DIGITAL

MARKETING

Push versus Pull Marketing: Evolving Towards Consumer Controlled Marketing

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Introduction

In the multifaceted landscape of marketing, two paradigms persistently prevail and often become the central point of strategizing: push and pull marketing. Both these concepts embody distinct approaches that marketers across industries leverage to engage consumers, promote products, and build brand value. However, their fundamental principles, applications, and impacts differ markedly, creating a dynamic interplay that demands a nuanced understanding.

The importance of dissecting these marketing strategies transcends mere academic inquiry. For graduate marketing students, it offers a theoretical framework that lays the foundation for practical applications and innovative research. For Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) steering the marketing strategies of established corporations, it provides vital insights for aligning tactics with overarching business objectives. Entrepreneurs, the trailblazers of the business world, must grapple with these concepts to tailor marketing approaches that resonate with their unique business models, target audiences, and resource constraints. Today, these are not "either–or" strategies but you will likely use them together to maximize your market share. But, you need to know why they are different and their limitations for your marketing program.

Whether you're taking the first steps in your marketing education, overseeing a complex marketing ecosystem, or crafting a disruptive start-up marketing plan, this exploration promises to equip you with valuable insights and actionable strategies to navigate the intricate world of push and pull marketing.

Push Marketing Explained

Push marketing, a term familiar to marketing professionals but often misunderstood, encapsulates a proactive and direct approach to placing products or services in front of potential customers. Prior to the internet, websites, and social sites, push marketing was the only way a marketer could grow market share and build stronger relationships with the company's customer base. Other than direct sales, push marketing was the only option.

Definition and Key Characteristics

Push marketing is aptly named for the strategy of "pushing" products or services towards consumers. Rather than relying on the allure of the product to attract customers, push marketing places the onus on the marketer to initiate the customer relationship, creating demand through various promotional techniques.

Key characteristics of push marketing include:

Total Marketer Control

In push marketing, the marketer is in total control of the potential relationship. The marketer determines:

Who – The marketer will identify the list segments they want to develop. In the early days of direct marketing, the marketer would select lists from their customer base using RFM – P. They would consider the recency of purchase, the frequency of past purchases, the monetary value of total purchases and the products purchased to select the best prospects for a marketing offer.

For prospecting lists, they would use compiled databases to select prospects using demographics and life style data or, more often, they would rent lists of prospects from catalog and magazine companies who represented their desired target markets. These lists would be selected by "hot line" name [those who purchased or subscribed in the last 30 – 60 days] and by the same RFM – P characteristics. For these rental list names, they would be merge/purged to reduce the list to one name per household.

- When – The marketer controlled the marketing calendar and determined when direct mail, telemarketing, or catalog offers would be made. Same for traditional media like magazine, television and radio advertising / marketing.
- What – The marketer has total control over the "package" they will offer the prospect. They determine the telemarketing scripts, direct mail kits, catalog content, and all other aspects of the marketing effort. They also determine the offer and the pricing they will use in the marketing program.
- Where – The marketer determines what media channel they will use to communicate their offer.,

Immediate Call to Action

Encouraging immediate purchase or response. Often, the marketer will include special incentives or promotional elements that encourage a faster response. Often, marketers included time and quantity limits, special pricing for early response, and other strategies to accelerate response. The feeling was that if we didn't get the response, our competitors would.

"Straight-forward" Tracking & Measurement

A final characteristic of push marketing is its ease of tracking. Push-marketed offers usually just had two ways to respond. Direct mail & telemarketing, TV & 800 numbers, etc. As a result, tracking was simple. For example, when an individual responded to a direct mailed offer, there were only two actions they could take. They could respond on the order form which contained a tracking code. The code would tell the company the campaign, source list, and offer being made to the individual. The other option is to call using the 800 number on the order form. When they called in, they would be asked for the code on their order form. As a result, push-marketed campaigns had accurate tracking and measurement. There was no need to discuss "omnichannel" concepts.

Push Marketing Techniques and Channels

Push marketing manifests through various techniques and channels, each serving unique business needs and customer segments:

Trade Shows - Participating in or organizing trade shows, exhibitions, and product launches to physically present products to potential customers. Your display will be benefit-driven and your sales reps will tailor their presentation to each company visiting the display area. Organizations will invite their best customers and prospects to visit their area during the convention or conference. They will also advertise to attendees prior to the event to maximize visitations.

Direct Mail Marketing – Direct mail was a staple of thousands of companies in the 80's and 90's. The availability of targeted subscriber lists and early compiled lists gave marketers the ability to target specific markets in the US and Canada. In a direct mail kit would be a cover letter, brochure, order form and – at times – other incentives or action items. Often, the direct marketer would include a time or quantity limitation or an incentive to move the reader to action. The direct mail kit would also include an 800 number so the reader could call to place an order or request additional information. Direct mail kits were tracked with a keycode which consisted of the campaign number, the list segment used to select the prospect, and the kit being sent the prospect [allowing for package testing]. If the prospect called in, the inbound telemarketer would ask the prospect to read the keycode so they knew the offer and kit the prospect had been sent.

Outbound Telemarketing – Many of the subscription lists used for direct mailing also contained a telephone number. As a result, companies would develop scripts to deliver their message and would directly solicit prospects using outbound telemarketing. The scripts would often start with a question to get the prospect talking. The telemarketer also had a database of likely questions and objections with tested answers to keep the prospect interested. Outbound telemarketing programs were tracked with tracking codes similar to direct mail.

Catalog Marketing – Catalog marketing uses the same lists and list segmentation techniques as direct mail. However, the high cost of a catalog made segmentation critical. When the first census files were made available, my company – Marketing Synergy – would work with catalogers to develop zip-level predictive models. While primitive by today's standards, these early predictive models allowed catalogers to eliminate highly unresponsive zip codes thereby saving money. It also allowed them to use marginal lists and select only the highest responding zip codes.

Direct Response Television & Radio – Both television and radio were used to generate new business for many companies. One of the "tricks" developed in these early promotions was the integration of the company's 800 number into the advertisement. This integration was perfected in infomercials. The "trick" was to be sure to show and mention the 800 number three times during the commercial. The thought was the first mention alerted the interested prospect to call, the second occurred while they were getting some paper to write it down and the third mention allowed them to write down the number to call. As a result, telecenters which fielded the calls needed to be alerted when the commercials were being aired as respond tended to occur seconds after the ad ran and was sustained for only a couple of minutes. You needed to be sure the telecenter was staffed and ready to avoid blowing up the telesystems.

Direct Sales - Engaging in one-on-one sales efforts, including door-to-door sales, telemarketing, or personalized email campaigns.

Email Marketing: Creating targeted and personalized email campaigns that drive customers to take immediate actions, such as purchasing a product or signing up for a newsletter.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Push Marketing

Like any strategy, push marketing presents both opportunities and challenges:

Strengths

Control and Precision: Allows marketers to control the message and precisely target the audience.

Quick Results: Suitable for time-sensitive campaigns and product launches.

Weaknesses

Perceived Intrusiveness: Can be seen as intrusive, especially if not tailored to the recipient's interests or needs.

Higher Costs: Often involves higher promotional and distribution costs.

Is Push Marketing Used Today?

Yes. All of the time.

Infomercials, email marketing, inbound and outbound telemarketing and even direct marketing are huge marketing channels used by digital marketers today. In fact, today we use messaging on social media to direct awareness and move prospects to action. It is classic push marketing. The IMC marketer controls the entire process and targets the markets they want to develop. While social media marketing is considered state of the art in the 2000's, it uses push market to drive people to the top of the funnel.

Pull Marketing Uncovered

In contrast to the direct and assertive nature of push marketing, pull marketing adopts a subtler approach, designed to "pull" customers towards a brand or product. It's a strategy that fosters customer interest and engagement through value-driven content, creating a magnetism that draws customers in. This chapter seeks to demystify pull marketing, exploring its underlying principles, applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

Definition and Key Characteristics

Pull marketing represents a strategic alignment with the consumer's interests, needs, and curiosity. Rather than reaching out directly, it creates an environment that attracts customers to actively seek out products or services.

Key characteristics of pull marketing include:

Customer-Centric Approach: Focuses on creating value and interest for the customer.

Long-term Engagement: Encourages ongoing customer relationships rather than immediate sales.

Brand Building: Aims to establish brand loyalty and awareness through consistent value delivery.

Techniques and Channels for Pull Marketing

Pull marketing leverages a wide array of techniques and channels to create an ongoing conversation with potential customers:

Content Marketing: Utilizing blogs, videos, webinars, and other content to educate, entertain, and engage the audience.

SEO & SEM: Employing Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) to make content discoverable by customers searching for relevant information online.

Social Media Engagement: Building a community through social media channels by sharing valuable content, encouraging interaction, and fostering brand loyalty.

Real-world Examples

The abstract notion of pull marketing comes to life through real-world implementation:

A Health and Wellness Brand: Creating a blog series and video tutorials focused on healthy living, drawing in individuals interested in wellness and leading them to related products.

An E-commerce Platform: Leveraging customer reviews, user-generated content, and SEO to attract shoppers searching for specific products or product categories.

A Luxury Automobile Manufacturer: Building brand prestige and customer desire through aspirational advertising, social media presence, and customer testimonials.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Pull marketing's unique approach brings its own set of advantages and challenges:

Strengths

Sustainable Growth: Focuses on long-term customer relationships, loyalty, and advocacy.

Customer Alignment: Tailors to customer interests and needs, often leading to higher satisfaction.

Weaknesses

Slower Results: May require more time to see tangible results compared to direct push strategies.

Content and SEO Challenges: Requires ongoing efforts in content creation and SEO strategies, potentially demanding more resources.

Importance for Brand Building and Long-term Growth

Pull marketing is not confined to any specific industry or business size. Its principles of attraction, engagement, and value creation are universal, making it a key strategy for brand building and long-term growth.

Comparative Analysis of Push vs. Pull Marketing

Understanding both push and pull marketing strategies is only the beginning of the journey. The real art and science lie in discerning when and how to use these strategies. Is one inherently superior to the other? Or do they serve distinct purposes within a broader marketing landscape? In this chapter, we will conduct a comparative analysis of push and pull marketing, highlighting key considerations that will guide marketing students, CMOs, and entrepreneurs in developing robust and effective strategies.

Target Audience Considerations

Knowing your audience is paramount in choosing between push and pull:

Push Marketing: Often effective for specific, well-defined audience segments where a direct approach may elicit immediate action.

Pull Marketing: Suited for a broader or more diverse audience, where building interest and loyalty over time is the goal.

Timing and Lifecycle Stage

The product's stage in its lifecycle can strongly influence the choice between push and pull:

Product Launch (Push): Introducing a new product might require aggressive promotion to generate awareness.

Brand Building (Pull): Over time, focus may shift towards nurturing customer relationships and establishing a strong brand presence.

Budget and Resource Allocation

Push Marketing: Often requires higher upfront investment in advertising, trade shows, and direct sales.

Pull Marketing: May demand sustained investment in content creation, SEO, and community engagement but can be more cost-effective in the long run.

Metrics and Performance Evaluation

Measurement and evaluation criteria differ between the strategies:

Push Marketing Metrics: Immediate sales, response rates, conversion rates, and ROI on specific campaigns.

Pull Marketing Metrics: Brand awareness, customer engagement, content performance, long-term growth in sales and customer loyalty.

Strategic Integration: Push and Pull Combined

A holistic approach often involves a synergistic integration of both push and pull:

Seasonal Integration Example: A retailer might use push marketing for holiday sales while maintaining pull marketing efforts through content and community engagement year-round.

Start-up Integration Example: A tech start-up could employ push marketing for a product launch and then shift to pull marketing to foster an engaged user community.

Ethical Considerations

Both strategies require attention to ethical marketing practices:

Push Marketing: Must avoid intrusive or aggressive tactics that could alienate customers.

Pull Marketing: Should provide genuine value and transparent communication, avoiding misleading or superficial content.

In summary, it becomes clear that push and pull marketing are not mutually exclusive or universally applicable. They present unique strengths, weaknesses, and best-fit scenarios. The savvy marketer—whether a graduate student exploring theory, a CMO orchestrating a multifaceted marketing strategy, or an entrepreneur navigating a competitive landscape—will understand that the choice between push and pull is rarely binary. Instead, it involves a nuanced blend of strategies tailored to specific goals, audiences, timelines, and values. Understanding this intricate balance can transform marketing from a series of isolated tactics into a cohesive and resonant symphony of engagement and growth.

In the words of the late Peter Drucker, "The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself." In embracing the art and science of push and pull marketing, we move closer to realizing this timeless wisdom, creating value not only for businesses but for customers and communities alike.

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