

## business issues

# THE BIG CHANGE

BY ANDY SLIPHER

What has really changed with marketing in the last 100 years?

Just one thing. Really.

**IN 1975, THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION** (FCC) issued a largely overlooked ruling that allowed earth-orbiting antennas—satellites—to be used for broadcasting television over large areas. Around that same time, a little-known regional broadcasting network called Home Box Office (HBO) took notice and decided to use the FCC's landmark decision to begin distributing its own programming via satellite.

HBO's innovative move would have a ripple effect that would spill over onto the landscape of marketing. Soon, satellite networks proliferated, and with them, marketers' ability to target in ways that were never previously possible.

Since that time, there has been so much technological innovation that marketers are faced with choices beyond measure. It can be blinding and bewildering for anyone charged with allocating marketing dollars on behalf of a business. And this very issue is what has caused marketers to go awry. This is an age of unprecedented communications, and yet many still struggle to connect with one another. But this is not the real problem.

The true problem is that too many marketers have failed to recognize that only one major thing has changed in marketing in the past 100 years: technology. That's it. Yes, you now have social media and tweets and followers and apps and branding and remarketing and analytics and focus groups and ROI and CRM and customer personas and digital and so

on. It's all certainly true. But what has enabled nearly every bit of it is technology.

So prolific is the role of technology in marketing that it has become, for some, an alluring distraction. Panic and peer pressure set in, and organizations pursue the latest and greatest technology-based marketing tactics without taking the time to thoughtfully consider a strategic approach. As legendary philosopher and strategist Sun Tzu once put it, "Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

Marketing must ultimately get the product or service into the hands of the customer—i.e., a real live person. Marketers need to realize that it is way too easy to distract ourselves (via technology) away from what is centrally important in marketing: generating a sale to a real person and hopefully repeating that process again and again to her or

his delight. Marketing strategy is not so much about a plan but rather a system. If you build your marketing (including the sale) around a strategically based, customer-centric system, then technology becomes a true and valuable tool and not a distraction.

If you want to plan your marketing communications on a more strategic level and with a more integrated and seamless approach, consider the following methods and means toward doing so:

**Strategic marketing plan.** This entails full-on marketing guidance—someone asking the right questions and enabling you to think critically about your industry, business, customers, competition, brand and marketing activities. A strategic marketing plan answers both "What are we trying to do?" and "How are we going to achieve it?" in a thorough, resolute way that doesn't miss a lick (broad-to-specific). It facilitates a systematic way of measurably and methodically moving your business's overall marketing activities from point A to point B.

**Strategic brand plan.** Marketers love to talk branding these days, but few truly understand what a brand is. At its core, a brand is simply a (strong) promise. Everything after that is embodying the promise or not. A brand plan helps an organization answer the why's and how's of their brand in a way that actively demonstrates its value.

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**Brand landscape.** Develop a collaborative document and process that combines visual (graphic/ photographic) and distilled conceptual elements (written) to succinctly express what a particular brand is, and what it is not, to a broader internal audience. At its core, it's a reference and training document. It serves to familiarize an organization's management on the concept of their own brand, so that they themselves can more consistently demonstrate and articulate it to others.

**Vision.** Your organization needs to aspire to something greater in order for its marketing to become something that inspires others. Sometimes there is no unifying or inspiring vision—an expression of what an organization hopes to reach or become in the next five to ten years. Other times, a vision reads as flat, academic or long-winded. A good vision statement isn't fluff. Rather, it helps all stakeholders reach for something higher.

**Public outreach strategy.** Address and formalize a communications approach for the public-at-large. This does not necessarily mean customers. Rather, it's about respecting and interfacing with the general public as influencers, opinion holders, social activists and supporters of personal, political or economic interests. This type of strategy addresses a need for responding to criticism, opposing or competing points of view. Its purpose is to build and demonstrate credibility and to authentically communicate it.

In conclusion, plan your marketing. Don't be led by technology or allow it to distract and overwhelm you. Know who you are, what you want from your marketing and how you're going to achieve it. Only then will technology become a navigable means to achieve your goals. ■