

Strategically solving the conundrums of marketing complexity

 By Darren Woolley

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The world is sitting in a now familiar state of uncertainty, with debit crisis, stagnant established markets and emerging growth markets and continued pressure to deliver increasing returns. In the face of this uncertainty and continuing increase in fragmentation and complexity, marketers will need to strategically develop more flexibly responses to deal with a range of conundrums.



1. Chasing growth and maintaining share

Global marketers are looking for growth in the emerging markets, often funding this investment in at the expense of maintaining or defending their existing markets.

The conundrum in 2012 is getting the right balance between the two because underinvesting in established markets opens opportunities for competitors, which could erode the funding required to penetrate the growth markets.

2. Knowing as many and as much about your customers

Customers are no more diverse than before; it is just now they have a voice and power of numbers. Before, marketers could treat them as an amorphous group or segment. But today the individuals within that group can - and do - connect and share and flex their muscles.

The continuing conundrum this year will be how to continue to reach a mass while being able to connect with the individuals within that group in the way they want.

3. Matching, making and managing channels

Everyone talks about owned, bought and earned media. But marketers struggle with getting the balance right.

The conundrum appears to be go for reach with the traditional bought media with little budget for investing in owned and earned, or invest in owned and earned media for greater engagement at the expense of reach.

Striking the balance is difficult but in 2012, a "test-and-learn" strategy will provide the answers.

4. Working globally and locally

The idea of the global village is a reality with universal internet connectivity. But it is a village of multiple communities and cultural diversity. Global and multinational marketers are confronted with the conundrum that what they do in one market will be shared across all.

Therefore, in 2012, there will be an increasing need to have a consistent global strategy with aligned and localised implementation.

5. Having customer "do" or "know"

Traditional advertising has been focused on awareness. But following awareness is engagement. "Tell me how" is one thing. "Show me how" is another. But let me "do it for myself" is engagement.

The conundrum is how to strike the balance in investment between driving awareness and engagement to meet expectations.

6. Small ideas or a BIG idea

You load up your advertising with the big idea, you aim it at the target audience and you fire. And you keep doing it until you run out of firepower - usually budget. But now fragmented targets requires a more granular approach, with an on-going "test and learn" process replacing the old campaign model.

The conundrum is that most marketing strategy (and its funding and execution) is campaign-driven and so 2012 will be a year of transition.

7. Mobile for reach or engagement

The conundrum is not mobile or not, as any brand wanting to engage customers' needs to think mobile (it is the main access to internet in emerging markets). The conundrum is how.

With so much opportunity for reach and engagement, too many have failed using the mobile for awareness and there has only been nominal success in brands using mobile for engagement. But in 2012, that will change.

8. Collaboration or alignment

To embrace complexity requires collaboration both within the organisation and across the organisations engaged. But the conundrum is that collaboration requires alignment. But aligned to what? Corporate objectives? CEO vision? Brand? Sales projections? The customer?

The first step to creating collaboration is to agree what is it you are collaborating on and to what outcome. Internal and then external alignment

9. Who owns digital?

Digital is not just the all-pervasive platform of marketing. It is the same across the whole of the business world. Websites, social media, and other external communications meet internal finance systems, inventory control and logistics. Nowhere is this more obvious than e-commerce.

So the conundrum is who owns digital? This year, the CMO, CIO and the CFO will become new friends for every company embracing social media and e-commerce.

10. Pay for results or value but not costs

Much of the cost of advertising is simply a cost. The cost of media. The cost of agencies. The cost of production. But with the increased pressure on marketing and advertising cost, the conundrum is how do we move from this cost-based approach to a value- or results-based model?

It is no longer acceptable to be a cost of business, but for marketing to be an investment, this year we need to stop thinking about costs and start focusing on value and the return on investment.

11. Social media is in-house and out-house

While traditionally many organisations outsource their communications needs to specialist agencies, social media is causing a rethink. In-house or out-house? With the opportunity to engage your customer in a conversation, it is not just a marketing channel, but also a customer service tool, a reputation management function and a customer-relationship management application.

So is it in-house? And, if so, who owns it? This conundrum needs to be answered this year.

12. Who is responsible for CSR?

The customer is talking about you. And not just your products and services, but the way you manufacture them, the way you treat suppliers and employees, the environment and, in fact, all aspects of your business.

But it is not just another channel to be managed. The conundrum is how do you make corporate social responsibility (CSR) everyone's responsibility?

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