

The Alignment of Marketing and Technology— Critical to Delivering on the Promise of the Brand

Dvora Ivankowski, Aaron Kassover

In today's competitive market, customers are increasingly bombarded by the promise of better, quicker service for less money. Not living up to the promise is the same as breaking the trust of a loyal friend. Remember, the competition is just a click away.

In economic terms, a strong brand provides a reason for people to use and recommend your products and services, again and again. It can help sustain a price premium, open the door to future sales, and retain customers after a negative event. A great brand can be worth more than your real estate, physical assets and patents.

As a result, building customer loyalty and maximizing the return on that loyalty is critical. An integrated approach supported by a responsive organization listening to your customers is essential to reinforcing a positive experience.

The Importance of Your Brand

Most of us agree that the customer owns your brand. And, it is the customer's experience—positive or negative—that reinforces your brand. Your brand communicates what “you are” and how your customers see themselves in relation to you. Each time your customer interacts with your company, it impacts your brand—positively or negatively. The question is how to ensure a consistently positive experience.

The crux of your brand marketing lies in defining what position you want to occupy in your market and then making sure that your marketing initiatives, your operational processes and every single one of your employees is steeped in that brand. This consistent focus on delivering a meaningful customer

experience is the basis behind becoming a customer-centric organization. How to achieve that level of consistency is an ongoing question, one that necessitates the close integration of your marketing programs with the other areas of your organization.

To say that you are a customer-centric organization is not sufficient. There must be organizational alignment from the core of the company—where data is captured and kept—to the customer touch points—where service and products are provided—to ensure that the company keeps its promise of putting the customer first.

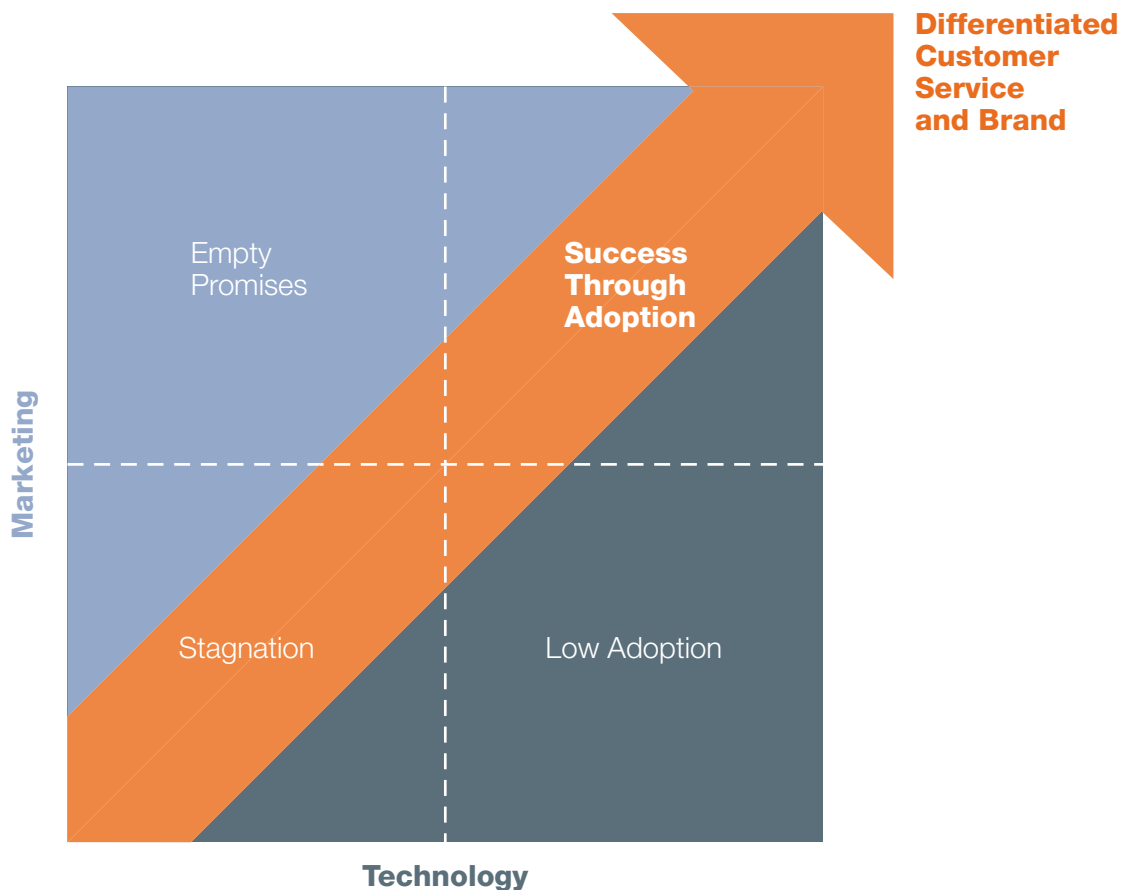
Aligning Marketing and Technology

In order to deliver upon its brand promise as a customer-centric business, a company must go beyond traditional marketing efforts and reach into its organization to transform the way it interacts with its customers. To achieve this transformation it must integrate branding efforts with the technology infrastructure.

By aligning technology initiatives with branding efforts, the internal technology infrastructure creates a conduit through which customers can reach deep into an organization's operations. This alignment provides the organization with the ability to deliver on your promises, driving this alignment as deep within your organization as possible.

An insurance company's claims processing system, for example, has a lot to do with its ability to deliver on its promise to pay customers' claims. Traditionally, claim processing is a business process not associated with marketing. However, the claim filing experience and subsequent processing time are part of the customer experience, which reinforces the brand—positively or negatively.

Outcomes of Customer Service Initiatives—
based on the participation of marketing and technology groups within an organization

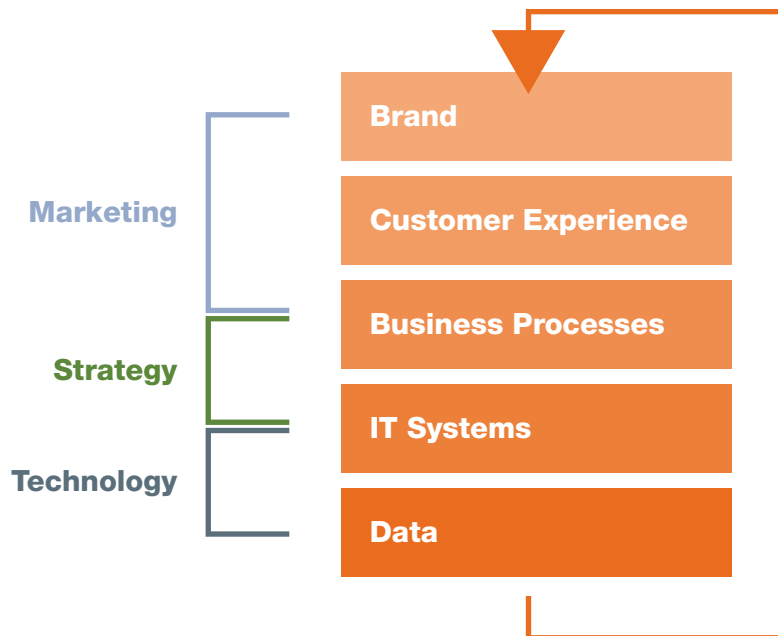


Problem—The Silo Effect

If a branding message is driven 100% by marketing, there is no true change in the customer experience. Consequently, while there may be a temporary shift in your customer's perception of your company, it is little more than an empty promise without the necessary shift in product features or service. Likewise, change that is driven by technology rather than brand leads to the development of a feature-rich system with low adoption because it is not driven by your company's value proposition.

We have all seen the losses that organizations sustained by spinning off separate e-business units. These organizational newcomers were empowered with tremendous budgets in order to create a new technology channel through which a separate digital brand would be delivered. The very separation that was intended to empower them to move without traditional constraints was at the root of their downfall. Because they had no impact in the traditional organization's operations, they could not truly affect customer interactions. The result was both empty promises, and overbuilt and under utilized systems, resulting in massive write-offs and losses.

Successful Customer Experience—
Customer interactions and experience are driven by core organizational data. Without leveraging IT to reach deep into the enterprise, marketing efforts designed to impact the customer experience create unfulfilled promises.



Solution—Find the Missing Link

Achieving the right alignment to deliver on your promises begins with communication between Marketing and IT. It ends with co-ownership and collaboration. Here are three keys to getting you there more quickly:

Send in an Ambassador

Create a marketing liaison to IT projects that is responsible for representing customer promises in technology. Make sure everyone is working from the same information in order to develop the program addressing the customer's needs.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Look for ways that technology efficiencies, normally associated with operations, can be positioned to create incremental change in customer interactions.

There's Gold in Those Hills

Position technology to gather metrics about customer needs and interaction patterns, and work with your IT team to develop increasingly advanced customer models based on their interaction with your operations systems.



How Does the Customer Benefit?

Consider this example—for a customer of insurance products reaching age 64 ½ is a milestone. This should trigger a series of events by the insurance company that encompasses a focused campaign to deliver service and product information related to planning for future insurance and financial needs. Achieving this one-to-one event is simply a matter of developing the scenario

based on what that customer needs to consider as he or she plans for the future. With the customer's profile stored in the company's database, it is fairly simple to extrapolate the necessary information to determine what would be of interest to the customer. Once this information has been captured it can be shared with the customer.

Conclusion

In today's economy, customers come first, and products must be tailored to fit their needs (customer centric). Thus, the evolution of marketing has come full circle—the marketer-driven approach of one-to-millions has given way to a consumer-driven one-to-one relationship. Your brand is no longer defined by how you present your products

or services—it is defined by the experience your customers have when interacting with your organization. This is especially true in such industries as insurance and financial services, where customers are asked to do more and more online and where a poor experience can quickly lead to the loss of that customer.

About the Authors

Dvora Ivankowski

Dvora Ivankowski provides integrated marketing and business solutions to clients within the technology, financial and non-profit environment. Her experience includes the full spectrum of integrated marketing program development from branding, strategy development, public relations, product development and improvement, competitive analysis and research, event management, budgeting, direct mail, to CRM and advertising.

Aaron Kassover

Aaron Kassover provides a vital link between the business strategist and the developer. He defines 4SIGHT's methodologies and service offerings; bridging the gap between strategy and execution. Through project architecture, Aaron ensures that the final product meets business objectives and supports business development and client services.

info@4sightcommunications.com