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What marketers have forgotten about marketing

Marketing and sales are not the same thing



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OK, so the title was a little click-bait. Because I don't actually think this is what marketers have forgotten about. I think it's what the people who pay marketers have forgotten about.

And this has led us to a weird place.

In the old days, experienced marketers knew all about brand and creative and nothing about digital.

Now, it's flipped.

I've spoken to so many companies who say "we're really good at performance marketing, now we need to figure out brand."

This is a pattern I keep seeing everywhere. And this is a problem.

Again and again, I keep hearing this same thing and this has happened because **we've forgotten the difference between marketing and sales.**

"But marketing and sales are totally the same thing now," says the engineer founder of a D2C startup. "You're just old fashioned."



Unfortunately, despite what we've been taught on How I Met Your Mother, new is not always better.



So many businesses today are treating performance marketing [which is effectively sales] as the only marketing that matters. Because all that matters to them is sales.

Performance marketing = sales (not marketing)

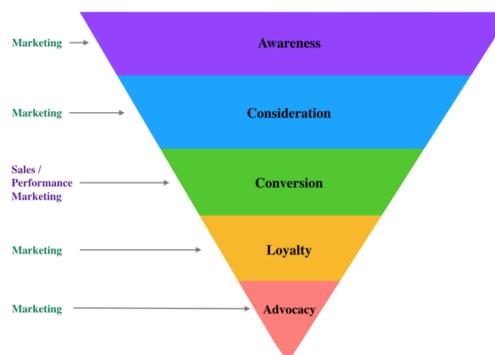
See the trouble with focusing purely on sales is that in order to drive sustainable sales and growth over time, **you need actual marketing**. Yes, in the early days of a business, performance marketing is incredibly valuable as a first step to help you find product market fit. And it can be great over the long-term too, when done well. But the problem with relying on it is that over time, it plateaus. And since you haven't started by building a brand that anybody cares about, you get stuck. And then you try to retrofit "brand" into your business as an "emerging growth channel." But brand is not a channel. Brand is the unique story that people recall when they think of you—retrofitting it at the end is a mistake.

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Marketing: understand your audience, create a meaningful proposition, reach and persuade customers to try your product, encourage loyalty and recommendation

Sales (and performance marketing): close the deal

If you focus all your marketing on performance marketing, you're essentially focusing all your efforts only on sales, which is a very limited piece of the pie.



Consumers aren't robots. They think about things before they buy, just like you do. And you can change the attribution window on Google Analytics to be 3 days or 30 minutes and optimise for the sale all you

want—that doesn't change the reality that your customer is taking weeks/months/years to actually decide to choose your product. All it means is that you're optimising for the most obvious metrics to try to make what is most easily measurable look like it's working.

This is illogical and it ignores your customer.

If you focus only on sales or performance marketing, you're thinking short-term and guaranteeing that at some point, you're going to have trouble growing at a sustainable rate. This isn't even considering your extreme dependency on specific platforms that can change their algorithms and increase their pricing at any moment (which they can and they do and they will). This is assuming that if all factors remain constant, the pool of potential customers you can reach through these channels, who respond to these channels, will inevitably dry up.

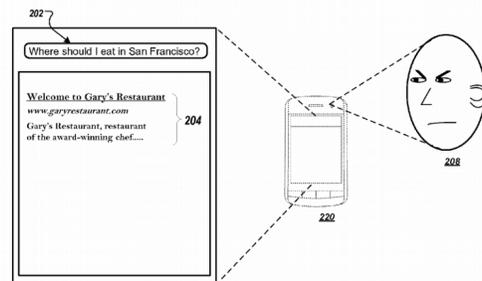
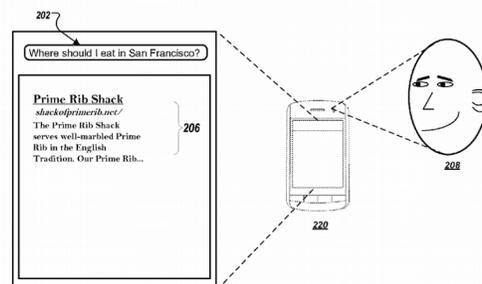


FIG. 2A



Enjoy the days of current SEO while you can—Google published a patent application to score and rank search query results using emotional and biometric parameters of satisfaction and engagement.

“But look at Amazon!” says the founder. “They never do any marketing, and look at them.” The thing though is that they do spend on marketing. A lot of marketing. \$8.2 billion worth of marketing in fact.

“OK but what about Booking.com? Their business is completely built on performance marketing.”

Again, not the best example. Booking.com spent \$509 million on brand marketing in 2018. CEO Glenn Fogel said, “**These marketing programs are taking on a greater importance because many of our performance marketing partners are experiencing slower customer growth.**”

Because that's what happens—performance marketing is fantastic until it isn't. And if you wait until it plateaus to create a proper brand and start thinking about marketing, you're going to be in trouble. The more you depend on performance channels early on, the more likely you are to go wide and shallow and plateau quickly. Reaching only the low-hanging fruit only is an incredibly short-term way of thinking and potentially damaging in the long run. Investors are smart enough to understand that this type of growth will reach its limit quickly. If you understand the relationship of marketing and sales early on, you can create the foundation for something meaningful that will grow sustainably and ultimately last.

Some people say that marketing is one-to-many and sales is one-to-one. I wholeheartedly disagree with this. I think there's fantastic one-to-one marketing out there that isn't shoving sales tactics down consumers' throats. So many brilliant businesses have been built on amazing content that primes customers for sales down the road. "Down the road" could be a day later, a month later, or a year later, depending on the business model, the industry and consumer behaviour. These are businesses that understand their customers' process, and that decision making is an emotional process, and that great marketing builds trust and loyalty over time.



Good marketers and good leaders understand the importance of reaching the customer at every possible touchpoint—from before they know who you are to the moment they're ready to buy for the first time to the moment they're ready to buy for the second time to the moment they're recommending your product to their friends.

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I really feel for junior marketers coming into entry level jobs these days. A good junior marketer today is supposed to know everything there is to know about SEO / ASO / paid search / display / Facebook ads / Instagram ads / Pinterest ads / Snapchat ads / YouTube ads / email / loyalty / referrals / affiliates / every analytics platform in existence / sql / coding / a/b testing / attribution modelling / forecasting / brand / design / UX / CRO / marketing automation / video production / content creation / content distribution / copywriting / TV / OOH / podcasts / social media / community management / PR / influencer outreach / partnerships / events / "emerging channels" / project management / agency management / campaign management / user research and a whole lot more.

The problem with the myth of the "T-shaped marketer" is that in practice it's another way of saying jack of all trades, master of none. The best supposed T-shaped marketers I've personally met understand performance marketing and code but they don't understand brand building, content, advocacy, or anything that's creative or outside of a spreadsheet. And they're brilliant at what they do! Then you've got the amazing people working with PR and influencers who are being forced to justify their work as SEO or affiliate programs and are effectively doomed to fail, despite the real purpose of their work being incredibly important.

No one can be amazing at everything, and it's not fair to expect them to be. Especially if there's no one there to teach them. It's also pretty close

to being a guaranteed way to produce mediocre output that is trying to do everything and not achieving anything particularly well. There is value in expertise—across all parts of the consumer journey, not just the final sale.



Yes you need generalists early on—but don't expect miracles. In the longer term though, at least the T-shaped marketers have a chance because they've been exposed to different areas of marketing. In my opinion, those who are most at risk are those who are focusing on being pure performance marketers (the word "growth" is probably in their job titles because that means they must be analytical right). These are the people who have never been taught to think about audience because the machines optimise to those who click and buy. There's a good chance they've got two, maybe three years left until their jobs are fully automated. And since nobody is teaching them what marketing actually is, as opposed to the sales jobs they're actually in, they're going to need to start again and learn from scratch.

Marketing people shouldn't be forced to be salespeople or finance people or developers. Yes of course they should be able to speak the language of other teams and efficiently communicate with them. But being shocked when your marketers can't write code means that your expectations are not in the right place. Empower your people to be good at what they're good at and stop holding them back.

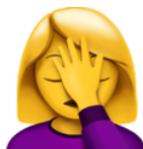
It's the job of the leadership in the business to set and manage expectations for the marketing team—whether the responsibilities of individuals relate to marketing or sales—and be crystal clear on objectives and where each person's role sits within the bigger picture.

This includes the leadership team understanding the purpose of every channel within the customer journey. Marketing channels should be measured for what they are meant to do, and sales channels should be measured differently. Measuring a Trueview ad based on direct sales metrics is frankly ludicrous. When's the last time you decided to not watch a YouTube video you were about to watch because instead you decided to click through from a pre-roll to go buy something immediately? Stop expecting customers to do things that you know you would never do yourself! This is simply not the way the brain works. Figure out what you need—then find the right channels to make it happen—then measure the channels based on what they're meant to do.



The most common marketing debate I've experienced is about PR. "Since it's so hard to measure, it must not be worth doing" / "we got that great press and we didn't see a spike in sales" / "if we can't see immediate sales it must be wasteful" / "we should focus our efforts on where we can see success."

Again:

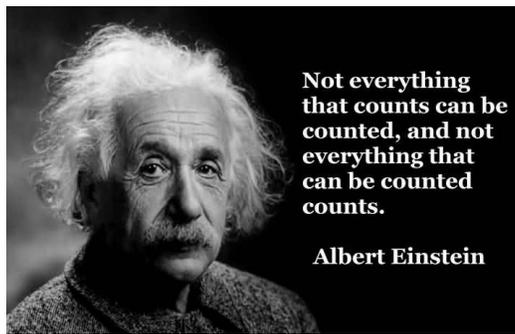


OK so let's start with the basics. If you're reading these words, you are reading an article in a publication. Not seeded with press, and not hawking a product, but you're reading it because you found it on a medium that you trust. Chances are, you probably find out about most of things you know about from press or your friends sharing information with you (which often include links to press). Do you click through and buy immediately? No. Does that make it ineffective? No. Does it influence your decision over time? Yes. Can it be measured? Yes, admittedly with a lot more difficulty than a paid search ad.

And while it can be measured, sometimes you also need to trust in your business and your product. This means understanding that having people hear about your product is enough to initiate the very early stages of the buying process, even if you don't see the sale immediately. If you don't believe that someone hearing about how great and relevant your product is has an impact, deep inside I suspect you might not actually think your product is very good. Something to think about.

Just because you don't see an immediate sales spike (remember, marketing is not sales), doesn't mean it's not working. Have faith that your product is good enough that when you make people aware of it, you're kicking off their consideration, and that, along with other forms of persuasion, are enough to aid performance marketing in closing the deal for you later. You can measure this in various ways, and it can be as simple as a "where did you hear about us" question on your site.

Without the marketing efforts to make people know you exist and consider buying your product, the effectiveness of your performance marketing is likely to be much worse. It will only perform with the tiny number of people who haven't been primed but can still be convinced to buy your product based on the performance marketing alone. You and I both know that this segment of your audience is very small.



Building out holistic marketing based on the customer journey

Much of what I've said might make me sound like I'm anti-performance marketing. I can't stress this enough—I'm not. I think it's incredibly important, especially in the early days of a business, and I've worked in companies that have been incredibly successful using performance marketing alongside other channels. This is my main point—it needs to be incorporated within a broader marketing plan. Optimising for the final sale alone is not enough, and the full customer experience must be considered.

Here are some steps to help you think about this:

1. Figure out what your brand is about

- Who your audience is
- What you're really selling
- What your brand stands for

Don't retrofit your branding later—it's so much better when it's authentic and is determined from the start. Think about a) what you actually care about and b) what makes sense to be coming from your brand. Ensuring that you're clear on your mission and purpose from day one is critical when creating a strong, consistent and recognisable brand. Understanding your audience includes understanding how long the full customer journey actually takes in reality, and how many touchpoints there are in this journey—from first discovering your brand to buying your product.

2. Think about **what channels make the most sense early on**. It very likely might make the most sense to test performance marketing channels to grow your audience to find product market fit, but you also might want to create useful content to introduce concepts to your audience in a format that makes sense for your brand. Test everything you have the resource to test and don't underestimate the power of creative options in your testing. Avoid getting hooked on paid media immediately—it's always the cheapest when you start and will never be as sustainable as you want it to be.

3. **Improve product market fit**. Take everything you've learned from your early customers and your marketing and sales activity and optimise your product based on your insights.

4. As you scale your business, **optimise your table stakes performance marketing while growing your holistic marketing and word of mouth**. Consider your customers' full journey and what information they need at every stage of their decision making process.

5. As you move from scaleup into hypergrowth, performance marketing will take a back seat as your loyalty and word of mouth get stronger. **Differentiation through brand building** will need to be the primary

focus at this point, and creativity will be a skill you need from every marketed in your team.

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In a nutshell: stop obsessing over performance marketing / sales just because it's easier to measure. Don't disregard marketing in favour of pure sales channels—you'll always need both and they complement each other. The balance will shift over time but it's always necessary to be looking at the bigger picture. Focusing only on short-term sales will hurt you for the future. **You need to remember what marketing is actually supposed to do and why it matters.**