

# Broadening the ambit of marketing in the digital era



By [Kim Andersen](#)

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As an organisation embarks on a digital transformation strategy, one of the most visible (and most important) functions that needs to evolve is that of marketing. Brought sharply into focus by new digital, social and mobile channels, the role of marketing is to be the virtual 'shop front' of the organisation and the customers' first point of contact with the organisation.

With today's increasingly fickle and demanding consumers, one's initial engagement with a company often determines whether or not they will continue the relationship. In the most acute cases, a bad first experience can turn away a customer for life.

This heightened importance of marketing in the digital era also means that marketing executives and managers have to take on a far broader remit. Their portfolio now spans across many different domains of knowledge, including a number of technology-related fields. Some analysts are predicting that the marketing department will be the area of the business that soon commands the biggest IT budgets - particularly for new, greenfield technology deployments.

## Omni-channel marketing

Digital marketing teams are tasked with bringing together all the digital touchpoints into one consistent, unified experience, giving customers' choice over the channel they prefer.

In fact, this coordination extends beyond merely the digital touchpoints. Marketing needs to look at how digital customer experiences correlate to more traditional channels - such as call centres and physical store presences.

Once this has been achieved, marketing teams are being asked to track every facet of the organisation's interactions with customers - tracking website browsing behaviour, social communication, buying patterns, demographic data, and much more.

We can group this data into three primary categories: transactional data (customers, sales, etc), human-generated data (unstructured, social information about customer conversations), and machine-generated data (connected devices that reveal aspects of customer behaviour).

The companies that use this data most effectively will emerge as the victors in the new digital economy. Using data science techniques, they will meld information from all three categories into one analysis framework, and producing outputs that give greater insights into the customer, and inform business strategy and product development.

## Multi-sourcing as the answer

Added to this, digital marketing is becoming closely tied to the realm of digital commerce; and business managers are increasingly demanding tangible results, or 'return on investment' from any marketing efforts. Plugging the marketing activities into the sales funnel, or the eCommerce platform, becomes a vital role in the new marketing portfolio.

Cloud services offer answers to many of the challenges facing digital marketers today. For example, specific marketing campaigns may cause spikes in digital activity and interaction (for example, the release of a new app, or a campaign to drive traffic to a website). By flexibly provisioning hosting and computing capacity when and as it's needed, the marketing team doesn't have to over-invest in capacity.

And, as with any form of digital transformation, the increased adoption of technology also leads to stronger digital security requirements. Marketing teams will need the right security solutions to ensure the safety of customer data, sales information, and other valuable data.

Clearly, wise technology investments are required to build the systems that truly integrate digital marketing into the sales engine of the organisation: from social CRM tools that connect with the traditional CRM databases, to advanced analytics engines, and content management tools.

With so many considerations, the best option is to look at multi-sourcing relationships (selecting the most appropriate vendors, integrators and consultants for particular requirements). Using 'pay-per-use' hosted software limits the up-front capex requirements, and allows the marketing team to easily pivot in new directions, and towards different technology sets.

As the marketing portfolio grows in scope and importance, having the right technology partners and the right tools become crucial enablers of success in the digital economy. Technology represents the opportunity of bringing marketing closer to the customer, to tailor brand messaging to an 'audience of one', ultimately achieving what we refer to as "zero distance".

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