

## **Marketing and Communications is about to enter its Golden Age.**

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The future of the Communications and Marketing industries is extremely bright.

The dramatic changes that appear today to be challenging every aspect of media and communications eco-system are actually laying the groundwork for a golden age of growth, effectiveness and creativity.

But this optimistic forecast will hold true only for companies, institutions and people who can re-invent to remain relevant in a fast changing world.

The future will not fit in the containers or the mindsets of the past.

### **The Seven Underlying Trends**

**1) The Connection Engine:** This is how we describe the Internet. People connect to share, transact, discover, and express themselves. We discover in new ways using search engines such as Google but also being pointed to new things by friends via Facebook. Twitter along with Facebook area also two great sharing platforms. We transact using Amazon and other e-commerce providers. Finally distribution platforms such as Wordpress and You Tube, allow people to express themselves and distribute their thoughts around the world

**2) Facilitation of Self-Marketing:** Today because of the Internet whether it be wired or mobile, many of us are marketing to ourselves. All over the world we search for products and services, ask our friends for recommendations, read blogs and reviews and are active participants in determining how and what services and products we consume. Think of how you buy a car or plan a trip or get a book today versus five or ten years ago. We live in an age where people are marketing and learning by themselves, so how do we facilitate this behavior? How do we align with e-commerce, search engines and social media?

**3) Voices and Users:** In the past marketers and politicians “targeted” heavy users of their category. There was a belief that these were the most profitable and highest volume customers. This remains true and therefore heavy users need to be a focal point.

However something else has happened due to social media such as blogs, Twitter, Orkut, Facebook, Google + and their equivalents all over the world, which is the rise of the influencer. And an influencer need not be a heavy user but simply someone with charisma and a large network. So now marketers need to reach heavy users and heavy influencers, with many of these influencers being detractors of the brand. These detractors will need intermediaries such as both an unbiased and fact based news media to consider toning down their criticism if it is not justified.

**4) Re-aggregation:** In a digital world there is no mass audience but simply audiences of one that come to search engines or mobile apps or websites one at a time. This micro fragmentation is what marketers, advertisers, and retailers struggle with. They ask how do we re-aggregate groups large enough to affordably market to or scaled enough to impact business? Google is an amazing re-aggregation engine in that via search and to a lesser extent AdSense it combines people who share intent one at a time into large groups.

While traditional communications was about segmenting large audiences into smaller audiences similar to hacking at a cow till one gets a steak, re-aggregation is taking small slivers mince and rolling them up to a hamburger patty which is large and full filling enough to market to.

**5) Mobility is causing the real world and digital worlds to merge:**

All things analog are becoming digital (such as television)

All things digital are becoming mobile (iPhone, iPad...)

Most things mobile are becoming deeply linked to place and to connect to people. In effect mobility is linking the digital and analog world.

Yes, mobile increasingly is about where you are. It is about community. Who is around you? What offers? What is the reputation of the retailer? Is this a good restaurant to eat in and if so what is a good

**6) Globalization is bring new people and new ideas in to the marketplace:** In India and China alone two billion lives are being transformed due to the opening up of markets. Already in many industries from Automobiles to Luxury goods these two markets and several others are driving the bulk of growth for brands. As importantly, media companies from newspapers to television are seeing their audiences and circulation soaring.

These markets are not only new sources of consumers but new sources of ideas on how to communicate and market and also bring their own creative legacies such as Bollywood into the larger communication picture.

**7) Technology Platforms, which allow for better targeting and measurement as well as new ways to leverage creativity.**

Computers, mobile devices and easy to use software are allowing creative and communication people to tell better stories and companies to better identify and reach audiences. Many aspects of the advertising and communication landscape are utilizing terminology of the financial marketplace (real time bidding of audiences, data dashboards, data marketplaces and the like) where we are seeing faster and more efficient methods in all parts of creative and media worlds.

## **The Golden Age of Marketing and Communications**

In many markets particularly the more mature ones in the West as parts of the media industry such as newspapers and magazines face technological change there is a sense of despair that the best age is behind us. Media that is fragmenting, new powerful players such as Google and truly empowered consumers and customers, also daunt marketers.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Philip Kotler of Northwestern defined marketing as “understanding and meeting customer requirements”. More empowered customer means marketing becomes more essential since we must better understand and meet requirements like never before. An uninformed and disenfranchised customer does not require marketing to. Was there much marketing in Russia till the market opened up? So why should marketers despair that customers are now more powerful? It means better marketing is called for.

Similarly when there are new ways of telling stories and having people participate in story telling, why is the communication industry in a funk or advertising and media people wishing for the days of “Mad Men”? Surely more effective ways of reaching and measuring audiences and a larger creative palette should be good rather than bad?

Empowered consumers, more creative tools, increasing powerful platforms and new markets are a recipe for explosive growth and creativity and a golden age !

But not if one looks at the future through the lens of the past or one hopes to stumble into greatness without re-invention and hard work. The industry is in transformation and we need to transform ourselves!

### **A Recipe For Re-Transformation of the Marketing and Communication worlds.**

- 1) ***Run Schizophrenic Models:*** Andy Grove said that only the paranoid survive. I believe only the schizophrenic will thrive. For instance Newspapers and Magazines must run two models. One model for the traditional businesses that today’s business is. It is a huge business and an important one even if declining (but in many markets it surging). But then run a fresh sheet of paper business with a relentless focus on the future. When you can, give access to the new folks of the best of the old stuff but do not give them the old ways of thinking and metrics. This is particularly true in the markets that are thriving since technology that eventually hurt the many news media in the west is being adopted at exponential rates in India, China and Brazil to name a few markets.

- 2) **Embrace Technology:** We are living in an age of magic. Software coders, hardware designers, application developers and a whole lot of technologists are key to the future. We must embrace them and make them key (either hire them or partner with them). But most importantly every professional and student of marketing and communication should use an RSS reader like Google Reader, go onto Facebook, get a Twitter account, sign on to Four Square or Gowalla to see how mobile and local intersect. We need to get ourselves a mentor who is in their 20's in our own organization if we are senior management. Buy them a drink or a meal every month and listen. They will surprise you. Yes the future is not how good you butter your boss but how well the tech savvy of your company align with you!
- 3) **Move Fast:** In the past they said speed kills. Today the lack of speed kills. The future driven in part by the technology industry is rapid iteration and rapid prototyping. Please accelerate. This industry will be very different in 1000 days. Go now. Go fast.
- 4) **Embrace the Blur:** Go to your editors if in the communication industry and have a honest non bull shit, non fear based, non posturing, conversation with them. This church and state stuff is all very fine but what does it matter when the entire landmass is going underwater? You both must serve the community and the community is the civic folks, the retailers and the readers. People out there will call you out on anything that is weird or not transparent. The folks who read or interact with you are not stupid. They are smarter than us.
- 5) **Promote Youth:** The communication and media businesses may be losing the very best new talent to industries such as software and technology. Not only are many companies and industries struggling at attracting young people to engage with our products but we may also not be getting enough talented young people to join your industry. Look, I am not suggesting that old fogies like me are over the hill (just watch what we have in store!) but the way we consume and interact and relate changes over the generations. A business that wants to thrive for tomorrow must make sure that it gets people who will be like the people who are alive tomorrow unless you are in the cremation business. Give folks more responsibility and more money and whatever it takes. Relative to senior salaries this is cheap.
- 6) **Curation, Combination. Convenience:** In a web of streams and not of pages. In a world of voices and users and abundant information and content how can your business curate, combine and make convenient for folks in your community this chaotic but wonderful world. Do not think edit, do not think content, and do not think news, Think Curate. Combine. Convenient.

- 7) **Plan your Device, Platform and Search/Discovery Strategy:** In a networked world, links matter. In a networked world leading platforms like Google, Apple I-tunes and Facebook and soon maybe Twitter are huge realities. They are the platforms of the future. You must have a strategy to engage. There are new devices like I-Pad. There are issues here with regard to closed systems and the fact that you may not know whom your consumer is, but it is a big deal with advertisers. What is your device strategy? And search. It is still there and still growing important. It is not just Google but Twitter and Facebook and others. Maybe instead of your search strategy what is your discovery strategy?
- 8) **Think Deep about Partnering:** The world is moving too fast and the array of skills too vast for any company to do it alone. Partnership is very important but realize that in the world we live in most partnerships are what is called co-opetition where firms co-operate and compete. Things are grey. So build around this reality and choose your partners well. Platform partners, technology partners, and yes content partners too (there is a lot of content you do not have).
- 9) **Organizational and Mental Design:** The future does not fit in the containers of the past. Many organizations and incentives are optimized for the past and the people who came before. If you are to be an industry of the future you must incentivize behaviors of the future and organizational design of the future. If everything is to protect the declining cash cow sooner or later you will have lots of dead meat and very little milk.

But it is not just organizational containers that are of the past but sometimes our own mindset. Do an exercise and write down your three most cherished beliefs and then try to build a case why they are wrong. If you cannot build a strong case be worried since you have stopped interrogating yourself and therefore continuously improving.

- 10) **People:** In the end the future of this Industry is about you. Not about your boss, your weird colleagues, the crazies in IT and others that do not “get it”. Every firm is a wonderland filled with thousands of folks who “get it” who believe nobody else “gets it.”

Remember that regardless of how far technology spreads and the world becomes more and more digital, but people are still analog. We have feelings, concerns, fears and joys. We feel and do not just compute. It makes the future fun and interesting. So put people first.

Embrace these changes and embrace the future and welcome to the Golden Age of Communications and Marketing.

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