Firstly, marketing is a mindset, not a department. It is a business-wide management process that should influence every single function of the business, from the design of the product to the way in which it is delivered to customers.

Branding is at the heart of marketing efforts, because it defines your audience, values and establishes what makes you truly different. Brand, however, is a living thing that is based on the dialogue you have with your audience/customers and is ultimately influenced by everything your company does (and doesn’t do).

Marketing in itself is often too focused on putting various tactics into separate boxes, concentrating on which channels, platforms and media to use, instead of seeing each as simply one aspect of an overarching strategic process. The result of this is often a series of disjointed and ineffective marketing campaigns and other efforts that frequently lead companies to question the return on their marketing investment in general. Content marketing, social media marketing, and search engine optimization, for example, are often viewed as entirely different entities, rather than integrated aspects of a holistic strategy that centers around creating compelling content for the customer.

Today marketing has shifted from one-off, campaign-led initiatives to an “always on” approach, where continuous communication with our audience has forced our businesses to become more consumer-focused and less organization-centric. Thanks to the digital revolution, it is no longer about buying audiences, but about building ongoing trusted relationships with them. It is about acknowledging that audience and influence constantly and consistently cut across all channels, platforms and media, both online and offline, highlighting the need for a well-coordinated transversal approach.

Defining, enhancing and promoting your brand are all areas that can be improved through having a clear editorial position, where the objective is to publish valuable information uniquely tailored to your target audience(s). Having the right content can help enrich your brand and values, broaden awareness and encourage loyalty – but in reality, no one is waiting for your content, so amplification is key.

As organic reach continues to diminish, brands must incorporate both paid distribution and influencer outreach into their content plans if they are to reach their desired audience and score valuable SEO points. With today’s wired consumers, it’s becoming clear that owned media on its own will no longer suffice. Integrating
both paid and the ever more powerful earned media into online marketing initiatives has become key.

Performance marketing continues to dominate customer acquisition, growing increasingly complex, competitive and expensive. It is vital that the marketer stay on top of new developments and takes advantage of innovative new ways to reach qualified potential guests. Understanding your audience is vital and in an online environment where everything is measurable marketers have to be open to testing, experimenting and changing in order to adapt to the tactics and strategies that are shown to work best. The marketer must also be technically proficient, possessing the ability to manipulate, analyze and understand data more than ever before.

Analytics is one thing, but how you interpret, and more importantly use, the data is quite another. Big data is irrelevant without big marketing; smart, targeted outreach to relevant shoppers, customers and potential leads. Data may well reveal who the audience is, but it won’t tell you how you can influence them.

Considering all of these issues together, my conclusion is that marketing has changed more in the last two years than in the last 50. It now requires a much more strategic approach where analytics and metrics provide vital evidence for the business that in turn empowers the highest quality of decision making to support growth and minimize risk.

In such a fast changing environment, marketers have to continually learn. They must develop their skills in managing technology, data insights, strategy and championing the customer, in order to future-proof their business. While at the same time always remembering that marketing is not a skillset, it’s an ever developing, rapidly evolving and thoroughly fascinating mindset.

As Vice President of Marketing for The Red Carnation Hotel Collection, Suzie Thompson has worked in travel marketing for over 15 years, with previous positions held at Sabre Hospitality Solutions, lastminute.com and Intercontinental Hotels. She is actively involved in the travel industry and is a member of the HSMAI Europe Digital Marketing Advisory Board. Suzie was recognized as one of the “Top 20 Extraordinary Minds in Sales and Marketing” in 2013 and Red Carnation Hotels were named “Digital Winner” in 2015 by HSMAI.
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