Integration - the one truism that should underpin all businesses

By Scott Cundill

With the explosion and exponential growth of marketing technology, businesses are spending billions to acquire the tools and capabilities to better connect with and service their customers.

This has been confirmed by researcher and consultant for the International Data Corporation (IDC), Gerry Murray, who says organisations worldwide will spend some $20.2bn on software solutions for marketing in 2014 alone. Further to this, he predicts that that the marketing software market is expected to grow to more than $32.3bn by 2018 (indicating a compound annual growth rate of 12.4%), making marketing technology one of the fastest-growing areas in the high tech world of today. In his blog, Murray indicates that "over the five years from 2014 to 2018, organisations cumulatively will spend $130bn on software for marketing departments."

Connecting with the customer

But to make it all worthwhile, integration will become everything to businesses who understand the necessity and scope of opportunity to connect with and add value to their customers in an intelligent, multi-faceted and ongoing manner. Integration provides the gateway to communicate to customers through multi-dimensional touch points in real-time. And real-time is where authentic value and relevance lie.
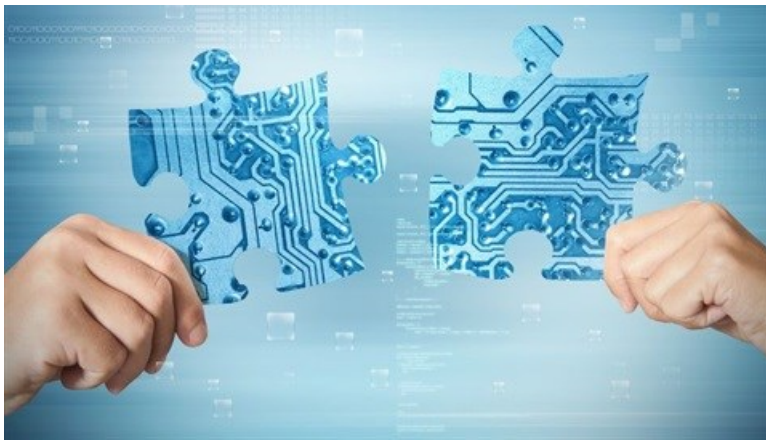
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Consumer markets are becoming more intelligent and tech savvy, rapidly adopting and utilising new technology in their everyday lives. This impacts their life-styles, spending patterns and buying behaviour, all of which change in real-time. In order for businesses to be relevant to a fragmented and multifaceted world of the consumer - communicating in an intelligent and integrated way is key. Being able to disseminate valuable and relevant content to consumers at multiple touch points at the right time and place is inarguably invaluable. This may sound somewhat complex and intimidating but integrative tech platforms have made the deployment of integrative communication an accessible and easy part of our reality. Different technology platforms such as Zapier and Task Centre allow a variety of technologies to connect and communicate with one another in order to transmit relevant, real-time messages to multi-tiered and diverse market segments.

Experts predict that all these massive investments in marketing technology, on a global scale, mark just the beginning of the beginning. And with this comes the recognition of the pivotal and vital place of marketing within businesses of today. So why do so many established enterprises continue to treat marketing as a support function and a somewhat begrudged cost centre?

Brands are investing billions in technology that essentially creates a better marketing mousetrap, but what are businesses doing to ensure that software is integrated and seamlessly functions in unison?

Power of integration

We need to change our traditional world view of business and challenge what we are accustomed to. For example, the power of integration surpasses the traditional marketing domain and can be applied through enterprise technology solutions in order to optimise business processes in real-time - and all geared towards transmitting relevant, personal and engaging communication to customers.

If our goal is to truly leverage technology to communicate to customers in real-time, then real-time workflow strategies are a must. Let's explore some examples of how workflow or operational marketing can be applied in an integrated manner:

Say you have just invoiced a customer, and a predetermined query raises the flag that this customer has not been invoiced in at least 12 months. Furthermore, the value of that customer is extremely high. In simple terms, it is clear that an old customer, who is very valuable to the company, has returned. Such a flag should immediately trigger a personal "welcome back" email from a senior manager, or possibly even a phone call.

Another example is when a status changes within an operational procedure, such as "parts ordered" which could trigger a communication to the customer saying "Hi Scott, this is Fred here from ABC cars. Just to keep you in the loop, I am letting you know that your parts have been ordered."

Having the necessary data

An integrated data system can trigger these "Communication Journeys" or integrated, real-time communication episodes, as soon as a particular event happens. Without an integrated system, this is impossible because the data simply is not available. It's only through acquiring valuable customer data that businesses will be in a position to create these real-time customer journeys that do not just serve customers better, but up-sell and cross-sell to them as well.

While software will solve marketing process, automation and other problems, it will be the ability of this technology to integrate disparate departments and isolated systems with the simple goal of seeing a 360 degree view of consumers and communicating to them in a way that will add value to their lives.

The future will belong to those businesses who understand that their customers are on a journey, and that they are sharing this journey with them. We need to change our world view and integration makes the global enterprise more locally accessible and relevant to multi-tiered markets. Those businesses who realise that authentic communication is the only real currency that matters will be the brands of tomorrow.

ABOUT SCOTT CUNDILL

With 18 years of personal experience in the internet communications field, Cundill researches and pioneers communication and technology solutions that have proven potential to change the face of business. Fiercely authentic with a drive - he is passionate about empowering any kind of business with the technology to inspire and cultivate sincerity and relevance through original 'Communication Journeys'...

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