

From Campaigns To Conversations

by Dave Sutton, TopRight, LLC.

Marketing is undergoing a remarkable evolution at this moment in time. The multitude of mediums and technologies that are being used to speak to the marketplace is revolutionizing how the work of marketing is performed. The days of campaigns – the practice of start-stop-measure-tweak-repeat – are over. Today, for marketing to effectively build brands and drive revenue, it must facilitate a continuous, meaningful conversation with customers.

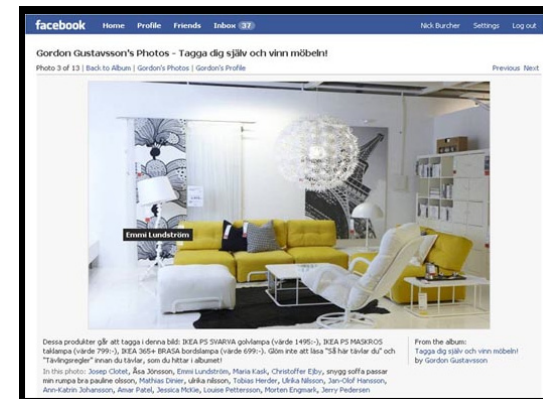
Traditional marketing campaigns are sponsored by the brand owner and are demarcated by periodic sales seasons, budget cycles, product launches or responses to disruptive market forces. A campaign may last a day or a month, but if we're thinking about it as having a fixed start, middle and end, we may miss the opportunity to focus on the bigger picture - the idea that a winning marketing strategy must be adaptive and integrated across channels.



By initiating and engaging in conversations,

Marketing can take advantage of the immediacy and the reach that technology has provided us with social media and email to communicate with our audience continuously and meaningfully, targeting our message by media type and inviting the recipients of that message to engage with us and respond.

IKEA, the Scandinavian furniture retailer, transcended the traditional social media campaign step of creating a Facebook fan page and running in-store events – instead they created a dynamic and profitable conversation by executing a clever social marketing strategy. IKEA leveraged Facebook's photo-tagging feature on the personal profile of its Malmö store manager. The manager's photo album contained photos of the showroom, but there was a catch; the first Facebook user to tag his or her name on a pictured piece of furniture received it, for free. Enthusiastic Swedes jumped into the conversation and begged for more pictures so that they could tag themselves to a new sofa, a new bed, or a new vase. Before long, thousands of Swedes were spreading pictures of IKEA showrooms all around their Facebook profile pages, news-feed and links. Taking advantage of one Facebook function that cost the brand almost nothing, IKEA devised a genius brand promotion and store traffic driver – an ongoing conversation that continues to this day with their loyal customers.



Forward thinking brand owners recognize that they can't possibly control the myriad of conversations about their brands.

Moreover, unlike campaigns, conversations are often not even initiated by the brand. Therefore, they monitor, segment and target the peer-to-peer conversations that represent the highest opportunity and/or risk to brand reputation. When entering an existing conversation, Marketing must be transparent with regard to their affiliation with the brand and authentic in their delivery and tone. Disingenuous party-crashers are quickly exposed and ejected from the conversation with brand reputation consequences.

The most successful marketers will know how to facilitate that conversation both internally and externally so they can engage their customers with the right things in the right way at the right time.



■ So What Does This Mean For B2B?

In the B2B world, your conversations project through channels – noisy channels that you often don't control. So, you need to make sure what you're saying in the conversation stands out and makes sense. If you're going to say something to customers, make it meaningful to them. Here's the acid test: anything you tweet, email, or blog should be valuable to them even if they never buy from you. And if you lure them in with that tweet, email or post, make sure that conversation stays on track throughout the sales process. If you conduct B2B marketing in a vacuum, you start a different conversation in a different way over and over again with the same audience. If someone did that to you in real-life, real-time, you'd get annoyed and walk away. As a B2B marketer, you also need to pinpoint the best time to bring your Sales team into the conversation:

- When should a lead be handed off to Sales or stay in marketing for more conversational nurturing?
- What should Sales do with the lead once they get it?
- How should Sales report on progress and close the loop with marketing 100% of the time?
- When and how should leads go back to marketing for further nurturing if the sales-cycle stalls?



Think about the conversations you're conducting with industry influencers, your channel partners, your customers and your sales team. Successful B2B marketers act as facilitators of the conversation - assuring that the audience hears what they want to hear in the way that they want to hear it.



About The Author:

Dave Sutton is a leading authority today on how to plug strategic marketing techniques and enabling technology into the modern business to drive organic growth. He is the Managing Partner of TopRight Strategic Marketing – a firm he founded to help companies corner the markets where they choose to compete. Dave is also the co-author of Enterprise Marketing Management: The New Science of Marketing -- the groundbreaking book considered to be the definitive statement of a new business discipline designed to create sustained, profitable, organic growth. Dave's primary research efforts over the past few years have focused on helping companies to demystify social media and to leverage this important new marketing channel to generate real competitive advantages for their businesses.

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