

PART ONE

The agile marketing
opportunity

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Marketing in the digital age

Changing marketing – how the 4 Ps are evolving

Marketing can often be obsessed by the shiny and the new. Sometimes this can be helpful since it can help us to challenge our assumptions, focus on innovation and find new ways to engage customers and achieve our objectives. Yet it can also be unhelpful when we forget the fundamentals of marketing strategy and practice in our rush to embrace the latest technology trend or fad. Digital technologies have revolutionized multiple industries, business models, customer behaviour and routes to market. It has disrupted incumbent businesses, rewired the way in which entire markets operate and changed competitive environments for good. It has empowered consumers in ways that were unimaginable 30 years ago. Now, everyone with a smartphone has the answer to just about any question right there at their fingertips.

Yet great marketing is still great marketing. Among all this change the core fundamental elements of marketing have not changed. According to the UK's Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM):

Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.¹

Let's break that definition down. As a process, marketing is a way of generating value from and organizing activities around customers and their needs. In his classic book *The Practice of Management* Peter Drucker famously declares:

Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two – and only two – basic functions: marketing and innovation...

Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs. Marketing is the distinguishing, unique function of the business.²

This process revolves around identifying customer needs, which is based on research, observation and insight. Marketing has always placed the customer at its heart, has long been the voice of the customer in business and enabled the organization to focus its activities to generate customer value. Marketing brings customer orientation to the company. Marketing also anticipates customer needs by spotting opportunities and gaps, meaning that it can be customer led but also customer leading. It's also concerned with satisfying customer needs, which means having a clear, customer-focused purpose for products and services and executing that purpose in ways that deliver to and exceed customer expectations. The final part of this definition is profitability which is, of course, about serving the needs of the business. To paraphrase American marketing theorist Richard Bagozzi, marketing is an organized system of exchange – the business gains revenue, profit or some other gain in exchange for the benefits that are provided to customers by the product or service.³ However, the context for *how* we deliver these essential elements *has* changed. And changed dramatically. From a fragmentation of channels and touchpoints to a revolution in the role that data and technology plays in the discipline, to powerful shifts in customer experiences, targeting and measurement. Digital has changed how we identify, anticipate and satisfy customer needs. It has changed the way in which we derive benefit and profit through new models and new ways of understanding the value and return of the activity we are delivering.

The impact of these long-term shifts has been compounded by rapidly changing, increasingly complex and uncertain environments. Many organizations were undergoing significant digital transformations in response to the need to rapidly digitize capability and become more agile and responsive to changing contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic served to dramatically increase this requirement for transformation as consumers moved rapidly to online channels and companies struggled to adapt to swiftly evolving customer behaviour. McKinsey research has shown that between the start of the pandemic in December 2019 and July 2020 the average share of customer interactions that are digital grew from 36 per cent to 58 per cent globally. This triggered a rapid acceleration in digitization with the number of propositions, products and services that were partially or fully digital growing from 35 per cent to 55 per cent over the same period.⁴ Respondents to the survey were three times more likely than before the crisis to say that at least 80 per cent of their customer interactions are digital in nature. A survey of 2,500 enterprise decision-makers from around the world by cloud communications platform Twilio found that 97 per cent of respondents believed the

pandemic sped up their company's digital transformation and that it had accelerated companies' digital communications strategy by an average of six years.⁵ Data from digital, marketing and e-commerce specialist Econsultancy and Adobe revealed that a majority of businesses in their research (63 per cent for B2C and 57 per cent for B2B) had seen unusual growth in digital customers but also that around half of companies had seen unusual buying behaviour from existing customers.⁶ The McKinsey survey also showed that the largest changes (including changing customer needs and requirements) were also the most likely to stick through the recovery period.

With such significant change it has become essential for marketers to respond with greater agility and adaptability to these shifts in both customer behaviour and expectation. And yet while expertise, roles, the use of technology and elements of practice have evolved, my argument in this book is that much around the structure, process and mindsets that marketing teams deploy to execute marketing strategy and realize objectives has not fully kept pace with this change. This book is not about challenging or rehashing classic marketing theory. It is instead a pragmatic view on how marketing teams can apply key principles and practice from methodologies that have grown up with digital to facilitate greater responsiveness and adaptability. It is about how data can be placed right at the heart of marketing practice to support better decision-making, continuous iteration and optimization. It is about marketing execution that is fit for purpose for a rapidly changing world.

But first, let's begin with what's NOT changing.

What's not changing

I very frequently get the question: 'What's going to change in the next 10 years?'... I almost never get the question: 'What's not going to change in the next 10 years?' And I submit to you that that second question is actually the more important of the two, because you can build a business strategy around the things that are stable in time.⁷

This quote from Jeff Bezos speaks to the importance of paying attention to fundamental customer needs that largely don't change over time. In Amazon's case this might be low prices, ease of purchase, fast delivery and a huge range of products to select from. This, he says, enables a business to be truly exceptional at what is fundamentally important and focus on long-term success and not just short-term profit.

There is much around classic marketing theory and practice that has not changed. The importance of marketing strategy and positioning, and of understanding the market, competitive propositions and how this can shape objectives. The importance of insight into customer needs, motivations and behaviours and how these can shape our segmentation of customers, the identification of who we want to target and the messaging that we want to use. The significance of brand and how this creates disproportionate value for organizations. The need to combine brand building with sales activation. The value that comes from creativity. The need to integrate, plan and measure activity against clear goals. The need to optimize the mix of our activity to ensure the best possible returns. All these things are just as important now as they have ever been.

Taking this into marketing communication, marketing and advertising strategist Tom Roach has defined seven key principles of effectiveness that will always be true, since they relate to the fundamentals of not just marcomms, but how the human brain works.⁸ These are a good reminder of essential principles that don't change:

- 1 Reach:** Research has consistently shown that brand growth is driven by new and light buyers in the category. In his seminal marketing book *How Brands Grow*, Byron Sharp demonstrates that brands succeed through building mental and physical availability and through reaching new customers, which means reach is fundamental.⁹
- 2 Attention:** Reach is of little use if you can't then gain attention from customers and prospects. This means standing out, earning attention and cutting through all the noise.
- 3 Creativity:** Work by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising in the UK and by Peter Field has shown that creativity is a powerful driver of sales and profitability.¹⁰ More powerful than media and targeting.
- 4 Distinctiveness:** Distinctive brand assets can help create the memory structures that help customers to recall your brand in buying situations. US ad executive Rosser Reeves famously argued as long ago as the early 1960s that marketing communication should display a unique proposition (a USP), but research by the Ehrenberg Bass Institute for Marketing Science has shown that brand distinctiveness (standing out with impact through assets like name, colours, messaging) is a more effective driver of impact than brand differentiation (setting yourself apart from the competition). In order to be chosen, brands need to come to mind easily.¹¹

- 5 **Consistency:** It's not enough to just be distinctive. Brands need to be consistently distinctive. Roach references an analysis of 1,500 campaigns by Ebiquity that found that long-running distinctive brand campaigns delivered returns that were 62 per cent higher than the rest. Ebiquity also found that second and third bursts of campaigns on average generate ROIs 30 per cent higher than the first burst, as they build on the brand recognition scores initially achieved.¹²
- 6 **Emotion:** Multiple studies have shown that a consumer's emotional response to marketing communication and advertising has a much greater influence on their intent to buy a product than the actual content of that communication. As Roach puts it: '*Communications evoking emotional responses have better attention, deeper processing of the content, better memory-encoding and retrieval.*'
- 7 **Motivation:** Paying attention to and showing how the brand can help customers to achieve something they want helps turn connection and engagement into action.

Marketing and marcomms has always worked best when it brings together the full potential of technology with human intuition, empathy, creativity and understanding.

Let's go back to that Jeff Bezos quote that opened this section. Alongside designing and creating long-term value around fundamental needs that don't change, the Amazon founder has also talked about how advantage comes from innovating and delivering against these fundamental needs in exceptional ways. In other words, to break open category norms and surprise and delight customers with new propositions that deliver to those needs in ground-breaking ways (Amazon Prime Now is a good example of this). In other words, the fundamentals remain true, but how we deliver them creates real advantage.

This is now the potential that digital technology has brought to marketing. While key principles are as important as they have ever been to build the foundation of good marketing practice, *how* a team delivers against these principles has never been more powerful in delivering advantage. Turning good practice into great practice is increasingly about how a team can build on the foundation of classic marketing strategy in how they think, work, execute and operate. The contexts and environments within which marketing operates have changed dramatically. It's time that the way in which marketing teams work caught up.

What is changing

One of the all-time classic frameworks for marketing is the 4 Ps of marketing: product, price, place and promotion. The origins of the 4 Ps stem from Neil Borden, an advertising professor at Harvard University who first wrote about the concept of the marketing mix. His ideas were built on by E Jerome McCarthy, a marketing professor at Michigan State University, who turned the marketing mix concept into the 4 Ps as we know them today.¹³

Given the new contexts for marketing that have been created by digital technologies, let's consider how the 4 Ps are changing.

- **Product:** How our product meets customer needs. The growth of 'as-a-service' solutions, service design and innovation, and direct-to-consumer propositions mean that a growing number of products are becoming digitized services. A toothbrush was once just a toothbrush, but now it is a connected device that tracks your brushing and an app that provides you with recommendations and notifications. Innovation in razors was once about adding another blade but now it's about a subscription service that knows your shaving preferences and habits. A car was once a metal box on wheels and now it is a connected device that serves up multiple personalized options. As service design and innovation proliferate, the lines between product and service are becoming blurred. With software becoming integrated into an increasing number of products, the lines between product and marketing are also becoming blurred. Customer experiences require modular, personalized, joined-up, on-demand, scalable, networked, adaptable solutions that meet and exceed customer expectations. This brings changes to the role of content, how we understand customer needs and intent, the relationship that brands have with customers and the value that is created by data. It creates opportunities to bake marketing into products, to join up interaction and product usage with marcomms in much more seamless ways, to understand product life cycle and usage in ways that can inform strategy and achieve marketing objectives such as customer acquisition and engagement, to place data from a much wider range of sources at the heart of decision-making. It is both a challenge and an opportunity for marketing but is dramatically shifting the context that product brings to the discipline.
- **Place:** Where customers look for and buy our product. Digital has markedly increased the potential routes to market for products, from

direct-to-consumer propositions to a proliferation of specialist retailers, the growth of marketplaces, affiliate marketing through influencers, content creators and publishers, and the growth of live streaming and social commerce.

- **Price:** What customers pay and the value of the product. Digitization of pricing has brought with it greater visibility and transparency through aggregators and price comparison. It has catalysed the ability to scrape pricing data in fundamentally easier ways. It has enabled dynamic pricing (pricing that responds in real time to surges in demand, competitive pricing or time-based dynamics). It also shifts the strategies that marketers can adopt to create real and perceived value in a customer's mind. It enables new models (like subscription) that can be priced in smart ways to generate longer-term customer value.
- **Promotion:** How we choose to promote, publicize and differentiate our product. The amount of promotion and channel opportunities open to marketers has exploded as a result of digital. Data has transformed how we identify and anticipate customer needs, segment our customers and target them with relevant messaging. Customer experience is now a complex, ever-changing phenomenon that pulls in multiple touchpoints, data signals and opportunities to engage. Advertising is now increasingly bought programmatically in automated ways. The fragmentation of channels brings ever more nuanced ways to reach customers. Real-time measures give us far greater transparency around campaign performance and the ability to adapt and optimize.

These new contexts may not have changed the key principles that underpin good marketing strategy, but they have framed a huge shift in the environment in which marketing operates. A shift that requires different ways of operating, working and delivering to those all-important conventions. This book is about how marketers need to evolve practice and execution to be truly fit for purpose for the digital empowered world.

The impact of data, technology and marketing automation

It can almost go without saying that technology and data have had a profound impact on marketing practice, but let's consider just how profound this is. Renowned marketing technologist Scott Brinker conducts an annual survey that maps the marketing technology landscape. When he began conducting

the survey in 2011 there were only 150 different technology vendors in the market. Less than a decade later and there are over 8,000 separate technology solutions for marketers to choose from.¹⁴ The market has exploded, presenting an ever-increasing range of services that marketers can combine into an individualized marketing technology stack but also an ever-heightened level of complexity for them to navigate. The research also reveals that an average large enterprise has up to 120 tools in its marketing technology (MarTech) stack. Gartner found that in 2020 marketing technology already made up 26 per cent of the average marketing budget, and 68 per cent of CMOs were planning to increase their technology spending into 2021.¹⁵

As marketers look to marshal capability into a cohesive whole, a number of critical shifts have emerged. The rise in automation has enabled far greater efficiency in marketing execution, but also a shift in effectiveness through more sophisticated use of data and optimization. According to a report by Research and Markets, the size of the marketing automation software market was estimated at \$6 billion in 2019 and is expected to grow to be worth almost \$17 billion by 2025 (a compound annual growth rate [CAGR] of over 19 per cent).¹⁶ Marketers are also increasingly looking towards how combining different technological capabilities can drive compounding benefits. This may relate to establishing a common core to the MarTech stack while also creating a custom suite of apps to augment proficiency in key areas or blending together software and services in ways that allow for greater flexibility and adaptability over time or using data and attribution to drive further into profitability measures rather than just sales and revenues. Marketers are increasingly looking to establish a core data-driven foundation in technology (through CRM systems and customer data platforms), which can then integrate efficiently with multiple other services and systems that can serve specific requirements. As the investment in and significance of data and analytics continues to grow, machine learning and predictive analytics are being baked into systems, catalysing new understanding and learning at speed. This in turn is shifting the dynamics of data, with greater focus on data quality and analysis, first-party data and more sophisticated understanding of customer behaviours and preferences. A growing proportion of customer interaction is happening over digital channels, and these channels account for an ever greater proportion of budgets. In their CMO spend survey Gartner found that digital channels accounted for almost 80 per cent of budgets in 2020, with almost a quarter of the marketing budget going on digital advertising and paid search, and almost 60 per cent going on owned and earned digital channels.¹⁷

This is resulting in some elemental changes in marketing practice. Adept use and application of technology and data have become ever more essential to marketing and there is far greater demand for specialist expertise in data, a wider need for marketing practice to be far more data-driven and a rise in marketing operations functions and roles that are focused on building and operationalizing the marketing technology stack and optimizing workflow efficiency. The ability to use real-time data and fast customer feedback loops is transforming the ability of marketing teams to make smarter decisions quicker. As I'll discuss in the next section, the need for marketing teams to work in closer alignment with product and technology teams is driving a shift towards more iterative and continuous delivery of value. As an example, the frequency of software release that many technology teams now operate to has dramatically decreased over the past few decades. According to data operations firm DataKitchen, the average frequency of software releases under the waterfall model in the 1980s was around 12 months.¹⁸ Waterfall may have worked well in situations where detailed requirements are understood well in advance and don't change, but in fast-changing environments this becomes problematic. As software teams abandoned waterfall methodologies and adopted Agile development in the late 1990s and early 2000s companies organized technology development around shorter iterations and the average release frequency dropped to about three weeks. Now, as working practices evolve still further and practices such as DevOps are introduced, the average release frequency of software projects has reduced further to increments of days or even minutes. As agile practices have expanded beyond technology teams, the rhythm and cycles at which businesses operate have dramatically shortened.

As the focus on customer experience expands within organizations, there is a parallel opportunity for marketing to expand its impact, enabled and driven through a technology and data revolution that is changing marketing practice forever. Marketers find themselves facing a perfect storm of factors including rapidly changing customer behaviour, shifts in technologies that are reimagining possibilities, the need to be always on in communications, increasing pressures for growth in often low growth environments, volatility in markets and macro-contexts, and heightened demands around accountability and value attribution. Every one of these factors is leading to a re-evaluation of not only competencies and processes but entire ways of operating. CMOs are looking to embed far greater levels of agility, adaptability, responsiveness, efficiency and accountability into the fabric of how their teams work.

Systems and empathy

With data, technology and machine learning changing marketing practice in such fundamental ways it is essential for agile marketers to remain focused on how they can bring technology and human capabilities together in ways that compound benefit and impact.

In 2014, journalist and author Charles Leadbetter was asked to write a paper about the future of cities.¹⁹ Great cities, said Leadbetter, bring together two foundational elements: systems and empathy. Systems 'bring together disparate interacting components to achieve a common purpose'. They act as the oil for cities to function. Yet systems are also ways of doing things, processes, methods that enable scale, efficiency, transparency and reliability. As an example, trains, ticket machines, signalling software, station equipment and escalators are all part of the London Underground system, which is in turn a part of the wider London transport system. Systems are essential. Without them, cities would fall apart.

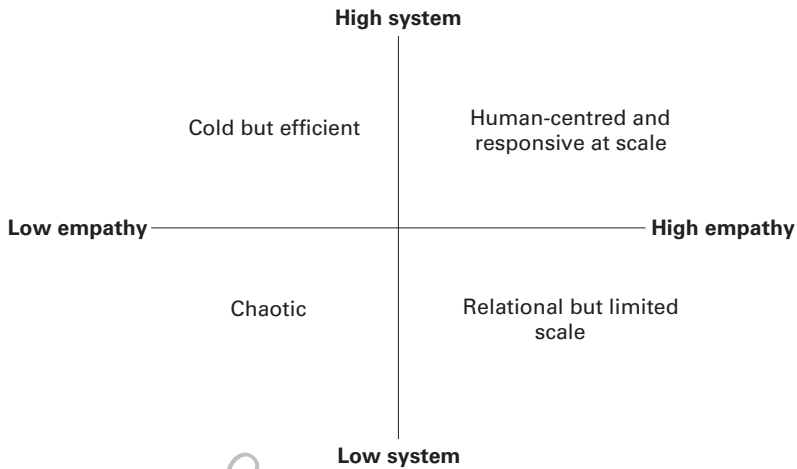
Yet cities also need human connection, understanding, insight, compassion and rapport so that the people within that city might come together and share, find affinity and common understanding:

Creative cities depend on a kind of dark matter, something that must be there to make them work, but which cannot be observed directly. That dark matter is empathy, our capacity to connect with other people who are different from us, to find common ground and to engage in sharing and exchange. That is the basis for the collective genius of city life: collaboration, cooperation and civility.²⁰

While it is systems that make cities work, it is empathy that makes cities human. A lack of systems may result in chaos and inefficiency but a lack of empathy results in distance and coldness. It is when systems and empathy are brought together (Leadbetter gave the example of the London 2012 Olympics as an experience that defined this combination best) that cities are most able to realize their full potential.

So it is with agile marketing teams. The combination of systems and empathy brings together two foundational elements that between them enable teams to blend the efficiency, control and empowerment of technology with the connection, insight and affinity that can only come from human understanding and perspective. Agile marketing teams are empowered through technology and systems that can help them to work efficiently, communicate well, execute easily, test rapidly and learn fast. Yet they also

FIGURE 1.1 Systems and empathy in agile marketing



never lose sight of the importance of human insight and understanding, connection and engagement, and creativity. Empathy is what enables a team to be truly customer-obsessed and deliver experiences that are exceptional rather than just functional. Empathy is what enables teams to collaborate and work together in ways that break down silos and realize the true potential that technology facilitates.

If systems are the oil that makes the engine run smoothly, then empathy is the fuel that powers the engine.

The growing impact of product strategy and thinking

As the focus on digitized products and services inside organizations has risen, so has the significance of product strategy and management. These roles have been key in translating business strategy into product strategy, owning the product vision and higher-level roadmap, and understanding how the customer and market environment impacts how the product can best serve both customer and business objectives. With the proliferation of agile practice, product owner roles have also grown in number and importance, typically working closely with agile teams to optimize the development process and the delivery work that the team is doing and oversee the product backlog and its regular reprioritization.

Over time, as environments have become increasingly uncertain and fluid and the digitization of products and services has expanded, there has been a

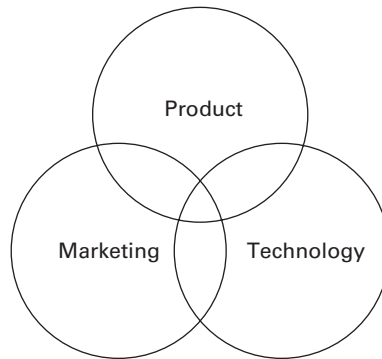
real need for products to be developed and optimized more incrementally and in far more adaptive ways so that development can always take account of the latest known customer and market contexts.

This has resulted in a move away from a situation where product managers could ‘throw requirements over the wall’ to an IT or development team to work through, effectively turning the latter into a so-called ‘feature factory’. This approach may have worked in environments where products were shipped and changed infrequently, but as complexity grew and the requirement for rapid feedback loops, testing and prototyping also grew, the need for more concurrent and closer working became paramount. With increasingly digitized products and services, more frequent release cycles and a wider need for greater agility, businesses now needed to break down functional silos and bring together key disciplines to work together towards common goals. Business strategy needed to be tied more closely to product strategy. Product strategy needed to be coupled better with development. Product development needed to work in a more joined-up way with marketing.

As digitization and product thinking has expanded, it has become ever more important for marketers to consider not only brand, positioning, customer insight and segmentation, but also how the development of the product itself can support marketing objectives (such as customer acquisition, for example) and how marketing strategy and execution can in turn support the development of the product. The huge growth in importance of customer experience is also a force amplifier in bringing product and marketing closer together. Both areas deal with important areas of the customer experience and journey – marketing more focused on brand awareness, driving consideration and purchase or acquisition, and product dealing with post-acquisition product experience, activation, engagement, optimization and customer success. The inability to join the journey up in seamless, customer-focused ways leads to a poor customer experience. A failure to bake marketing into product development (for example, to develop mechanisms where existing customers can support the acquisition of new ones) leads to missed opportunities. A failure of marketing teams to understand how products are used and how customer feedback is shaping development leads to more missed opportunities. A failure to align product and marketing strategy leads to disjointed customer experiences and under-optimized business and customer outcomes. The growth of product marketing has come in response to exactly this need for greater alignment and integration.

The third leg of this three-legged stool is technology. If technology doesn’t work closely with product, it will be impossible to develop, experiment, test, prototype and adapt. If technology doesn’t work closely with marketing it

FIGURE 1.2 The convergence of product, marketing and technology



will be very difficult to understand needs, derive insight, target, promote, optimize and measure. Technology and development are the critical enablers for both product and marketing. This is a new ‘holy trinity’ in organizational capability.²⁴

Huge opportunity exists from bringing these foundational elements closer together in the service of business objectives and customer needs. As environments become increasingly complex, the need to be adaptive and emergent with all three of these elements is critical. As they become ever more integrated and entwined the opportunity is to align not only strategy and execution but also ways of working, cadence and rhythm to deliver better outcomes for both customers and the organization. *This* is the opportunity for agile marketing.

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