

COLUMNS

## Marketing in the Digital Age: How data helps fight entropy

May 13, 2015



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Entropic forces natural forces that lead to a lack of order or predictability rule the marketplace. To understand the marketplace and create order and predictability, leading marketers, regardless of their size, understand that marketing is a data science.

For decades, marketers such as Procter & Gamble Co., Walmart, Coca-Cola Co. and the unnamed thousands from around the world have used, and in many cases invented, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to generate data and insight around the effectiveness of their marketing efforts.

These marketers use these methodologies to generate inalienable facts, truths rather than subjective interpretations, around the current and future state of consumer's needs and the effectiveness of their marketing to fulfill those needs.

Indeed, they constantly adjust their methods to test, validate and revise their facts and their truths to ensure that their understanding remain viable within an ever-evolving marketplace as they strive to achieve the ultimate goal of marketing: to connect buyers and sellers through the exchange of mutual value with maximum effect and efficiency for both parties.

Attention spurned

Marketing science fights an ongoing battle against entropic forces while striving to achieve and maintain equilibrium.

Marketers are constantly at risk of using too little or too many resources to achieve their goals. But to be truly successful, marketers must strive to apply the appropriate amount of resources to a given situation when working toward their goal.

If they use too many resources, they are being wasteful, while if they use too few resources, they are not taking full advantage of the opportunity.

If they use the right amount of resources to achieve the goal, they may find a state of equilibrium.

In the digital era, marketing science is not getting any easier. In fact, it is getting harder, more complicated and faster.

Report after report informs and reinforces the fact that consumers' media consumption patterns have irrevocably changed forever a consequence of their adoption and use of mobile phones and connected devices such as tablets, fitness monitors, digital display, smart televisions, cars and smart watches.

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Consumers are spreading their attention across an ever-expanding number of devices along with countless forms of traditional media and digitally enhanced traditional media.

Moreover, with the onslaught of new media including social media, games and niche Web, applications and messaging channels serving a near infinite set of interests and demands, consumer attention is at a premium.

Second helping

Marketing publication *Mobile Marketer* recently reported how an executive from GfK, a global leader in consumer insight, noted that the average attention span of consumers has dropped from about 12 minutes nearly two decades ago to eight seconds today. This blip of time is slightly less than the attention of the average goldfish.

In other words, you have less than eight seconds to grab someone's attention, engage them and start to influence their behavior, or more specifically, to refocus them from being an unaware or anonymous shopper into a highly aware and engaged loyal advocate. This is something we refer to as the practice of directed shopping.

While marketing in the digital era is increasingly more complex, it can also be deceptively simple, as illustrated by Mayur Gupta, global head of marketing technology and operations at Kimberly-Clark.

Mr. Gupta, during the recent MarTech 2015 conference in San Francisco, provided this simple illustration to show how his team is tackling the complexities and entropy of marketing in the digital era.

Kimberly-Clark has organized marketing into four pillars: media, content, data and commerce. And it has learned to influence commerce as a function of data-informed content that leads to effective storytelling in owned, paid, earned and shared media.

Kimberly-Clark is not the only company to adopt this approach, albeit I have not seen anyone else present the strategy so simply. This framework is exactly what leading marketers are doing with the adoption of cutting edge solutions such as programmatic advertising, content marketing and hyper-personalized SMS, MMS and push notification messaging.

What is unique about the current digital age is the real-time signals, or the digital exhaust, that consumers are generating as they move through the digital and physical realms.

Like crude oil, cutting-edge marketers are capturing a consumer's digital exhaust, analyzing and refining and repurposing it so that they can engage consumers at real-time moments that matter.

Media mix

Marketers are shifting from hope and trust to test-and-learn marketing.

For example, in the advertising context, marketers no longer have to buy media in advance based on fixed media modeling while hoping the media mix is the right one and settling for average results of uncertain value.

Instead, marketers can leverage automated systems that, in real-time, leverage data to place relevant ads, offers and messages aka content when and where an individual customer is most likely to respond, i.e. in the grocery aisle after she has stood in front of a product for more than eight to 30 seconds.

This customer-centric approach to marketing and advertising is driving results that matter to marketers i.e., views, subscriptions, downloads, installs, store visits and purchases and delivering value to people.

This new data-driven, fact-based approach to marketing is also shifting the marketer's needs away from traditional paid media approaches.

A few years ago, Coca-Cola launched what it refers to as the Coca-Cola 2020 initiative an initiative that has the company focusing more on creating relevant content to have a conversation with their customers rather than simply relying on mass-market paid media to generate awareness that cannot be measured.

Adidas, Taco Bell, Dell and countless others are also adopting this practice. Taco Bell chief marketing officer Chris Brandt in March said "people don't necessarily want to be marketed to, so brands should look to create engagement and conversations at every consumer touch point."

As illustrated by Mr. Gupta, data and facts are at the heart of modern marketing.

To know what someone might find engaging and to validate that they do requires a discipline of listening and response, a discipline in the digital marketing world that takes advanced data measurement, management and

marketing automation skills.

Amazon, for instance, reportedly updates its Web site every 11 seconds to experiment, collect data and optimize the experience that it is giving its visitors.

IN A DATA-DRIVEN marketplace, marketers must adopt a test-and-learn strategy that includes data collection, listening and response. It is not getting any easier. It is just getting faster as consumers move throughout their lives in a constant circadian rhythm between digital and physical states.

As we leave behind the age of Mad Men, an age characterized by creativity and messaging, and enter the age of Math Men, we will find that marketers can generate and leverage an ever-widening array of data and facts like those reported in this year's Direct Marketing Association Statistical Fact Book.

It is imperative that every marketer recognizes that marketing is a data science and begin to leverage the facts contained herein to help guide their marketing journey.

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