

# Integration complexity, risks of social media must drive marketers back to basics

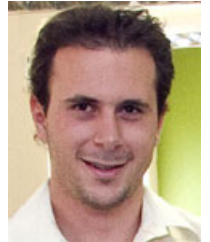
By [Nicholas Marini](#)

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Many business owners and marketers are finding themselves in somewhat of a quandary. As new digital and social media emerge as the must-have, latest and greatest marketing channels, what happens to the traditional direct marketing channels?

How do marketers begin to engage these new channels effectively while retaining the tried and revenue-driving traditional channels to connect with their existing and new target customers and grow the business?

Too many marketers have dived in head first and forgotten about the basics and fundamentals of good marketing practice. Most importantly, they have bypassed the value that integrated marketing communications brings to a brand.



In all the hype and furore around social media that has seen many brands dash blindly into setting up devastatingly useless and mismanaged Facebook pages, blogs and emit copious mindless tweets while simply failing to respond to irate consumers who make their dissatisfaction painfully public, it seems that marketers have forgotten about what integrated marketing communications means.

## **Approached in exactly the same way**

Somehow, for reasons unknown, social and interactive direct media channels are approached as if they are some standalone panacea for all marketing challenges. As simple channels to consumers, they need to be approached in exactly the same way as any traditional marketing channels as part of a master marketing strategy.

It's about integrating and leveraging the best channels available that are suited to your consumer's habits and preferences, driven by data and analytics, and that conform to the demanding regulatory environment governing direct marketing. And, as much as social technologies have been capturing marketers' imaginations since the emergence of the Internet, they've all too often been deployed in a silo as experiments that are separate from traditional marketing.

Reaching customers is becoming increasingly challenging as their touch points continue to fragment. Hence, an integrated marketing communications approach needs to be taken that includes both social and traditional media. New channels such as social media and web must sit within the marketing organisation as they impact so many different forms of marketing tactics, approaches and mindsets.

Like in other media forms, we cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to media application. Each one of your audiences will have a different penchant for social media technologies as they do for traditional media.

## **Lesson for marketers**

The manner in which media pioneers such as newspapers, magazines, radio and TV have embraced the use of social and digital media should be a lesson for marketers in terms of integrating and leveraging, rather than replacing.

Radio and TV programmes use social technologies to infuse a two-way relationship with listeners and allow for real-time immediate feedback and public opinion. By monitoring what is being said on Twitter during a programme broadcast, presenters and producers have a great source of new content and measurement of public sentiment on issues.

Newspapers and magazines, which still have the edge in terms of nothing quite beating the physical experience of the medium, have virtually all established social media properties, from Facebook pages and blogs through to twitter profiles. But, in each situation, it's been about integration and leverage, rather than replacement. The same applies to traditional direct marketing channels.

Marketers need to break through the silo mentality and integrate all media channels, including social, across the marketing organisation. Consumers expect brands to have a multifaceted presence, and yet marketing leadership seems at a standstill in terms of how to achieve and implement this.

### **Experience, engage, experiment**

Expert training and knowledge sharing in new media experiences are critical as there are bound to be mishaps and high degrees of risk with social media, as is the case in any new form of marketing. Encourage your marketing team to experience and engage with social media and to experiment with combining these with other forms of marketing such as events, promotions and direct marketing.

And, most of all, plan for integration of social media with traditional direct and interactive marketing from the outset, rather than treating it as a last minute add-on. The results in the latter scenario will disappoint and you will miss invaluable opportunities to maximise your effect and reach.

The bottom line is, with the advent of the Internet, the way new products and services are marketed have changed, even though the aim of business in bringing economic and social values remain unchanged. Indeed, the bottom line of increasing revenue and profit are still the same.

Marketing has evolved to be more of connectedness, due to the new characteristics brought in by the Internet. Marketing practice was once seen as a one-way, with firms broadcasting their offerings and value proposition. These days, it is seen more and more as a conversation between marketers and customers.

The challenge now is to get marketers to use an outside-in thinking approach which is data-driven and focuses on identifying consumer insights, and to develop a strategy with the right online and offline combination.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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