

Marrying new-age and traditional marketing skills

 By [Farren Roper](#)

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The principles of marketing have fundamentally changed over the last decade and we continue to see the change year on year...

People and passion; connecting those two fascinations has become integral in telling a thought-provoking story in the digital and social era.

As the Central Marketing Organisation (CMO) lead for Microsoft South Africa, connecting people through the digital and social world has become ingrained in what I do every day.

My background, would surprise you. I was not always a classical marketer, but coming from a background in law, entrepreneurship and running several businesses, I have managed to change direction in my career in order to pursue a dream of connecting the organisation to the end customer, bringing a brand's story to life.

Being digitally connected to the consumer



Old school marketing, meet new-age methods... © Katisa – [123RF.com](#)

Digital and social have both become buzz words over the past few years because of the exponential trend of rapid user adoption of social platforms, which shows no sign of slowing down. As marketers we have seen the trends of how existing and prospective customers are flocking to create a high-profile online presence, they are consuming more information each day, they are dictating how they wish to consume information, they are in control of the messages they wish to receive and can easily damage or bolster a brand in a matter of seconds.

The challenge we face is to reach them before our competitors do. How do we do this? How do we tap into the conversations already taking place on the interwebs? How do we tactfully approach the consumer who has the power of influence embedded in his/her thumbs?

Marketing in the customer-everything era is about connecting with our customers, on their terms. Making the story we are telling relevant to them, knowing our customer and what is important to them (at a moment in time), knowing how they wish to consume their information- this is almost the most imperative part.

We have a responsibility to put our brands in those important purchase decision moments as they happen. This requires a higher degree of customer centricity from marketers than ever before.

The skills required in order to be a highly successful marketer have transformed along with the change in user behaviour. The new skill is not only a technical one which understands the marketing wheel, but one which can adapt and react to the rapid change.

Taking it the street

Campaigns are not static, they ought to change depending on the aspects which are working and those which are not. This is indeed the beauty of digital and social marketing... the ability to be able to change things on-the-fly. But this entails that marketers need to be comfortable with being connected on-the-fly and have the courage to say 'I tried it and it didn't work'.

As marketers, we are not responsible for communication alone, but we are now also responsible for the intricate dialogue

between the customer and brand. Our campaigns are not a one-way communication channel, devised by our agencies that cascade down to our customers; our campaigns are about driving user engagements. This is a big shift in thinking from the era where we were looking at finding new subscriber; an engaged fan trumps a disengaged subscriber any day of the week.

Marketing communications specialists are also being held accountable for driving sales. At Microsoft South Africa, for example, marketing and sales have a symbiotic relationship, where the sales organisation holds marketing accountable for driving leads, netting new business, and in turn the marketing division holds sales accountable for closing business. This means that we are no longer in the business of driving communications agenda, but we need to drive the business agenda too. We need to think like business people.

Marketing is increasingly becoming about cost-effectiveness and scale. We are increasingly being demanded to deliver more results with less marketing budget. In as much as traditional media gives us reach, it can sometimes be cost-ineffective. Even when you have the budgets to support traditional media, some of the more successful campaigns have shown an integrated-marketing approach, which marries traditional and non-traditional media works better. This is the approach which companies like Microsoft South Africa have adopted.

The land of analytics

The new marketing landscape is also rife with opportunity. Customer data is being generated all the time. Every single interaction with a customer across any communication channel (digital, call centre, direct marketing etc.) is an opportunity to learn more about that customer. The more we learn about the customer, the more we can drive marketing innovation and enhanced customer experience.

The opportunities with big data are clear... I recall a time when I made retail decisions based on the personalised experience I received with the retailer, now with all of the information we gather on customers, the possibilities for that kind of personal (yet digital) relationship are returning. And this hunger for data is bi-directional. Customers are also wanting more data about themselves, for example the increasing demand for wearables; while the concept remains a big buzzword for many, smart marketers are investing in big data so they can provide better services to customers.

Customer experience is becoming a key differentiator for brands. As a marketer, I consider my role to be an innovation role. In the technology space, the points of differentiation or competitive advantage could easily dissipate, but marketers have the ability to grab mindshare through innovation. The best source of innovation is information; information that we have about customer needs and the needs we can identify about customers that they don't realise they have.

These are some of the biggest opportunities facing marketers today, as our responsibility grows, so in turn does the level of skill required to connect to the consumer. Marketers need to be more customer centric than ever before, be more connected to their campaigns, to be quicker off the mark in order to make sure that they meet customer demand in the moments that count. We need to embrace our broader responsibility as business people who have the ability to drive new business and increased customer engagement. Last but not least, we are creatives, so we need to use our innate skill and talent in order to drive marketing innovation.

ABOUT FARREN ROPER

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