



A simple guide to multi-channel marketing

Introduction

To generate the best sales in the current environment, you need to have a multichannel marketing plan in place. Built around the behaviour, preferences and expectations of your customers, it should engage them across a range of channels including email, mobile, social networks, web and print.

In the ongoing battle between digital channels and offline channels, digital platforms are fast gaining strength and their relevance is now over shadowing the print and 'old media' channels for a lot of businesses. Digital has become the dominant force.

Smart marketers are catching on to the importance of establishing a strong presence across the various digital channels to seize a greater market share. *The even smarter ones are taking a measured approach and adopting a plan that integrates all the channels – online, offline, new media, old media – to provide a funnel for these offerings so that their business gets a multichannel marketing plan that is fit for purpose.*

We're all familiar with the various print options but, to most of us, marketing online can be a little daunting. With so many avenues to explore, presenting us with an assortment of fragmented offerings, it can be quite difficult to work out which options will be most effective.

To work smarter and maximise our digital assets, we need to be able to harness them and understand what fits best and where. The various pieces should complement each other, as well as any off-line activity that we undertake, and provide us with the best results...

...And that's where our simple guide to multichannel marketing comes in.

We're not here to bombard you with information. The technical stuff can wait until later. This guide is intended as an overview to advise you on the best approach to multichannel marketing and to help you to avoid any pitfalls...

Business without boundaries

Customers are individuals. They have individual traits and individual needs. Just as they will know about you and your business from a variety of different sources, including web searches, traditional advertising and word of mouth, they will also buy from you in a number of different ways.

Recent reports from ebay revealed that in 2011 over 10 per cent of its sales came from a mobile device – and that figure is expected to increase going forwards. Desktop browsing is officially in decline as people enjoy ‘couch surfing’ on tablets, ipods and smart phones.

Growing numbers of customers now engage in a mix of channels when going through the purchasing process. They can research products online and buy in-store or browse in-store and buy online later. They can use their smartphones to price check or to see if different sizes are available online. The blurring of lines between online and offline is now apparent across all channels.

As there are now no hard and fast rules and no single way of buying an item, the rules of engagement themselves have changed and marketing activity has to be both pro-active and responsive and, most of all, intelligent.

Your objective has to be to make your customers’ path to purchase as simple as possible. To do this, you have to embrace multichannel customer engagement and talk to your customers, clearly, frequently and across many platforms to make sure that you connect...

The methods of engagement – digitally speaking...

The offline methods of engagement are still as relevant as ever and exist to be delved into depending on your budget and the profile of your customers. They include print marketing – direct mail letters and fliers, target media advertising and editorial coverage through PR and media liaison. There are also various broadcast options.

However, it is online that the widest, most diverse audience can be reached.

At Livelink, we are digital experts who specialise in web-based business solutions. It is our job to guide you through on-line and mobile marketing and social media and show you how these important pieces of the puzzle fit in.

Vices and devices

Pause for thought... Nearly half the mobile phone users in the UK have smartphones and 46 per cent of internet users accessed the internet via mobile phones in October 2011. Smartphones now out sell PCs by three to one.

More people are spending time on mobiles and tablets than they are on desktop computers and the next generation websites are being built to recognise this. Smart brands are currently building in HTML5 to establish a responsive website design that reacts to the device the end user has access to, adapting text and size accordingly.

By acknowledging the width of the screen and adapting the content to fit, the brand is graciously presenting the user with the best experience – yet another way of saying, we know you and you matter to us.

HTML5 takes away the reliance on expensive apps and introduces further access features such as location information and cameras, even allowing a website to take a photo of its visitor and upload it.

Web

Your website is your shop front. It is the first point of contact many potential customers have with you and your brand and so it needs to reflect, and clearly identify, what your brand stands for while clearly relaying your key selling messages.

To ensure web surfers spend time on your site and return to it, it should be well designed, contain good content and be easy to navigate. First though, customers searching for services and goods available from your sector need to be able to find you....

- *SEO* - The surest way to get discovered by potential new customers is by SEO (search engine optimisation). This is the process of getting your website found when potential customers perform searches for the type of goods and services you supply on search engines such as Google. If you have a high search engine ranking you are more likely to be found by customers who want what you have to offer.
- *PAY-PER-CLICK* - Results can also be achieved with paid advertising or Pay-Per-Click, which allows you to boost online traffic by paying a fixed amount to promote link clicks to your content and website.

Once you have the visitors to your website and they are sufficiently engaged, the trick is to capture them as potential leads. You need to give them a good reason to hand over their personal information. Many businesses have a newsletter sign up form or invite people to put in their details in order to download useful information.

Another method of capturing these leads is to make the customers feel special. To do this, feature heavily on exclusivity, offering the customers who become 'members' the very best deals and early notification of special offers. You can offer private events for member customers only.

Your website is like the pumping heart of your digital offering – the healthier it is, the better the other parts will work.

Email

The use of email marketing is a must for those looking for a guaranteed return on investment. Email spend is growing faster than social media spend indicating the recognition it has earned as one of the most powerful tools in the mix. Note that personalized automated email campaigns generate an average of two to three times higher click-through rates than mass triggered email campaigns. It's about getting the right message to the right person at the right time.

The best strategic approach is to personalise any automated follow-up so that it is targeted based on your customers' behaviour, likes and dislikes (as demonstrated by past purchases) and pages in which they have shown an interest. Amazon does this really well by emailing its customers with offers that would be of specific interest to them and identifying key things they might like based on recent purchases.

One of Livelink's customers, Coals2U, enjoyed a 110 per cent increase in revenue from its automated e-marketing campaign sales last August compared to the same month the previous year. That's a pretty significant hike in what is a hard selling month for a solid fuel manufacturer.

The breakdown of figures for Coals2U included 39 per cent of customers opening the emails, 35 per cent of customers completing the online surveys, 8 per cent conversion on abandoned checkout, 14 per cent conversion on anniversary of purchase, 8 per cent conversion on re-engagement and 40 per cent conversion on loyalty emails.

An automated email campaign that is personal and relevant will position you and your brand in the best light. This can raise your conversion rates by engaging your clients and addressing their particular needs and interests.

Mobile Text

Mobile texting is a way of contacting customers with speed, relevancy and efficiency. It's a tool that fits well when used as part of a coordinated, multichannel marketing effort. Companies like Sky, British Gas and John Lewis deploy this means of communication well when they use it to let people who are waiting for deliveries or service engineers know that someone is on their way.

It's a convenient and considerate service and a great way of keeping customers informed. Texting frees up phone lines when otherwise customers might be tempted to call numerous times to get an update on estimated arrival and delivery times. It also lessens the risk of complaints by keeping the customers both informed and 'on side'.

As part of an integrated system, SMS provides yet another form of instant and relevant communication, highlighting your attention to customer service and positioning you as caretaker of a responsive brand that values its customers.

Social Media...So what's it all about?

There's been a bit of a social media backlash from some companies. Many businesses didn't get the return on investment they had hoped for having jumped on the bandwagon and invested heavily in social media in the last couple of years, encouraged by some of the more over-zealous agencies...

However think of the workman and his tools. The tools in the social media box all serve a useful purpose, the trick is how you use them, when you use them and, basically, knowing how to use them correctly.

Fact is that tools such as Facebook and Twitter are a great way to access your audience and draw them in. Approximately 75 per cent of consumers use social media in some form to learn about products and services and it's a conversation that you should be a part of.

Even if you're not actively involved in the chat, you need to be aware of it so that you can join in as and when required. (Remember, you have no control over who talks about your brand on these networks so be prepared to respond to comment openly and honestly, if you need to, using the very same channel).

There are many ways to engage with social media: blogs can be used to announce new products and to discuss industry news and Twitter followers and people who 'Like' you on Facebook can be rewarded with exclusive deals. Once these services are set up, they are easy to maintain. They're yet another way of keeping in touch with your customers, ensuring that you don't get left behind.

Facebook

Like it or not, Facebook has become a phenomenon. It is currently the second most visited site after Google and, arguably, a more powerful influencer as users who visit the site then stay on it for a considerable amount of time. People may find you via Google but they 'Like' you via Facebook and that sends a message to all their friends. They are endorsing you and making 100+ people aware of it.

There are 24 million Facebook users in the UK and 50 per cent visit at least once a day. If your website has Facebook integration, visitors can access their profile from your website and they can 'Like' you on Facebook – and you can incentivise them to 'Like' you. Advertising on Facebook is a great way to create a buzz about your brand. The amount of people liking you can snowball and you can communicate with a whole group of people via just one.

Twitter

There are 15 million active Twitter users and 32 per cent of all UK adults have a twitter account. Over half of Twitter users access Twitter through their mobile phones.

Twitter allows you to join in the conversation. For those with sharp elbows, it gives you the opportunity to push in. If you are selling something specific and there is a relevant feature on television, then why not tweet about it? See a celebrity wearing a certain pair of shoes on Big Brother or TOWIE? Tweet if you have a similar, much cheaper, line. Is a character driving a certain car in Coronation Street? Tweet if you have that model in your showroom or if you provide a particular service for that vehicle. Keep it observational and relevant – remember, you're part of the conversation.

Be relevant !

We're all chasing the same dollar at the moment.

Consumers are being advised to rein in their spending as the threat of a continued recession lingers and times are destined to get tougher... And yet many businesses still churn out a single message regardless of their varying audiences and the platforms they might be using.

People are beginning to suffer from email fatigue as they are bombarded by messages from different companies they have previously bought from or registered an interest in. Inboxes are getting clogged and most of these emails are starting to resemble, at best, wallpaper and, at worst, trash. Consumers are starting to opt out rather than to opt in.

A 'one size fits all' approach can't be the standard in the current market. Maintaining key messages is necessary but you also have to consider starting new conversations and imparting fresh information whilst continuing to support your brand's core values.

Your customers' experience in a certain channel must match their needs and expectations for that channel. This means having the right tools and processes in place to control the user experience in each channel while maintaining a view across all channels.

Pulling it all together

The most essential tool for pursuing a successful multichannel marketing approach is to adopt an on-line marketing platform that will enable you to deliver multichannel marketing customer experiences and campaigns. Note that, in the US, 85 per cent of multichannel buyers ultimately purchase on-line.

Your new on-line marketing platform should be a next-generation, web content management system combined with integration services for digital asset management and social collaboration. It should work across a range of output channels including email, mobile, social networks, web and print.

Top Tips

- Customer needs vary by location, device and transaction type. What works on a tablet device might not on a PC. To ensure a sound multi-channel marketing strategy, prioritise the channels of most value to you
- Ensure brand consistency. Be aware that the nature of the internet and social media is of inclusivity and openness. It's great that your customers can talk about your brand and share information about you but they are not trained to make statements on your behalf. Be aware of potential cracks in your core messages and address them by keeping an open dialogue and using it to reinforce your original messages
- Optimise your resources by ensuring that the messages used for one channel are reused where appropriate across the other channels. This reduces the risk of conflicting messages and, again, reasserts key messages
- Keep your content relevant and respond to your customers' changing needs. Note the Marks and Spencer's television advert for Christmas 2011 which edited its content according to which X Factor finalists remained in the show
- Converse with your customers regularly to keep building the relationship. As well as updating your website, send out forms to keep in touch with your customers' changing requirements and establish an on-line forum for invaluable exchanges in order to build a true picture of your customers
- Use analytical tools to segment and target your audience. As common analytics include purchasing behaviour and campaign-offer responsiveness, any campaign that engages analytics will allow you to obtain the information you need to tailor your marketing to address individual customer requirements

And finally...

The importance of multichannel marketing continues to resonate. The basic truth is that campaigns that cross digital channels drive revenue and are in step with today's consumer. These campaigns stimulate conversation and raise customers' levels of 'connectedness' with your company and your brand.

To be effective and stem any drift to your competitors, you need a good, integrated marketing solution that allows you to converse with your prospects with increased relevancy and good timing. Ideally, this system would encompass a solid customer relations management system and marketing automation software...

... In fact, for a business to optimise its multichannel strategy without losing control of branding and the customer conversation, it's a must.

If you would like any more information on multichannel marketing and would like to discuss it with a digital and marketing expert, please call the Livelink offices or email me directly.

PK Vaish

p.vaish@ltl.uk.com / 0161 822 2558