

Brainwave series | No.1

Joined-up marketing

– managing the lead to closure

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Marketing has had a brilliant 'bull run'. A sustained 10-year period meant that information, communication and technology (ICT) marketers could cherry-pick the best opportunities, and new technologies promised better and cheaper ways to build relationships at every level. But what challenges do you need to address when the pickings aren't so easy? When the brakes are suddenly applied to marketing and advertising spends? 'Wait and see' is no strategy at all, and 'marketing inertia' plays to your competitors' advantage. Instead, consider the values of building communications that go beyond integration and work at every level of the decision-making chain – consider joined-up marketing.

For complex industries like IT and telecommunications, the customer isn't a single decision-maker and the sales process isn't always rapid. It's at this point that integration is not enough. The campaign proposition has to penetrate far deeper within the business – beyond generating a lead.

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Introduction

For many ICT businesses, buoyant markets meant that visibility and dominance were enough to ensure reasonable rates of return for their marketing investment. Pioneering and experimenting were to be encouraged and the only limitation appeared to be the marketing department's imagination.

Add the promise of 'digitally enhanced communications' with new ways to develop customer relationships and there seemed to be no end to the possibilities for growing markets and market share.

But today, uncertainty means we need to reassess some of the basic assumptions of marketing in the ICT marketplace.

From integration to joined-up

Many agencies are great advocates of integrated marketing. The logic is simple: encourage interest through broadcast communications then follow through with well-orchestrated direct activity to generate leads for the business to pursue.

But this strategy is very much a straightforward 'consumer-oriented' model. For complex industries like IT and telecommunications, the customer isn't a single decision-maker and the sales process isn't always rapid. It's at this point that integration is not enough. The campaign proposition has to penetrate far deeper within the business – beyond generating a lead.

This places a fundamentally different emphasis on the role of the marketing function and their agency. It's no longer enough to base campaign success on the volume of leads – what's critical is the conversion ratio and quality factor of business wins. Marketing activity needs to go beyond stimulating interest – it has to play a crucial part in all stages of the process up until closure. This is where joined-up marketing differs from integrated marketing.

Joined-up marketing places a far greater emphasis on the whole sales process, ensuring that all parties use the core proposition in a relevant yet consistent manner. It links everyone together, but concentrates on delivering discreet communications around the core proposition.

Lead generation management to sales conversion depends on joined up marketing. It not only recognises the dynamics of different influencers and decision-makers, but it is sensitive to value.

One way to visualise this is as a 3-dimensional diamond where each facet highlights a view of the total proposition. Each target audience is exposed to the whole proposition but the emphasis changes depending on their views and concerns, objectives and interests.

Few agencies can deliver this. Even fewer agencies have the depth of understanding related to ICT markets where they can help clients to fine-hone the core proposition at all stages of the sales process.

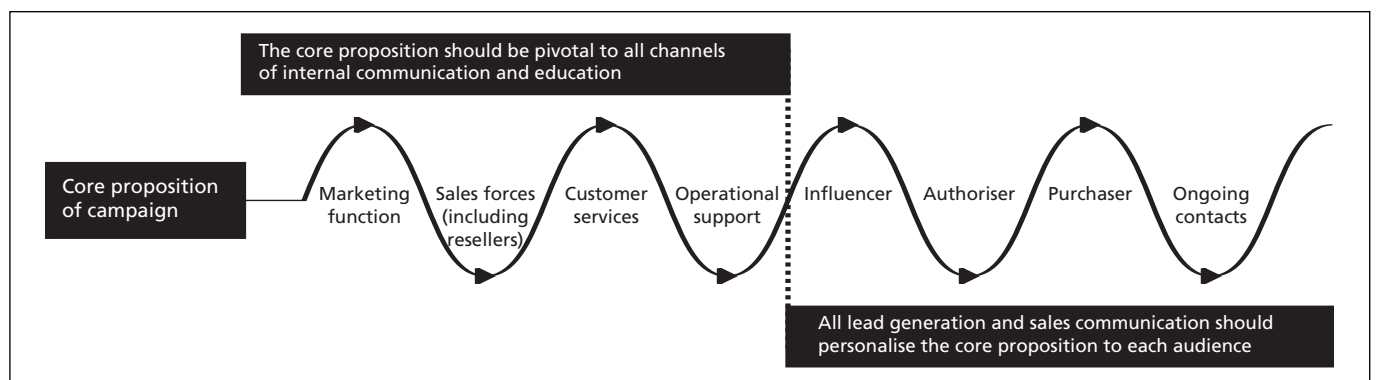
The process of driving the sale involves weaving a programme that successfully and successively builds relationships before, during and after the sale, qualifying the process all the way through. Joined-up marketing looks at these requirements and goes beyond simply delivering integrated communications.

The sale is made before the final presentation starts

Lead generation management to sales conversion depends on joined up marketing. It not only recognises the dynamics of different influencers and decision-makers, but it is sensitive to value. The multi-million dollar contract is not going to be awarded in the same way as a relatively low-value commodity.

Executed properly, the final presentation is more of a formality than a pitch to secure a sale. The decision has often already been made. The initial contact, the proposal, visits to the website, meetings and discussions, the mini-presentations and collateral support material – have all contributed to the sales process where the prospective buyer sees additional values over competitive offers.

Joined-up marketing goes beyond generating a lead



It involves understanding a complex set of dynamics and deciding how best to communicate and influence the influencers as well as the decision-makers.

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The right message to the right person isn't enough

This is where joined-up marketing differentiates itself from integrated marketing.

The goal is to ensure that, at every contact point, communications encourage the decision-making chain to talk amongst themselves. It isn't about a single communication directed to a specific person. Neither is it a linear model. The aim is to encourage people to talk with other people in the organisation. Each person will have their own agenda so they need to be exposed to the right messages about your product or service at the right moment. Some will want financial accountability, others will be concentrating on service levels or how what you offer enhances their own marketing opportunities.

The key is to check the robustness of your core proposition, apply it to different decision-makers and influencers and, where necessary, refine the proposition to ensure that you aren't simply repeating a message, but building a progressive understanding of the values behind that proposition. To make this work, joined-up marketing isn't a linear progression but a mapping and planning exercise that recognises a unique 'collaborative decision-making process' – especially where the contract is substantial. It looks more like a web of interaction than a sequential chain of communications, which is often a hallmark of integrated marketing.

Joined-up marketing is also a highly effective way of doing a reality check: It looks for and checks that there are no weak links where the brand promise fizzles away in the harsh light of cross-examination by a corporate customer. It involves understanding a complex set of dynamics and deciding how best to communicate to and influence the influencers as well as the decision-makers.

Because of a buoyant 10 years of trading, many ICT businesses have only had to pay lip service to this valuable marketing approach. When 'cash' is flowing customers are more forgiving. Not so, in pressurised trading conditions. They want reassurances at every stage.

Integrated marketing may be important for generating leads but joined-up marketing is vital for acquiring and keeping customers

Who champions joined-up marketing?

The short answer is most departments in your organisation. Every point of contact through the course of the sale is an opportunity to reinforce what you stand for, what you deliver and how you differentiate yourself from competitors. Whether that opportunity is a shareholders meeting or a telephone call for help and support.

Few technology businesses can manage this level of communications on their own. Very often they need a

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knowledgeable agency that will act as both the catalyst and guardian to ensure that every facet of the brand proposition is delivering a differentiated but relevant set of values to different people in the customer's company and within your own company.

When will you know whether it's working? Usually, it becomes self-evident within your organisation.

Companies experience a new sense of drive, harmony and increased business success. Collaboration between different departments that may not have existed before stimulates new thinking and solutions. The key values you're marketing externally become adopted values, internally. Executed well, the result is like an adrenaline rush that stimulates better relationships internally and externally. The agency therefore has to be prepared to deliver solutions across all departments and encourage internal marketing activity promoting the values you will take into the marketplace.

Wilson Miller has found that this can involve acting as mentor, arbitrator, facilitator, custodian as well as an agency contributing to a marcomms solution based on joined-up marketing.

For instance, at an early stage we use a message matrix to identify what needs to be communicated to different audiences. The research and information comes from different departments within the organisation. Sales, marketing, customer service, administration, special operations units – all have valuable inputs that can help define the message matrix which will describe the overall proposition and every facet which is needed for it to be successful.

A 7-point reality check for ICT businesses

Joined-up marketing recognises the need to adapt and adapt quickly to changing circumstances. To achieve this it starts with fundamentals and builds a framework that can respond to tactical advantages and test the strengths and weaknesses of existing marketing activity.

Think beyond a media solution. Look for visibility by getting away from the 'crowd' and talking to decision-makers when they're not saturated with promises and offers.

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Here are 7 points that should help ICT businesses to join up their communications.

1. *Contact mapping* that explains the dynamics of your communications on and offline, highlighting opportunities to encourage feedback and negotiation. Go beyond opportunities for communication.
2. *Dynamic planning* What values can you offer customers that fit your marketing strategy and address their concerns? What tactical opportunities can you use and what emerging opportunities will change the rules of the market? What is the cost and how do you avoid 'innovation' during times when companies want smart solutions not radical change?
3. *Communications bridge* that shows what tools are needed, how the 'brand' works in reality and at different levels depending on the profile of the person you need to influence.
4. *Proposition message matrix* showing all subsets and dimensions of the core proposition. Used to explore and describe the parameters of the marketing proposition and to clearly define discrete messages.
5. *Collateral support material* Where is it most effective? What should it be? (cover everything from PowerPoint presentations to letter templates for sales and support staff). What's the function of the material in context to the overall strategy? Where are the weaknesses and competitive threats? How can these be addressed?
6. *Lead generation referrals* How do you generate new leads from existing customers by using more imaginative approaches that accurately anticipate market sentiment and needs? Think beyond a media solution. Look for visibility by getting away from the 'crowd' and talking to decision-makers when they're not saturated with promises and offers.
7. *Follow-up programmes* Are they reactive or proactive? Use the contact mapping phase to establish activity timetables for these programmes and establish synergies with other departments such as the sales force.

'Joined-up marketing – managing the lead to closure' is part of the Brainwave series published by Wilson Miller, one of the industry's leading technology marketing agencies. This series of white papers provides innovative solutions to serious business issues for the ICT business. Visit wilsonmiller.co.uk for more titles in the series.

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