its marketers to gather deep insights into the behaviour and preferences of its customers.

The right approach

He said while best practice in digital marketing was still evolving as technologies changed, inventive brands were succeeding in their digital marketing on the back of certain approaches:

- The ability to create a platform - creating an ecosystem that delivers content and 'connects all the dots'
- Context - many online banners are not succeeding because they lack context. In construct, campaigns such as the Oreo 100th anniversary campaign, adapted rapidly in line with topical issues and in doing so, became the news
- Craftsmanship - marketers need to continually refresh their approaches to simplifying the customer experience and connecting with customers in new ways. He cited the Red Tomato Pizza connected fridge magnet for VIP customers as an example of innovation.
- Celebrate the community - marketers need to understand the value of a loyal and connected community
- Seeing 'the other side' - on the 'other side' of the device and the internet is a human being. Marketers need to keep this in consideration in their new media initiatives. He cited Dove's digital campaigns reaching out to real women and demonstrating the brand's understanding of the market's sentiments, as a good example of this.

A disconnect within companies

While digital channels offer huge new possibilities for engaging with the market, it is a challenge that there still an enormous disconnect between marketing and other departments - notably the IT department. "This disconnect limits marketing's ability to make full use of the data within the organisation."

"Companies today need customer insights, a consistent omni-channel approach, and the ability to respond to changing situations rapidly," added van der Laan. Critically, they also need attribution capability, in order to assign the components of various campaigns to final purchase, in order to demonstrate ROI.

Recognising the future importance of IMM, the company has invested in bringing to market solutions that enable marketers to maximise the value of customer intelligence technologies, by enabling planning, interaction management, analytics and customer experience management in a single platform.

Mandie Herzfeld, senior solutions manager for integrated marketing management at SAS South Africa, demonstrated SAS solutions that enable real-time personalisation and optimisation of the customer experience.