Embrace A New Marketing Era: End Dissonance And Drive Growth
PART ONE
The Era Of Marketing Dissonance

PART TWO
Where The Points Of Marketing Dissonance Are

PART THREE
Overcoming Marketing Dissonance
PART ONE

The Era Of Marketing Dissonance

In music, dissonance describes combinations of notes that sound unpleasant. No musical note is bad on its own, but certain ones don’t mesh well. Right now, we see a lot of dissonance in marketing. Most tools and ideas at marketers’ disposal are individually great, but they aren’t being orchestrated together in an effective, customer-centric way that can move the needle.

The result is like a song played out of tune: Customers don’t like the sound. The very things that marketers are doing to try to be customer-centric are turning customers away. Marketers’ efforts are creeping customers out, eroding affinity, and stamping out loyalty.

Marketing dissonance is the disconnect between what customers like and want and what marketers think customers like and want.

Take personalization. There’s no doubt that marketers see the potential: In 2017, 85% of marketers said that improving personalization capabilities was a priority. But marketers’ appetite for personalization far outstrips their customers’. Only 27% of US adults say they’re willing to let retailers use their personal information to personalize experiences.

Marketers are under tremendous pressure. Customer expectations are rising. Creating empathetic content for customers is proving challenging. And there’s an endless focus on delivering gains every quarter that makes it difficult to look at the big picture, think long-term, empathize with customers, or experiment. Changing models midstream is extremely risky in the best of circumstances. Marketers in this high-pressure environment are understandably wary of disrupting the current mechanisms driving monthly growth.
It’s not surprising that marketers haven’t gotten everything figured out. Digital marketing technologies have relentlessly multiplied, with each new development introducing another layer of opportunity and risk. The consumer technology and marketing technology (martech) landscapes are evolving faster than most marketing organizations’ ability to evaluate, synthesize, and leverage technologies. As a result, poor marketing practices have been codified. Ineffective marketing is being done faster and more frequently than ever before.

So How Did We Get Here?
Digital theoretically enabled marketers to target more precisely (increasing relevancy), create more marketing materials with fewer resources (upping scale), get accurate metrics (verifying ROI), and reach customers through new media (amplifying their message). In return, customers saw ads that better matched their interests, had access to more options, and felt more heard and valued thanks to personalization features.

That was the dream. In reality, a flood of repetitive messages now inundates consumers. They’re exhausted by the endless drone of bland ads that follows them around the internet, clogs their inboxes, and interrupts their social media feeds. Over time, customers’ receptivity to marketing has eroded, their interest has waned, and they’re actively taking steps to block out the noise with tools like ad blockers and intelligent agents (e.g., Amazon’s Alexa).

This wasn’t a result of poor intentions. Marketers did (and still do) want to serve customers better and provide superior experiences. The issue is that marketers have new tools but lack new strategies, business processes, and operating models to match.

Fortunately, it doesn’t have to be this way. False assumptions, ineffective use of technology, and a misguided idea of customer centricity are likely weighing your organization down. By evaluating your efforts and ensuring they complement your customers’ preferences and priorities, you can align your marketing to work better in concert and deliver better business results.
PART TWO

Where The Points Of Marketing Dissonance Are

01

The Relationship Brands Want To Have With Customers Versus What Customers Want

Digital data collection allows you to learn more about your customer than ever before. Marketers have hoovered up any and all information they can, trying to build a data-rich profile for everyone in their total addressable market. The logic has been that more data = better marketing, yet this has ended up creeping out and driving away customers and prospects.

Try A New Approach To Segmentation

Segment your customers by the kind of relationship they want to have. As a marketer, you want customers to be brand evangelists who frequently engage with you. But such loyalty must be built over time.

Think about the people you have a relationship with in real life: your best friend, your yoga class pal, your golf buddy, the old friend you see a couple of times a year. You appreciate them all, but they serve different purposes and you share different levels of personal information with them. Let customers select what you are to them.

This is especially important for prospects. Unlike customers, prospects don't have an existing relationship with you and don't expect you to know them. If you do know a lot about them, it can come off as creepy.

Think carefully about every piece of data your firm collects and whether it's necessary to deliver value and drive business results. You aren't really customer-centric if you don't respect customers' or potential customers' desire for privacy.

Consider creating a customer privacy center — where people can easily understand what you collect, why you do it, and what you do with the information — and then let them curate their own data experience, opting in and out.

Industry leaders like Lloyds Bank are already doing this.
Martech: Using To Codify Versus Using To Revolutionize

Marketers often use automation and martech to codify existing processes and practices, just on a larger scale. This can exacerbate problems instead of solving them, as bolting technology onto a broken process doesn’t fix the underlying issues.

To deliver results, martech must be woven into an ecosystem of effective workflows. When considering technology investments, marketers can benefit greatly by first designing workstreams that support strategic goals. After that, it’s prudent to look for where and when a technology solution may be appropriate.

When designing workstreams, ask yourself: How can I use technology to augment the experiences my brand delivers? Consider technologies that help customers accomplish goals with less decision stress and effort. For example, identity resolution technologies stitch together information about a customer that’s been accumulated across various silos and touchpoints. In the end, you have a clearer picture of the customer and can better anticipate their needs.
03

Personalizing To Serve The Brand Versus Personalizing To Serve The Customer

In the quest for scale, marketers have mixed generalizations into personalization strategies, leading to painful situations for customers. Instead of focusing on customer segments, personalize around a customer’s context. Offer personalized experiences at moments when it matters, taking into consideration the length and nature of the customer’s relationship with your brand.

For example, AT&T creates personalized videos for new customers to explain their first bill but skips adding personalized service recommendations since new customers are less open to upselling.¹

Twenty percent of US customers don’t want personalization.¹ Respect their desire for privacy and their desire for personalization with equal enthusiasm, and they will reward you. Give customers more control over personalization features. Nobody knows your customers’ preferences quite like your customers. For example, some will appreciate a retailer generating personalized shopping lists. Others may only want this during the holidays. Others don’t want it at all. Make it easy for people to select what they’d prefer. Consider a personalization control center as part of account settings.

Personalization And Gender Expression

Some people’s legal name and sex don’t reflect their preferred name and gender expression. Targeting women’s shoes to someone who no longer identifies as a woman can be painful and certainly won’t win you any sales. Customers will appreciate it if you allow them to tell you their preferred pronouns and name.

It’s becoming more common for individuals to use they/them pronouns instead of she/her or he/him (example: Joey is going ice skating. They are a great skater. I love going skating with them). Adding a preferred pronoun drop-down for customers is a small feature that can mean a lot to nonbinary individuals.
For years, CMOs have slashed creative budgets and severed agency relationships. Sometimes this was a pure cost-cutting move, but frequently the newly freed capital got invested into technology. Martech promised increased efficacy and efficiency. And unlike with creative, it was simple to measure martech’s ROI. This made it all the easier during the next budget cycle to justify shifting even more spend away from creative and into tech.

Now, the CMO has the fastest-growing tech spend in the C-suite, while creative has been cut to the quick. The divestment trend has led to bland, boring, undifferentiated brands. Customers struggle to tell one brand from another, as everything from app design to value propositions blend into (what looks to customers like) a single beige mass.

Firms are seeing that there might be a price associated with losing creativity: Kraft Heinz has cut its advertising budget by 39% since 2014 as part of its parent 3G Capital’s extreme cost-cutting strategy. Partially as a result of failing to properly invest in its brands, Kraft Heinz has lost half its share value, written down $15 billion on Kraft Foods and Oscar Mayer, and reduced its dividend by 36%.²

Taking a balanced approach to investments and integrating creative into tech-driven environments can help you delight customers and stand out from the crowd. Forrester’s ROI model for creative spend shows that for the average CMO's budget allocations, a moderate shift toward creative over six years produces an 18% higher overall ROI using the same budget.²
PART THREE

Overcoming Marketing Dissonance

To overcome marketing dissonance, remember your core intent: Serve customers better and drive growth. While maintaining a strong focus on this goal, revisit the technologies, resource allocations, processes, talent, and culture of your marketing organization. Is there alignment?

Here are three things to keep in mind as you move through this process:

**Keep It All About The Customer**

Much of the current situation in marketing is the result of short-term, campaign-centric thinking. Consider the cumulative effect of your efforts. Map your customer journey and use empathy to guide your efforts. Revisit how you measure success and verify that you aren’t accidentally rewarding short-term efforts that wear on customer trust and affinity, especially around data privacy.

Remember that you’re a consumer as well as a marketer. Have you been annoyed or put off by an ad? Conversely, have you experienced something excellent? Bring your experiences as a consumer into the conversation and encourage others to do the same.

**Start With The Big Picture, Then Turn To Tech**

Tech will only get more complex as automation, AI, and personalization continue to evolve. Ready your organization to derive optimal value from tech by introducing continuous process improvement. You may be surprised by how much budget and time can be freed when you sunset or improve unhelpful processes.

Ultimately, the right mix of strategies and tactics will depend on your firm’s unique circumstances. Just like the right musical key depends on what kind of effect the musician is trying to have on their audience, the right choice for your brand will depend on who your customers are and the nature of your business. The important thing is to keep going toward customer centricity, even when it’s hard.

**Build A Privacy Strategy ... And Let Customers See It**

Customer trust is your most important, hardest-earned, and most easily spent resource. Customers are concerned with how their data is collected and used. Regulators aren’t far behind.

Build a conscientious, customer-centric privacy strategy, then share it — because no matter how good your privacy practices are, customers won’t know unless you tell them. Transparency is key.
Marketing Dissonance Webinar

Delve further into the forces behind marketing dissonance. View our complimentary webinar.

What Does Creative Cost You?

Not as much as you’ll lose by underinvesting in creative. Discover our free guide to creative ROI.

ENDNOTES

1. See the Forrester report “Marketers Versus Customers: Opposing Forces Erupt.”
2. See the Forrester report “The Cost Of Losing Creativity.”