

Marketers, Heal Thyself from Bad Technology Purchases

A New Buying Process for New Digital Experience Marketing Platforms

By: Robert Rose, Senior Consultant

Marketers, Heal Thyself


You simply can't go to a marketing conference without hearing that consumers have fundamentally evolved the way that they research, browse, shop, and ultimately purchase new products and services. And - as is usually the point in these conference sessions - while consumers have readily adapted to this new landscape, businesses lag behind in their processes to address it. At Digital Clarity Group (DCG) we've written about this extensively. In fact, my newest book, *Experiences: The Seventh Era of Marketing*, is centered on this very notion. In the first chapter, my co-author Carla Johnson and I write:

Most marketing departments in large enterprises still operate in previous eras. In some companies, marketing is a service organization that views the sales department as a 'customer' and exists simply to support sales with materials. Even worse, in some companies, marketing is an annoyance that just creates pretty brochures while the 'important work' happens elsewhere.

Ironically, this anachronistic behavior extends in many ways into the way that we, as marketers, act as *consumers*.

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Why is that? Well, as it turns out, marketers as buyers aren't all that different from the buyers they market to. But, in many cases, the methods that businesses use to actually purchase enterprise-level marketing technology simply haven't changed very much in the last 15 years.

Marketers themselves...

...copy others.

We want what the other guys have. We attend conferences and hear about the amazing success that a competitor, or a business in a similar industry, has had, and we say, "That's us! We can, and should, do exactly what those guys did."

Which of course leads us to be...

...swayed by great marketing.

How could we resist a technology platform that will "help us grow revenue," or help us "master the art and science of marketing," or enable us to "deliver more relevant messages"? Of course, intellectually, we know none of this is actually true and that technology by itself does none of these things. But we want to believe it, which makes it really hard to resist.

Which influences us to...

...make impulsive decisions.

The digital landscape is changing fast. And, in order to keep up, we chase anything that looks like a quick fix to a process problem. We need more traffic/leads/engagement! Quick, get a marketing technology platform - that's what those solutions do.

But then ironically...

...we don't like to actually change.

Enterprise habits of doing the same thing repeatedly are really hard to break, so marketing departments default in two ways. First, we keep existing processes and look to implement marketing technology to facilitate them. Second, we employ the same methods of buying said technology that we've had in place for decades.

Is it any wonder then, that we...


...wind up with a faster horse instead of a car?

Most marketing departments switch out their digital marketing platforms and woefully underutilize the number of features. Sexy demos give way to the actual change management processes that would be necessary to make those demos a reality.

Marketers must break this habit. Just as consumers have evolved and expect a compelling experience at every step along the way, marketers must not only evolve the expectations of their own buying process - but also evolve the way they shop for enterprise marketing technology platforms.

The Digital Experience Marketing Platform

Despite the buzz, digital marketing platforms are still vastly underused by companies outside the technology industry. By most estimations, penetration still hovers in the single digits for those companies outside of tech.¹



But what is it, exactly, that should be purchased? What does a modern digital experience marketing platform (DXMP) look like?

Technology has certainly advanced well beyond most marketing organizations' capabilities. Cloud-based solutions, provided in suites and/or through inter-connecting apps, have begun to dominate the landscape. Unlike their "ancestors," these solutions now have the ability to optimize content-driven experiences, provide insight into the buyer's journey, deliver messages through multiple channels, and even connect into customer service, support, as well as other applications and data stores. In short, they have a tremendous amount of sophistication. So, the question becomes: If marketers are not utilizing the digital marketing features they have today, how do they evolve the purchase process of an even more sophisticated solution?

The Challenges of Selecting a DXMP

Today's modern marketers must have the capability to join, measure, and optimize multiple channels, including email, multiple-owned web channels, mobile apps, social platforms, kiosks, banners, native advertising, and more. They must also do this in the context of understanding the journey that their customer is taking – and have the ability to improve said journey in real time. In other words, we must face the reality that the outside environment may evolve more quickly than our internal infrastructures. Marketers' digital platforms simply must have the ability to effect, in a very adaptable fashion, the optimization of any part of the customer journey that evolves as a desired strategy.

Carlos Ablar, lead content marketing strategist in the global e-transformation office of industry giant 3M, agreed with this – and below he further expounds on the new need for digital experience marketing platforms:


“A robust digital experience marketing platform is an interoperable configuration of technologies that manages customer and business relationship needs across the customer lifecycle and their respective decision and action journeys. In other words, the technology, business process, mediating content, and customer processes form something much greater than simply the sum of their parts.

“The biggest challenge to this, of course, is many of the people making decisions on what vendor to choose, and how to deploy the technology, are nowhere near the level of granularity to really understand the day-to-day-efforts of using the systems. And, fatally, these people are not aware of the complex orchestration factors that would ideally configure them in an interoperable way to be best configured to business practices and the best customer experiences.”

Opportunities for agencies and mid-market companies to partner go beyond technology prowess. From content execution for content marketing programs, alignment of customer journeys to optimize lead nurturing campaigns, and even the ongoing measurement of success, agencies are evolving to help mid-market businesses fill other gaps in an already-stressed organization.

What Is Needed?

DCG works with many enterprise organizations to help them refine their selection process for all manners of technology. While we might argue that the classic request for proposal (RFP) process needs to change in its entirety, this may be beyond the remit or control of the marketing organization. And waiting on the evolution of the procurement process prior to selecting a DXMP – well, we simply may not have time for that.



Further, to be clear, a multivendor evaluation and selection process can still be one of the best ways to help ensure that a company maintains a good position for negotiation with new and existing partners. Request for proposals bring structure and organization to the process to help mitigate risk, keep alignment with the procurement project's goals, and clearly identify the pros and cons of each partner – vendor and service provider – being considered.

The opportunities for improvement come in both a shake-up in the traditional order of operations and in the creation of the foundation on which the actual RFP document is built. Meeting with potential solution providers and their current clients prior to issuing the RFP can be highly educational and informative, and provide important insights into how the technology and service providers work. This also allows the potential partners to assess their “fit” with each other and opt out where an alignment is missing.

A new, better procurement process for DXMP technology is required because of the following reasons:

- Traditional procurement processes tend to favor legacy relationships, not innovation or merit.
- RFPs tend to be one-size-fits-all structures with little room to accommodate new or innovative business practices, needs, or technology.
- RFPs are overly structured, limiting the opportunity for respondents to educate and bring new ideas to the requesting company.
- Today's RFPs are overly reliant on the quantity of features, rather than the contextual fit and a need for more service-oriented experiences from today's vendors.

- Procurement teams drive the decision more than the teams and end users affected by the decision.
- New business and marketing language and practices need new and improved procurement language and practices.

When it comes to the actual RFP document, concise, well-structured, and well-documented requests make for better, less-ambiguous responses. An effective RFP process and document should reflect the strategy, as well as the short- and long-term business objectives, and provide detailed insight upon which suppliers can then provide their perspective on how to best meet those goals. Today's RFPs should detail clear and complete expectations of the prospective customer, as well as typical RFP process instructions, timeline/ deadlines, and contact information.

What is needed is a more open-ended and flexible approach that allows the organization to create the right atmosphere for making the request. This important first step provides organizations the flexibility to make their ask in context of “what is needed” to support a smart strategy – rather than “what is possible” in any given strategy.

DCG has assembled an accompanying buyer's RFP tool to this brief, which can be downloaded from digitalclaritygroup.com, in order to help organizations take this first step and provide a guide to building a better procurement process for the new digital experience marketing platform.

Conclusion

In today's marketplace, the question for a visionary modern marketing team isn't, “What must we evolve into?” Rather, it is, “How we can build an agile marketing organization that can rapidly adapt to the unknown and unpredictable?”

Marketing departments must realign themselves into more fluid, organic organizations. The new marketing department is one that embraces complexity and is highly adaptive to changing conditions. This not only refers to the way marketing departments operate to deliver better customer experiences, but also to the way they purchase the tools that will help them deliver that fluid operation.


We've written before about a three-tiered architecture (as shown in the diagram below), that centers on how this new focus on change can be approached in a technology model.

Whether the DXMP is delivered by one "suite vendor" or an interoperable and integrated set of "point solutions" isn't as important as the marketer's understanding of what challenges he or she is actually solving for.

In this new world, the DXMP is so much more than a set of software tools. It is a new adaptive system, staffed by teams that are similarly flexible, working together toward developing integrated customer experiences - and hopefully working toward processes that resemble something that scientists call "emergence," in which relatively simple and separate interactions develop into productive patterns.

New Three-Tiered Marketing Technology Model





In this very real development, the whole does, indeed, become much greater than the sum of its parts. This becomes a learning system, one that can iterate as the conditions change. It embraces the unknown and is simply built to change.

But the first step in acquiring that is in making a fundamental assessment of where we are, our needs, and our current actions. As the Buddhist

saying goes, “If you want to know your future, look into your present actions.”

If we’re going to change as marketers, then we need to first understand what it is we’re changing.

Notes

1. <http://venturebeat.com/2014/01/08/fast-growing-marketing-automation-still-has-only-3-penetration-in-non-tech-companies/>



About Digital Clarity Group.

Digital Clarity Group is a research-based advisory firm focused on the content, technologies, and practices that drive world-class customer experience. Global organizations depend on our insight, reports, and consulting services to help them turn digital disruption into digital advantage. As analysts, we cover the customer experience management (CEM) footprint – those organizational capabilities and competencies that impact the experience delivered to customers and prospects. In our view, the CEM footprint overlays content management, marketing automation, e-commerce, social media management, collaboration, customer relationship management, localization, business process management, analytics, and search. As consultants, we believe that education and advice leading to successful CEM is only possible by actively engaging with all participants in the CEM solutions ecosystem. In keeping with this philosophy, we work with enterprise adopters of CEM solutions, technology vendors that develop and market CEM systems and tools, and service providers who implement solutions, including systems integrators and digital agencies. For more information about DCG, visit www.digitalclaritygroup.com or email info@digitalclaritygroup.com.

Contact Us

Email: info@digitalclaritygroup.com

Twitter: [@just_clarity](https://twitter.com/just_clarity)

www.digitalclaritygroup.com

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