

Marketing

Bridging the marketer-customer divide

By WILL GRIFFITH

IN today's highly competitive marketplace, savvy marketers know the key to gaining a competitive advantage lies in creating meaningful connections with their customers from the get-go. More importantly, they recognise the need to cultivate and grow this relationship throughout the customer's journey – in order to retain loyalty in a tech-savvy, millennial-driven era.

Indeed, marketers today face unprecedented challenges when they go to market. From the pressure to generate revenue and become more ROI-focused, to the imminent need to innovate and lead their companies into the digital age, they are increasingly realising the importance of being data-driven in their approach.

And, the marketing ecosystem has never been more complex than it is today. With thousands of applications and data sources to help drive personalised engagement, it is critical for today's marketers to keep pace with technological advancements to ensure they are delivering refined, targeted and meaningful interactions in a modern way.

Big Data: The driving force behind customer engagement

Every move and decision starts with the data – marketing and campaign successes can only be achieved by maintaining a focused approach to accessing and leveraging data. Marketers are aware of this and are increasingly looking to harness the latest data mining technologies to engage with customers in a more personalised manner, so as to build lasting and profitable relationships.

The foundation for any great relationship starts with insight and understanding – the same goes for building and sustaining that relationship.

However, the reality is that marketers have never had to deal with a more siloed ecosystem of data and systems than now. According to research studies, majority of enterprises actually do not have a synchronised view of customer interactions. The fragmented experiences are largely a result of the explosion of digital channels, which have led to disconnected technologies, data and processes.

Nevertheless, as businesses shift their focus to creating more targeted, personalised campaigns, marketers are also increasingly seeking new ways to centralise, manage and

orchestrate individualised customer experiences. No doubt, the ability to integrate systems and unlock customer data has never been more imperative.

Yet, while companies are already seeing the importance of harnessing data to drive business transformations, the reality is that many still aren't truly customer-focused. With customer centricity being vital for success in a world where digitally educated buyers are often more tech-savvy than the businesses trying to sell them, it is clearly time for marketers to take a different approach.

However, becoming customer centric is more than just a state of mind. It involves learning new skills, so marketers are well equipped to tap on today's rapidly emerging marketing automation tools to create relevant, targeted and valuable customer experiences.

Moving forward: Delivering on the promise of customer centricity

In order to fully leverage the exciting opportunities presented by big data while at the same time reducing complexity, it is critical for marketers to deploy technology solutions that help them unify their resources. What is needed is a platform that helps align IT and marketing by serving as a single, unified solution with the scalability, performance and integration required by modern marketers and IT professionals alike.

Fundamentally, the Holy Grail for customer personalisation is rooted in a meaningful understanding of target audiences and communities. With the proliferation and explosion of data sources, marketers can now capture valuable data across owned, earned and paid channels – all of which enable them to deliver much improved customer experiences.

And the potential benefits are massive for CMOs and CIOs who can come together to lead this charge. While CIOs used to mainly be responsible for ensuring the right governance, information security and compliance, they are expected to see a shift in their roles in 2015 to include revenue generation.

This is especially so as they start playing a larger decision-making role in the investment of new marketing technologies, which are essential in helping companies deliver on the promise of customer centricity.

(The writer is APAC Senior Director, Oracle Marketing Cloud.)

Asbicon opens new office in Sri Lanka to bolster presence in South East Asia

ASBICON Group, one of the world's leading consumer goods specialist firms enabling retail and distribution effectiveness, recently established its presence in Sri Lanka in a bid to further strengthen its presence in the South East Asia region.

Primarily aimed at meeting rapidly growing client requirements, this new presence will support the business needs of the existing clients and cater to the rising demand of the broader Southeast Asia and Middle East regions.

Headquartered in Forest Park, Berkshire, UK, with offices and presence across Asia and Europe, Asbicon addresses the client's demand and value generation needs through its three verticals of Consulting and Training (in partnership with Kantar Retail, a WPP Company), Data and Software, and DeSign.

Asbicon does consulting and training in partnership with Kantar Retail (www.kantarretail.com) and specialises in consumer goods clients, enabling retail and distribution effectiveness. In the field of data and software, Asbicon supports the client's journey from insights to ideation through to implementation, thereby enabling business thinking with relevant business tools by way of analytics, creating sales productivity focused IT solutions.

With 'DeSign Services', Asbicon helps conceptualise, design and implement the client's Point of Purchase Design and activation needs through creative brand communication in print, video, animation, 2D and 3D designs, digital, e-learning, etc.

Drawing from its extensive experience of working with multiple clients across 50+ nations (Fortune 500 and local clients) Asbicon provides practical solutions on insight



Asbicon Sri Lanka Associate Director Terrance Niranjan Abraham
generation and adoption, strategy ideation and implementation of the operational plans supported by the Data Analytics and Point of Purchase DeSign Services.

Operations in Sri Lanka will be led by Terrance Niranjan Abraham (terrance.abraham@asbicon.com) who counts more than 20 years of experience in consumer goods both in sales and marketing spanning channel sales, customer and trade marketing functions and brand management.

Over the years Abraham has been in the forefront of many initiatives and successfully managed and built sales teams, to overcome challenges in the ever-changing retail environment and modernisation of trade. He will spearhead the Colombo office as Associate Director.

Prior to joining Asbicon, Abraham held various positions of increasing responsibility including General Manager (Sales), heading the sales function of Hemas Consumer Brands (one of the biggest local FMCG companies in Sri Lanka) and Head of Business for Richardson Electrical focused on consumer lighting, protection and power for many global brands. He will report directly to Managing Director, Ankur Shiv Bhandari who is based in the UK. For more details regarding Asbicon, please visit www.asbicon.com.



Dilmah high tea challenge

By RUCHI GUNewardene

WITH the passing of the industrial age and the digital age, as we embark on the next phase which is the age of imagination, we need to shed our old world thinking and move into the new magical world of 'experiences'.

The digital environment enables us to envelope the customer with a total experience, for which a physical presence at a retail store is no longer required. Many companies (whether it be product, service marketing or business to business) are now looking at how their products and services can offer a total sensorial experience to customers, both virtually and physically.

This can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage that companies can carve out for themselves. For a country like Sri Lanka, with operations of a relatively small scale, this is the only way forward to capture global market share through innovation, design, a solution mind set and with the brand at the heart of the business, offering unique experiences to all those who come in touch with them. This enables us to focus our attention on market segments and to niche consumers who have greater price discretion.

Herein lies the power of design solutions, which many major international companies have embarked on, with considerable impact. Chief Design Officer (or CDO) is now a corporate title, reporting directly to the CEO at Apple, PepsiCo, Philips and Kia Motors. The CDO is typically responsible for overseeing all design aspects of a company's products and services, including product design, user experience design, industrial design, and package design, which also includes aspects of advertising, marketing, systems, processing and engineering.

Design in this context means a creative mechanism for solving problems or creating unique customer experiences that either answers a customer's needs or enhances his or her experience further. It essentially integrates many aspects of a business, providing solutions resulting in new customer experiences.

Design can help companies better understand their users' needs through innovative solutions. This may range from redesigning existing products or new product development, to making a website more

The experience is the future

user-focused, to developing a new customer service proposition for a hotel, retailer or a bank.

Companies that do not have this position are slower to react, because different heads are responsible for different parts of the business and there is little room for integration, except at the CEO level.

In order to ensure there is consistency in the solutions being offered, and continuous improvement and innovation in a single direction, there has to be a clear definition of what the company stands for, which is captured in the brand. Unless this is well defined and grounded in each individual company, there

will be little direction for the team to follow or guidelines on which the customer experience can be consciously built.

When looked at like this, the brand is no longer a logo or a design which so many companies still believe it is. It is not something that is limited to what the packaging looks like. Instead, it is a holistic expression of the user experience.

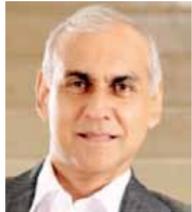
This new mind set of 'design' is applicable everywhere. It can be used for environmental solutions for example. Could you ever imagine drinking water that's distilled from a car exhaust pipe? Well, Honda could. Their new hydrogen powered car, Honda FCX runs so clean, its exhaust pipes contains only clean water that's drinkable. Although it was a PR/communication exercise, the company bottled this water, branded as H2O, and gave it away as free samples at movie theatres.

Design solutions lead to new product innovations. And it need not be high tech either. In India, MittiCool is a refrigerator that runs without electricity. It cools water and vegetables last up to a week. But the best part is this green inno-



Future Apple headquarters

Guest Column



By Ruchi Gunewardene

vation is made entirely of clay and other natural materials. The brand also includes water filters, pressure cookers, and non-stick pans, all made of clay.

The Brandix brand is now well defined which sets out to provide inspired solutions to their customers. Very early on, they identified that speed of delivery was the most critical element that could make the biggest difference to their customers and they set out to redesign their systems and processes in order to live up to their brand promise.

Through many years of consistently honing this capability, Brandix now has a significant competitive advantage on speed which it is able to leverage.

The power of inspired solutions does not stop merely with the customer for Brandix. It has instilled the essence of the brand into its employees through the work places that it has built for them. Each location is a unique mixture of interior design, architecture and environments that allow the employees the space to work and relax.

As market places get crowded and as companies seek growth, it needs to take the long term path of development through such brand led, design solution's view. It is this which leads to creating experiences across multiple stakeholders not just a single dimensional customer perspective.

Another great example of design is Apple. Anyone who has purchased an Apple iPad and opened it will know what an exercise of pure joy that is, through the simplicity of the experience. The minimalism of the product, the packaging has all been crafted after immense amount of research and development, and presented to the customer as a holistic experience that no other product has offered to date. Of course, once done, there those who will copy it, but the culture of the brand is so strongly embedded in the company that it is confident it can continue to innovate and be a step ahead of the competition.

Design is so intrinsic to Apple's culture that Steve Jobs once said,



Honda h2o

that the inside of the iPhone is as well designed as the outside, although the customer will never know what the inside looks like. Such is in the integrity of the overarching beliefs ingrained in the Apple brand.

The new Apple 'spaceship' headquarters that is currently being built continues that ethos, and will provide an inspirational environment for its associates.

The challenge with embarking on such a brand journey is that it takes years to fine tune and to embed into the culture of the company. But, once done it will create significant value. Brand Finance's research shows that branded businesses have significantly higher shareholder returns than those that do not have a strong brand.

Such a strategy should be adopted by more companies in Sri Lanka as we seek to accelerate value creation and not focus purely on volume. Whether it be in the tea industry (where Dilmah is still the only truly global Sri Lankan brand) or in the hotel industry (where Cinnamon has commenced its brand building journey) many more companies and industries need to follow suit and take this path.

(The writer is Managing Director of Brand Finance Lanka)



Ramachandran Aravindhan - Gold Winner



Mangala Gunathilake - Silver Winner



Madushanka Wijewickrama - Bronze Winner



Ramcy Lenora - Bronze Winner

Team Etisalat wins 4 accolades at prestigious NASCO Awards 2015

ETISALAT Lanka once again affirmed its commitment to corporate excellence when four of its employees won accolades at the recently concluded 2015 edition of the National Sales Congress (NASCO) organised by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM).

Etisalat secured four awards in the Mobile Telecommunications Category, with Ramachandran Aravindhan winning the Gold Award for 'Territory Manager of the Year - Telecommunications', Ramcy Lenora De Silva winning the Bronze Award

for the 'Sales Supervisor/ Executive of the Year of the Year - Telecommunications', while Mangala Gunathilake winning Silver and Madushanka Wijewickrama winning Bronze for the 'Front-Liner of the Year - Telecommunications' Award. The annual NASCO Awards was established

with the intention of promoting the standards of sales professionalism in Sri Lanka by recognising and rewarding their performance. All four outstanding employees of Etisalat were evaluated on their success in meeting four aspects of set individual targets, completing a written examination and facing a series of interviews conducted by

an eminent panel of professionals in the field.

They were assessed as to how successfully they met the set targets, their capacity to take up higher responsibilities in the corporate structure and ability to formulate creative solutions to challenges they faced in the industry.

The staff and management of Etisalat Lanka

congratulate the award winners on their remarkable achievement. As an equal opportunity employer that constantly encourages potential and personal career growth, Etisalat Lanka is proud to continue its endeavour in producing team members who display exceptional skill, focus and dedication to contribute to the success of the company.