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## **Marketing into the Storm**

### ***How and why the financial crisis will turn you into a better marketer***

The financial crisis will have a detrimental impact on our marketing and sales budgets in 2009. In this crisis, marketing leaders need to re-invent marketing not just as a functional discipline, but as the business fiber that connects prospects to companies like never before.

For the last 10 years, if not longer, the marketing function has been trapped within a confining connotation of "tactical, logistics execution." In fact, many CMOs I know continue to struggle against internal perception regarding the unappreciated strategic versus the taken-for-granted tactical natures of their role. To further compound this perception, product marketers everywhere still believe they are entitled to produce the traditional marketing materials created for their products whether they are appropriate or not – the press release, direct mail piece, website article and landing pages, etc. It's the marcom obligatory checklist. Survival of the marketing function depends on our ability to change this reality. Now.

### **Crisis creates opportunity**

Rather than falling victim to the "deer in the headlights" stance, a time of crisis is an opportunity for re-evaluation and change. It's time to look anew at our marketing assumptions and reprioritize our choices. Against the hard edge of this crisis, we must hone our marketing skills and refocus on what are truly the only important things: the prospect and the customer.

Gone are the days of flamboyant marketing budgets that include Donna Summer as the headliner for a customer event. Tossed aside is the mantra that "more (products, datasheets, webinars, marketing programs and campaigns) is better." Marketing silos can no longer be accepted. Truly integrated marketing campaigns must replace yesterday's isolated and random "marketing popcorn" activities.

"Marketing as usual" must change. Those companies that succeed and excel in 2009 will be the ones that embrace three marketing truths and proactively act upon them with vigor:

- 1) **"It's about the prospect and customer, stupid. Not the product."**  
Successfully selling to business people means that marketers effectively understand the business problem the customer is trying to solve. Only then can you really know how your products and services will be relevant and meaningful to this audience. If you don't know, conduct a [Customer Advisory Board Meeting](#) and find out.

- It's not enough to target "CFOs of the global 3000." Tighten your market segmentation criteria using adjectives and descriptors to clearly identify the demographics, psychographics, and behaviors of the target audience. Success requires being even more draconian in your target audience selection and prioritization.
- To better understand your target audience(s), take time to build and refine a *persona* to challenge your assumptions. On a scale of 1 – 10, how well do you *really understand* the person you are marketing to? Anything lower than an 8 is not good enough. Whoever understands the target audience the best, wins.
- Hold a [marketing-sales summit](#) to talk about customers and align priorities. Talk to sales reps to find out who they are talking to and what conversations they are having. Too many marketers spend their whole career never talking to an actual customer. Team up with sales to bridge the gap.

2) **"Plans are nothing. Planning is everything."** This quote by Dwight Eisenhower, US General and President, tells it like it is. Pursuing an annual business or marketing plan is only as relevant as the cross-functional dialog it inspires. Plans are static documents that gather dust, but planning is the ongoing, effective interchange that challenges our perceptions and priorities in order to focus our marketing efforts.

- Approach marketing like you are playing a game of chess. Take the time to look two or three moves ahead. What happens after you launch a new product? How will the competition likely respond? What messages will you communicate then? How can you nurture a meaningful dialog with prospects throughout the year so you can guide them quickly through (or out of) the sales funnel?
- Take 30 minutes to craft a [Marketing Blueprint](#) that visually links your activities and offers together in a meaningful, logical way. Marketing blueprints are the newest tool in a marketer's arsenal. Learn what they are and how to use them.
- Hire a marketing operations expert if you aren't sure where to [start](#). Seasoned marketing operations experts can help you quickly assess the quality of your team and their skills, the caliber of any current planning templates and documents, and the effectiveness of any existing (formal or informal) processes. Their focused recommendations can help you establish an effective planning process with confidence so you can get ahead of the 2009 planning curve.

3) **"Marketing is not an event. It's a process."** I like this quote from Jay Conrad Levinson, father of "guerilla marketing," because it challenges the notion that if we suspend marketing activities and assume a "wait it out" strategy until economic times improve, we'll somehow survive. Avoid this temptation! While marketing budgets will be tighter and our ability to execute will be curtailed, prospects and customers will still have needs. If they forget who we are, how can we ever hope to sell to them? The real issue is to separate the wasteful ineffective marketing tactics from the high-ROI engagement tactics that are worth continued investment. The good news is that *it is possible* to determine which half of your marketing investment is the half you need to keep.

- Instead of starting 2009 with a pre-defined list of marketing projects, use the *persona* exercise and the [marketing blueprint](#) exercises

described above. The most effective marketing activities and offers will become immediately apparent and will flow out of these exercises. And because the activities and offers will now be directly linked to a marketing blueprint, they will be easier to prioritize and defend internally.

- The act of marketing is a cross-functional team sport. Although we have the word “marketing” on our business cards, the fact is that everyone from sales to customer support plays a role in the successful marketing of a company. The most effective marketing blueprints are developed by cross-functional team players working together. Use these exercises to build camaraderie, gain buy-in, and energize the team.
- Stick to the [marketing blueprint](#), but be willing to make changes. Life never proceeds according to plan. As you monitor the success of any marketing campaign or program, be ready to change messages and offers in order to optimize your campaigns and programs.

## Reshaping Marketing

The truth is that this financial crisis will cause many enterprises and consumers to delay spending. It’s already happening. As such, many of us will see our marketing budgets and staff shrink. Ironically, the critical importance of the marketing role will only increase as companies strive to maximize lead conversion rates while demanding higher ROI for their decreasing marketing investment. This will put marketers in the hot seat, but we’ll have a new opportunity to show leadership to guide our companies through the financial storm.

The companies left standing at the end of 2009 will be the ones that have invested in their marketing teams to teach them how to become better marketers. The following links can help your team hone their skills and prepare for 2009.

**New book:** [Marketing Campaign Development: What marketing executives need to know about architecting global integrated marketing campaigns](#)

### Articles on:

- [Positioning and elevator pitches](#)
- [Marketing blueprints](#)
- [Sales and marketing summits](#)

## About the Author

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