# The 10 Essential Skills Every Marketer Needs

*"In the face of change we have three options: ignore it, grow with it, or drive it."*[1]

**—Gerard Puccio, Marie Mance, Laura Barbero Switalski, Paul Reali,** *Creativity Rising*

No one needs to tell us that the world of marketing is changing fast. We are living it. Low-cost and ubiquitous communications technology is irrevocably altering human behavior, causing seismic shifts in marketing philosophy, practices, and careers. At its core, marketing is still about creating and keeping customers, but the how-to questions for accomplishing this have changed considerably.

The Web has empowered people everywhere. Whether in New York or Nairobi, today's customers are connected, informed, and more vocal than they have been in the past. Anyone with a connected device—39 percent of the world as of 2013[2]—now has access to all of the world's knowledge and many of its citizens. With these resources at their fingertips, our prospects and customers can discover and investigate anything and everything, establish decision-making criteria, seek opinions from their peers, evaluate their options, and share their impressions and experience with others, anytime and anywhere. As a result, the relationship between businesses and their customers has been dramatically altered: our customers are now firmly in charge of the buying process.

### Digital Has Changed the Game

In the predigital landscape, our prospects undertook a straight-forward purchase journey that we likened to a funnel. The process began with a need or desire that our prospects chose to address. Salespeople were involved early on, helping to establish decision-making criteria. Our job as marketers was to build aware-ness and create materials that made the case for why our solutions should be adopted. Many consumer brands had loyalty programs to encourage retention, but not much attention was devoted to post-purchase engagement.

Digital has dealt us all new cards. Today's customer journey still starts with a need or a desire, but our prospects often undertake an at times lengthy period of silent due diligence during which time *they* discover and evaluate their options via the web. During this period of discovery our prospects' consideration set often grows rather than narrows. According to Google's Zero Moment of Truth study, the average person pulls information from 10.4 sources before making a purchase.[3] Some of the most influential sources are other people's unfiltered post-purchase commentary. Salespeople enter the process at a much later stage for business-to-business purchases; most e-commerce purchases can be made independently.

Marketers have become essential to the purchase process, as more often than not, content is the tool that breaks through this silent due diligence, initiating a conversation between us and our prospects. Recognizing this shift, marketers have become content publishers, experts at creating useful resources that address our prospects' and customers' underlying needs and desires. If these experiences res-onate, we may be invited into the purchase process. Serving as trusted advisors, rather than biased advocates for our company's products and services, we create the conditions for our prospects and cus-tomers to evaluate *for themselves* whether we make the grade.

Social media has multiplied the potential points of connection with our prospects and customers and its interactive nature has turned static text into cross-channel dialogue. As we blog, tweet, host webinars, publish white papers, produce videos, and curate Pinterest boards, we generate living assets that can draw prospects to us. As we come to know these people as individuals through
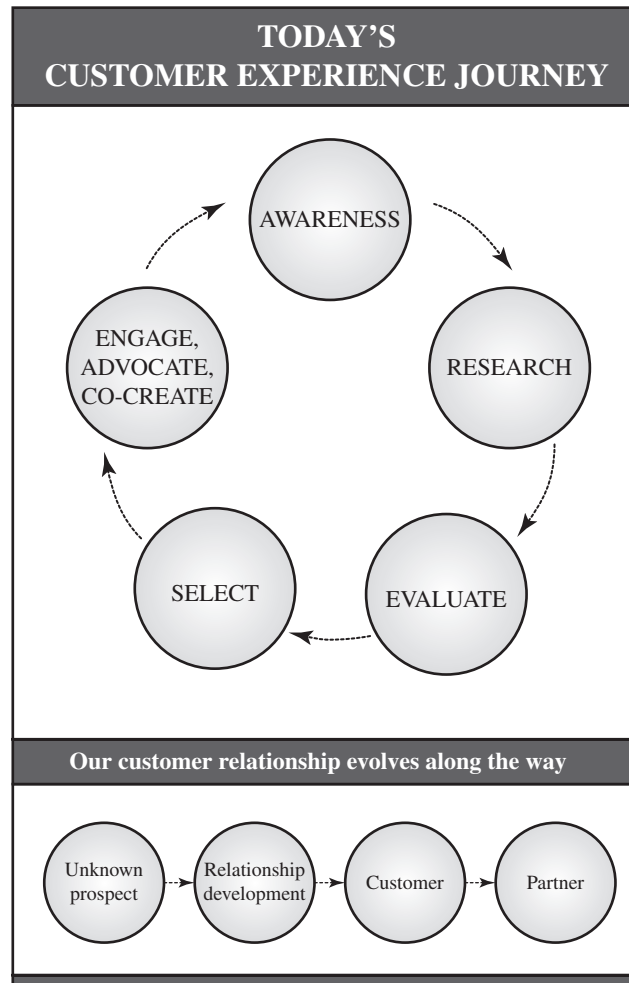
## TODAY'S CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE JOURNEY

AWARENESS

RESEARCH

ENGAGE, ADVOCATE, CO-CREATE

EVALUATE

SELECT

**Our customer relationship evolves along the way**

Unknown prospect

Relationship development

Customer

Partner

**Figure 1.1   Visual of the Customer Experience Journey**

careful observation of their digital body language, our encounters become more personalized, incorporating predictive analytics to enhance their usefulness.

Post-purchase engagement with our customers has become essential. Our customers are a primary source of word of mouth—peer-to-peer recommendations—that can make or break future sales. In these later-stage interactions we can learn the details of their

experience with us, answer any remaining questions they may have, and mitigate any outstanding negatives. If done right, these can foster positive advocates for our products and services, harness wisdom for our customer service efforts, and generate additional business. Our customers are also a vital source of insight into demand. They may not tell us outright what they want, but they can tell us about their needs and desires. With that knowledge, we can explore latent and emerging demand and co-create new products, services, and experiences that will provide tomorrow's revenue.

Although our prospects may not begin today's customer journey looking to develop an ongoing relationship with us, or with any company for that matter, as we engage in ways that are useful, they often morph from being unknown prospects, to becoming customers, and in many cases, to join with us as partners. As we transform a traditionally passive and transaction-oriented association into a collaborative relationship where we co-create, co-market, and co-serve our brands, our role as marketers expands. We are becoming key drivers of sales, loyalty, and innovation, producers of revenue rather than primarily generators of expenses.

### *The Disruption of Marketing Continues*

Digital's impact on marketing is not yet complete. Innovative technologies and heightened customer expectations are unleashing creativity, spurring imaginative forms of brand expression and interaction. Sensors and near-field communication devices are changing the very nature of products and services, prompting us to reconsider how our companies' value propositions may change when every object—from our customers' homes to their bodies—are connected to the Internet. As the bar is raised, marketers are becoming experience architects, collaborating closely with designers and software engineers.

Widespread adoption of mobile technology has brought new opportunities. The qualities that make mobile a highly engaging, lean-forward medium—touch screens, voice recognition, cameras, and GPS technology—are enabling rich, contextualized experiences. Mobile "always with you" quality has also issued us a new challenge: How to unobtrusively accompany our customers through the course of their days, offering valuable experiences that enhance their lives.

New channels continue to proliferate and are being adopted at record speeds, keeping us on our toes as we evaluate their relevance to our constituents and their effectiveness in obtaining our business goals. Every channel is becoming increasingly visual, forcing us to express our ideas in alternative, visually stimulating ways.

Today's customers live their lives across channels, often incorporating several to complete a single task or transaction. To effectively meet their needs, our companies must be present and available in their preferred channels, offering a seamless, personalized, and often predictive experience. Our ability to offer these contextualized interactions at scale requires that we become adept at big data collection, predictive analytics, and marketing automation, competencies that involve new technology, advanced organizational learning, and high levels of coordination across functions.

New enterprise marketing management systems are emerging to facilitate these personalized interactions, augmenting existing back-office oriented enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems that focus on accounting, manufacturing, supply chain management, and human resources. These new systems are designed to foster information flows and collaboration *across* business functions and our entire demand-related ecosystem in order to more effectively serve our customers.

Native advertising, which when done well mimics organic content, is presenting new targeting opportunities, causing a lot of buzz and a shift in media purchases. Fueled by immense amounts of data on our prospects and customers that is collected, integrated, and analyzed on a moment-to-moment basis, this new form of advertising is prompting marketers to develop converged marketing strategies, blurring the lines between paid, earned, and owned media.

E-commerce has lowered the barriers to entry for competition, establishing a truly global marketplace. Worldwide information flows are turning marketers, possibly inadvertently, into managers of global brands and customer communities. Viable disruptors to established industries can popup anywhere—especially in emerging markets.

Building loyalty in an age when people are inundated with options from near and far and can comparison-shop with ease is a

demanding task. As marketers we must continually find ways to stay on top of shifting customer preferences and distinguish our products and services from the growing competition.

Rapid marketplace changes demand that we become more flexible and responsive, challenging rigid corporate cultures and processes. Adopting a more iterative and experimental approach enhances our agility; however, it also requires that we foster a pro-learning environment that values what we glean from our successes and from our failures.

Finally, the pressure on marketers to prove the value of our efforts is tremendous. On one hand, it has never been easier to see the impact of our efforts as digital interactions leave behind a trail of behavioral data. At the same time, it is not easy to piece together this data as it is not captured in a sequential stream from first encounter to sale or advocacy. Closed-loop analytics are making it possible to track the effectiveness of each of our marketing initiatives, but they require software investment and technological know-how.

## We Have All Benefitted from the Disruption

As challenging as it is to be a marketer during one of the most rapidly changing business environments in history, both our customers and our businesses have benefitted from the disruption. The numerous changes that digital has ushered in have forced us to move away from our traditional producer-based strategies and tactics, to focus on meeting our customers' needs and desires.

Customer-centricity is an old story. For decades we have known that being as close as possible to our customers and bringing their voice into the center of our organizations has been a winning strategy, but we have not turned that aspiration into reality. The rebalancing of the relationship between companies and their customers has forced the issue, however.

Organizations that have grasped the new reality and are redesigning the way they engage with their prospects and customers are making strides in realizing customer-centricity. They are distinguishing themselves by setting new standards for a customer's experience and often exceeding them. A look at Amazon and Marketo illustrates just how far we have come.

### *Your Amazon.com*

Amazon's customers feel as if the world was made for them. When they arrive on any of the company's sites, they are greeted by name. A robust search engine acts like a personal assistant, quickly locating items from multiple vendors. Tailored recommendations that reflect their prior searches, page views, reviews, and purchases offer suggestions for additional items that may be of interest, presenting relevant options of which they may not otherwise have been aware (see Figure 1.2). To make itself even more useful, Amazon offers its customers the opportunity to proactively rate additional items and express their preferences, enhancing its search engine's predictive ability.

Ancillary features transform a simple purchase into an experience on Amazon. When looking for a book, customers may enjoy videos about the author, the opportunity to "look inside" the book's cover to preview its contents, and the chance to read peer reviews and add their own opinions to the mix. With Amazon's mobile app they can take a photo of an object, and within seconds, a description of the product and a link to where it can be purchased appears on their screen. Items can be bought quickly and easily; 1-Click purchases do
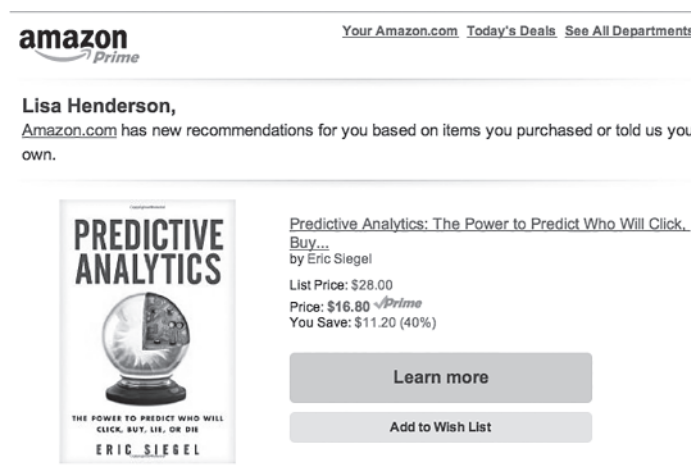


**Figure 1.2 Amazon Prompts Purchases with Customized Recommendations**

*The 10 Essential Skills Every Marketer Needs*

not require any additional data input (no names, addresses, or credit card numbers to key in) and Amazon Prime provides free two-day shipping—and complimentary TV, video streaming, and borrowing of e-books. If its customers are not ready to buy, Amazon saves their items for later access on any device.

Amazon's reliability builds trust; their customers know that when they purchase from Amazon their order will arrive intact and on time, if not early. The ability to set e-mail preferences—"We want to stay in touch, but only in ways you find helpful"—and to track orders online go a long way toward making customers feel like they matter. It is no wonder that one blogger wrote, "Amazon is liked so much because it is built to love."[4]

### *Business-to-Business Companies Are Players, Too*

Business-to-business (B2B) companies are also making strides in defining and delivering new levels of customer-centricity. Knowing that almost two-thirds of the research that potential B2B customers undertake takes place before a salesperson is contacted, the marketing automation and revenue management company Marketo creates myriad opportunities for prospects to educate themselves about this emerging field.

White papers, e-books, webinars, and videos are available in a Resource Center located on their website to assist potential customers in their early due diligence. Search engine optimization and contextualized advertising, topics we will explore in the coming pages, ensure that their prospects find their materials.

Once a potential customer has accessed their content, Marketo proactively offers them increasingly targeted content and invitations to events in hopes of being able to build a relationship. E-mail alerts notify prospects of new e-books and webinars on topics in which they have indicated an interest. The company carefully monitors recipient's reactions to determine the next best offer and the appropriate cadence for messages.

Because Marketo's communications are well targeted and well timed, prospects experience them positively, not as spam. Figure 1.3, for example, is a resourceful follow-up e-mail about an event for

**Figure 1.3   Marketo Nurtures Leads with Personalized E-Mails**

which Lisa had signed up for but was unable to attend. Engagement with Marketo also includes access to their social community of over 30,000 Marketo users, as well as on-demand training, and the ability to submit ideas to the company's product management team to shape the future of their products.

## Just Ahead: Relief and Reward

We have come a long way during the last two decades. While much complexity remains, we believe that we are entering a time of

refinement. After gulping down innovation for two decades, going forward marketers will be able to chew a little more thoroughly. This does not mean that invention will stop, that competition will become less fierce, or that the pace of business will slow. Nor does it mean that those who remain standing have secured a place in the future. It does mean that much of the innovation on the horizon builds and improves upon the seismic transformations that have already altered the landscape. Shakeouts and consolidations will be plentiful as the market integrates. As the dust settles and we gain comfort in our new skills, creativity will flourish.

The ability to create and deliver remarkable customer experience will be the signature of successful companies in this next phase of marketing. It is how we manifest our customer-centricity and what our prospects and customers have come to expect and reward. Organizations that are able to figure out what their prospects and customers want and expect, in terms of products, services, spaces, and the accompanying experiences, and deliver on this insight, will develop a powerful customer experience differential, a key source of differentiation in an environment where commoditization of our best ideas and efforts happens all too rapidly. This differential will drive results—it already is.

Working with five years of data from Forrester Research, Inc.'s Customer Experience Index, a yearly benchmark of businesses' customer experience quality, Watermark Consulting found that the stock performance of companies considered to be customer experience leaders exceeded that of both the S&P 500 and the customer experience laggards.[5] Customer experience leaders had a cumulative total return of +22.5 percent over the half-decade period compared with a −1.3 percent decline for the S&P 500 market index and a −46.3 percent decline for the laggard portfolio over the same period (see Figure 1.4). Here is the bottom line: customer experience matters. Whether we deliver remarkably good or remarkably poor customer experiences, it impacts our results.

With customer experience driving the growth agenda and performance measures for companies going forward, marketers are in the enviable position of holding the keys to the kingdom. To rise to the occasion, we must be able to think and act beyond our traditional
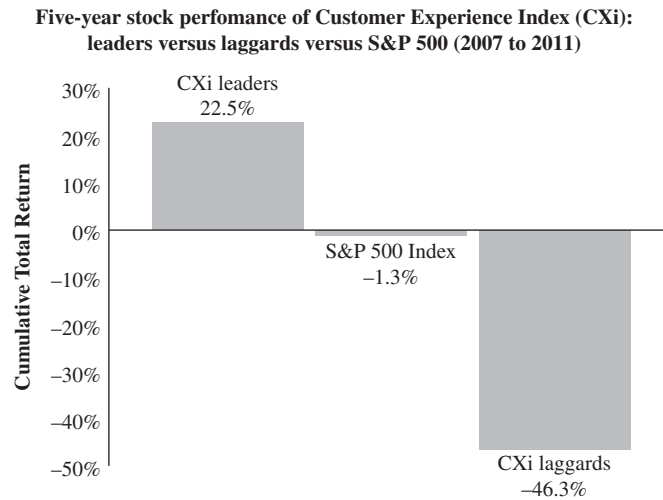
**Five-year perfomance of Customer Experience Index (CXi):**
**leaders versus laggards versus S&P 500 (2007 to 2011)**



**Figure 1.4  Focusing on Customer Experience Pays**

*Source:* **Harley Manning, Forrester Research, Inc. Blog, "When It Comes to Total Returns, Customer Experience Leaders Spank Customer Experience Laggards," Forrester Research, Inc., September 14, 2012.**

turf to proactively build the necessary skills to take our brands and companies to new levels. It is a good time for us to roll up our sleeves, digest what has happened, home the skills that are needed to benefit from these developments, re-energize our creativity, and get on with creating value in this new customer-centric marketing landscape.

## What Do We Mean by Customer-Centricity?

Much confusion exists around the definition of customer-centricity. Some false notions of customer-centricity that are expressed with some regularity include:

- Being all things to all people;
- Treating all of our customers the same;
- Attempting to meet every need our constituents have;
- Allowing our customers to haphazardly determine our strategy from minute to minute; or

- Blindly copying what Amazon, Marketo, and other market leaders are doing.

We define customer-centricity as helping *our* prospects and customers achieve *their* goals in a way that makes sense for *our* organizations. In this coveted sweet spot, depicted in Figure 1.5, our solutions meet our prospects' and customers' needs and desires. We are operating in a place of shared value, playing on the same team, and pursuing the same goals. That is a powerful combination.

As a result, customer-centricity is uniquely defined for every organization; however, two underlying principles are the same for every organization:

1. Customer-centricity is demand-driven, concentrating on meeting our customers' needs and desires.

2. Customer-centricity is focused, prioritizing our efforts on those customers' needs and desires that we can serve well and profitably.
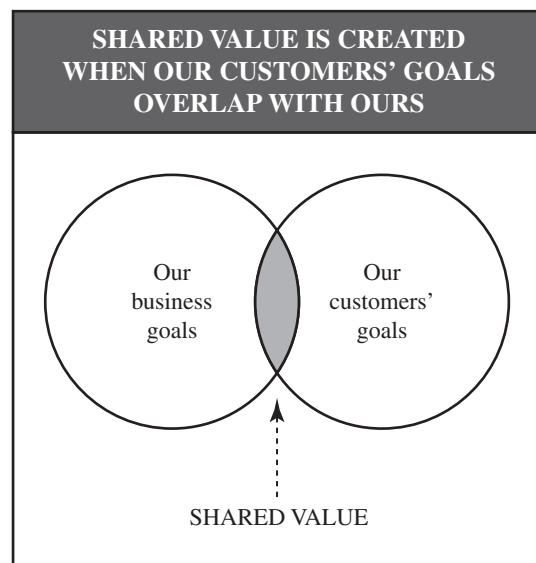
**SHARED VALUE IS CREATED WHEN OUR CUSTOMERS' GOALS OVERLAP WITH OURS**

Our business goals

Our customers' goals

SHARED VALUE

**Figure 1.5   Shared Value Is the Coveted Sweet Spot**

### *Walk in Our Customers' Shoes*

A deep understanding of our customers, perhaps even better than they know themselves, is a prerequisite to effectively meeting demand. This includes comprehending their needs and desires, motivations, attitudes, and existing knowledge, as well as their ongoing cross-channel behavior, preferences, and the triggers that prompt them to act. Staying current on these variables is a daunting task, as they change often. It is important, however, because this understanding, when coupled with a solid grasp of emerging trends and players in the marketplace, drives today's results and grounds our hypotheses about future demand. Our ability to rapidly test these hypotheses and to translate the resulting insight into innovative business models, products, services, and experiences keeps our companies relevant.

To truly understand our customers, we must shift points of view to see the world through their eyes. Flipping perspectives is hard because we are often entrenched in seeing the world from where we stand. It requires rethinking many tried and true, often producer-centric policies, practices, and frameworks.

To facilitate this flip, creativity and innovation consultant Tim Hurson encourages us to visualize our customers' needs and desires as itches they want to scratch. These itches can be physical, emotional, or psychological and they can be active, emerging, or latent. The most promising business opportunities generally come from addressing emerging and latent itches; who knew we could not live without a mobile phone or tablet until we had one in our hands? To identify the underlying itch, Hurson recommends that we ask, "If your [customer's] itch were a T-shirt slogan, what would it say?"[6] To develop a more complete context for the itch, he challenges us to consider the impact of the itch, what we know about it, who else may be impacted by the itch or influenced it, and our vision for the future in which the itch has gone away.[7]

Applying a different metaphor when he was still teaching, former Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt encouraged his marketing students to think of customers as having an underlying job that they are trying to complete. Most of these jobs have a

social, functional, and emotional component; Levitt believed that if marketers could understand this context, they would be able to create solutions that would appeal to their customers and prospects. Levitt illustrated this perspective to his students by explaining that, "People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole!"[8] Applying Levitt's framework, our task as marketers is to understand the job that our prospects and customers are trying to do, and design the experiences that enable them to do so.

### Eenie Meenie Miney Mo

Truly customer-centric organizations are able to take this customer understanding to the level of the individual and differentiate their products, services, and experiences accordingly. Differentiating among our customers may at first sound anticustomer-centric, but it truly is not. Our customers are heterogeneous, with different itches and jobs, and varying abilities to scratch and get the job done. As a result, the overlapping area of shared value we have with each of our customers varies. By segmenting and prioritizing our prospects and customers, we can more effectively meet their needs and allocate our resources. This is not earth-shattering news. What is news is our newfound ability to know our customers well enough to pull this off and to have the marketing automation technology to do so at scale.

Consider the case of a luxury boat retailer. While there may be many people who say they want a 50-foot sailboat, a much smaller segment can actually purchase one, and an even smaller set is ready to purchase one now. If we were designing a marketing strategy for the luxury boat retailer, we would recommend prioritizing active engagement with those customers who want to purchase a sailboat, have the ability to do so, and are ready to do so. This would involve a customized flow of content based upon their interest and behavior and engagement with our salespeople when they have been determined to be sales ready.

We would also recommend a nurturing strategy for those prospects who have the interest and ability, but for whom the timing

is not right. This would involve a smart stream of content, which becomes increasingly detailed based upon the prospects' actions. A low-involvement, self-servicing strategy would be appropriate for those who are interested, but not yet able to purchase. By knowing its prospects and customers well, the boat seller would be able to design relevant customer experiences that effectively meet the varying needs of the market and most efficiently use its resources.

### *Realizing the Customer-Experience Differential*

Our commitment to customer-centricity manifests itself in our customer experience. When we talk of the customer experience differential, we are talking about consistently meeting or exceeding our customers' expectations for our brands and accomplishing this with more perceived value than our competition. Expectations vary by brand; people naturally have different hopes for shopping excursions to Costco than to Nordstrom; both brands focus on delivering quality, but in very different ways.

Our customers' perceptions of our brands and whether or not they meet the grade are based on their experiences with us. A person's brand experience is defined as the "sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand stimuli."[9] These experiences can come in all shapes and sizes. Digital channels have magnified the number of potential brand encounters and have created a digital dimension for every product and service.

Take a Starbucks espresso, for example. There is the robust, slightly bitter drink itself, with its thick, swirled *crema* that floats on the surface and its satisfying aftertaste. People's experience of their espresso extends far beyond the cup of coffee itself, however. It can include searching for a Starbucks location: how easy is it to find digitally and physically? It can include the purchase experience itself, including the design of the venue, the personality and skill of the barista—*Do they remember my drink preference?*—the length of the lines, the comfort of the chairs, the cleanliness of the bathrooms, and the speed of the Wi-Fi connection.

For some customers the quality of the Starbucks espresso experience may also include their mobile phone. The Starbucks mobile app

**15**

lets them pay by scan, receive personalized text offers, and manage their loyalty points (see Figure 1.6). The espresso experience may also include life between coffees. Starbucks' 35.9 million Facebook fans and 5 million Twitter followers clearly want to engage with the company. For others, purchasing their espresso from Starbucks may be an expression of their values. They may feel connected to the company via its social and sustainability efforts, as represented in the program's tagline, "You & Starbucks: It's bigger than coffee." And that is only a fraction of the possibilities.



**Figure 1.6   Starbucks App—Mobile Payments, Automated Loyalty, and Text Communications in One**
*Source:* **http://www.starbucks.com/coffeehouse/mobile-apps/mystarbucks**

We refer to the sum of these brand impressions over time as the customer experience journey. These experiences can take place while our customers are searching, evaluating, or consuming our products or services, as well as between purchases and even outside the purchase process. Every one of these encounters is considered a touchpoint.

Touchpoints can be static, meaning one-way communications from us, such as when a customer receives a direct mail piece from us, or they can be interactive, like a tweet exchange or a visit to one of our stores. (Recognizing the value of engaging with our customers, most of our static brand experiences now invite our customers to engage with us in more interactive environments.) They may involve direct interaction with our employees in environments like a call center or sales call, or they may stop short of that with a simple download of a white paper. Each of these touchpoints is supported by a complex and interconnected system including Operations, IT, Finance, Human Resources, and Marketing, and by a broader ecosystem, which may include manufacturers, suppliers, media partners, and retailers.

Our prospects' and customers' brand experience include all of the interactions they have directly *with* us, as well as the interactions they have *about* us with their peers. Social media has fostered a recommendation-based global economy, creating unprecedented opportunities for people to seek out information from peers and to influence others. Some of these conversations take place in our branded social environments in the form of a post on our Facebook page or comment on our blog. Many take place in other public and private social environments and plenty still take place around the water fountain or over a cup of coffee.

Each brand experience contributes to people's overall perception of our customer experience (see Figure 1.7). Trust us, customers *always* have a perception of their encounters with us. These responses range from horrible to great or perhaps the dreaded state of indifference. These perceptions are fluid; they can change over time with additional encounters.

These perceptions are significant—they largely define our brands. As our customers write tweets, texts, reviews, upload photos, and

**Figure 1.7    Multiple Touches Shape the Customer Experience**

make recommendations, they are shaping our brands. This communication amounts to a lot of influence, on par with the big advertising spends of days gone by, because word-of-mouth influence is powerful stuff in a recommendation-driven environment like ours. These perceptions also determine whether our product or services will ultimately be acquired as research shows that brand experience is the single biggest factor in a prospect's decision to purchase a product or service.[10]

## Get Customer Experience Savvy—It Pays

Clearly there are many moving parts that contribute to how consumers experience our brands, some of which are in our control and some of which are not. (The manufacturing company John Deere

identified over 525 possible touches with its constituents!) These moving parts have to work together, consistently, to deliver remarkable brand experiences that capture our customers' attention and that stand out from the competition in a positive way.

Recognizing the complexity of the task, it is logical to ask ourselves if it is really worth the effort. Rest assured, there is gold in them hills. The customer experience differential represents a large opportunity for multiple reasons:

1. **Customer expectations for brand experience are widespread.** According to a recent study conducted by the marketing agency Jack Morton Worldwide (JMW), over 80 percent of people say that they are more likely to consider brands with differentiated experiences.[11] Although this is true across market segments, people between the ages of 25 and 34 are "most likely to consider, recommend, or pay a premium price based on a better brand experience."[12] Similarly, research undertaken by the strategy consulting firm McKinsey & Company found that customer experience impacts two-thirds of the decisions customers make; price often drives the remaining third.[13]

    Heightened brand experience expectations are not just characteristic of customers in mature markets. In China, for example, 93.8 percent of consumers surveyed said they were more likely to consider brands based on experience, compared with a worldwide average of 80.4 percent.[14]

2. **Few companies have made inroads into realizing the customer experience differential to date.** Although most managers believe that they are already delivering great brand experiences, a 2013 survey undertaken by Forrester Research found that only 8 percent of consumers agreed. In fact, 61 percent rated their experience as ranging from okay to poor or very poor.[15] This is a significant disconnect—and opportunity.

    Forrester also found that some industries are so lacking in customer focus—health insurance plans and Internet service providers are at the bottom of the list, as shown in Figure 1.8—that simply being adequate can create a point
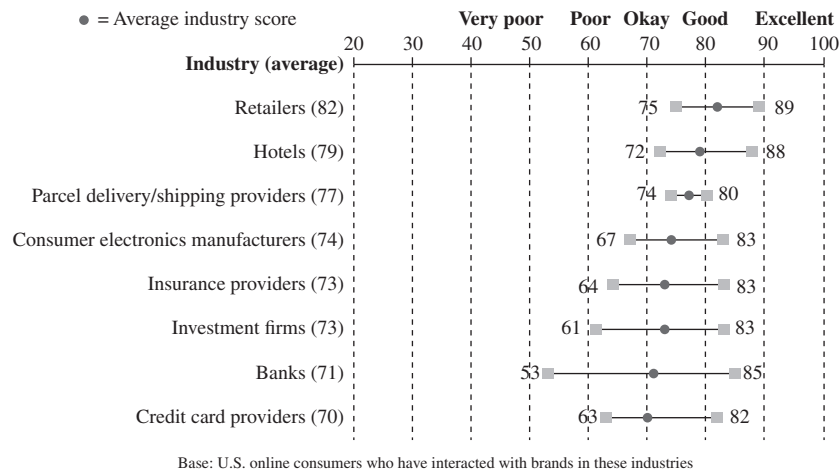
● = Average industry score

| | Very poor | Poor | Okay | Good | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Industry (average)

Retailers (82) — 75 ■——●—■ 89

Hotels (79) — 72 ■——●——■ 88

Parcel delivery/shipping providers (77) — 74 ■—●—■ 80

Consumer electronics manufacturers (74) — 67 ■—+—●——■ 83

Insurance providers (73) — 64 ■——●——■ 83

Investment firms (73) — 61 ■——●——■ 83

Banks (71) — 53 ■———●———■ 85

Credit card providers (70) — 63 ■——●——■ 82

Base: U.S. online consumers who have interacted with brands in these industries

**Figure 1.8 Customer Experience Varies across and within Industries**

*Source:* **Megan Burns, Forrester Research, Inc. Report, "The Customer Experience Index, 2013," Forrester Research, Inc., January 15, 2013.**

of differentiation from the competition. In most industries, however, there are one or two exceptional leaders and many others that lag significantly behind.[16]

3. **Remarkable customer experience pays.** Customer experiences with brands impact margins. American Express found that 67 percent of Americans would spend an average of 13 percent more with a company that provides excellent customer service.[17] Not surprisingly, advocacy is also affected. JMW found that 87 percent of those surveyed said they are more likely to recommend a brand based on superior experience.[18] In fact, 79 percent said they would *only* advocate for brands *after* they have a great customer experience.[19]

## *USAA Understands and Delivers*

In the financial services industry, the United States Automobile Association (USAA) leads the pack in terms of customer experience

and with good reason: they have made a concerted effort to engage their entire company in the effort. A few years ago the company, which serves military personell and their families, consolidated its customer-experience–related operations under an EVP of member experience. Today, almost half of USAA's employees are on the member-experience team, which is responsible for "setting strategy, monitoring performance, and driving innovation."[20]

To enhance its members' experience, the company recently reorganized its product offerings to better reflect and anticipate the actual steps that USAA members take when purchasing their products. For example, knowing that when their members purchase a car they may be also looking to secure a car loan and insurance coverage, the company now bundles these offerings into an integrated service. Through its mobile app, website, and/or contact centers, or some combination thereof, the company's 9.7 million members and their families can easily find, finance, and insure a car.

Seeing its business through the eyes of its customers paid off. Today, USAA enjoys the highest customer experience rankings across all three industries in which the company is active. These rankings translate into hard cash: the company has enjoyed double-digit increases in auto sales and loans.

### What Do Our Customers Want from Us?

People's expectations for brands are increasing; 57 percent of customers say they hold brands to higher standards than they did previously.[21] Our customers become accustomed to the standard of experience offered by companies like Amazon and Marketo, which is always being enhanced. Yesterday's exceptional experiences quickly become today's baseline.

To stay relevant, we have to keep our finger on the pulse of what really matters to *our* customers and build remarkable experiences around that. As a result, the answer to the question—What do our customers want from us?—will differ for every organization; however, there are some basic elements of customer experience that are becoming universal.

### *Understand and Meet Their Needs*

To attract and sustain our prospects' and customers' attention and win their business, we have to offer products, services, and experiences that meet their needs or desires. An understanding of the underlying customers and their needs and desires must accompany this functionality, creating tremendous opportunities for brands that can develop truly empathize with their customers and translate that understanding into products, services, and experiences.[22]

Our marketing must also be purposeful, achieving what marketing consultant Jay Baer describes as, "Youtility," marketing so useful that our customers would pay for it.[23] We can offer entertainment, inspiration, information, or self-actualization, but without being useful, we do not have a shot of being invited in to the customer journey.

Useful does not mean boring. In fact, useful experiences are usually drawn from deep wells of creativity. Take a look at what Nike is doing as an example. Knowing that its customers enjoy the opportunity to express themselves, Nike encourages them to design their own running shoes. By offering them the chance to personalize their shoes on the basis of performance features and appearance, Nike gives its customers the opportunity to say to the world, "This is who I am."

Recognizing the larger aspiration behind their customers' purchase of running shoes, Nike designs experiences that help them reach their fitness goals and enjoy an active life. Runners can map their runs—including elevation details—and track their workout progress through the Nike+ app. When they need a bit of extra motivation to make it up that last hill, Nike's customers can choose a high-energy song from one of the company's playlists. If they have previously alerted their friends of their run on Facebook or Path, they can hear real-time cheers along the way for every like or comment they receive (Figure 1.9).

For their street-soccer fans in Spain, Nike goes beyond the call of duty to provide opportunities for pickup games. Through #MiPista, the company creates temporary playing fields with laser beams projected from a crane onto flat open surfaces below. Using their smartphones, players can request that Nike's traveling team install a

**Figure 1.9   Nike Helps Its Customers Reach Their Fitness Goals with its Nike+ App**

*Source:* **iTunes.apple.com/us/app/nike+-running/id387771637**

temporary soccer field and then get to work rounding up players. Within minutes, empty spaces are transformed into illuminated street-soccer fields. Take a moment to enjoy photos on Nike's blog; they are inspiring.[24]

For anyone, anywhere, who is interested in being fit, Nike offers its FuelBand, an electronic bracelet that tracks and measures their movements throughout the day, whether generated from a tennis match, an early morning run, or just walking around the office. Movements are measured in NikeFuel, a proprietary metric that can be evaluated over time, shared with friends, and applied to unlock levels and content on the company's digital game, NikeFuel Missions. It is experiences like these that delight Nike's customers and generate $25 billion a year in revenue.

### *Offer Relevant Interactions*

Today's time-pressed customers want relevance. For many years we have operated under the assumption that our customers want more options; however, research conducted by American psychologist Barry Schwartz found that for most people, having too many options is anxiety producing rather than freeing.[25] Highly targeted experiences that zero in our customer's needs and desires simplify their lives; for many that is considered a gift.

Diane Hessan, CEO of Communispace, which creates private online customer communities for companies, describes this gift in the context of a couple. Tired after a long workweek, they are making plans for Friday night dinner. The man texts his girlfriend asking her to make the reservation at any place she wants, thinking he is doing her a favor by letting her choose the type of food and the venue they will enjoy. Rather than being energized by being given the choice, the woman thinks to herself, "If he really loved me, he would handle this, so all I have to do is show up. I would have even paid!"

What does this mean for marketers? Relevance is nothing short of offering the right experience, in the right format, on the right device(s), when our customers are ready. Relevance increasingly requires contextualized experiences that reflect the individual customer's behavior, preferences, current situation, and are often predictive. This type of personalized marketing experience has long been a dream for marketers, and big data and advanced analytics are now making this dream a reality. From our customers' point of view, relevance means feeling known, not in an invasive or creepy way, but in a way that says, "Can we be of assistance?" It is the difference between being welcome and being annoying.

In the case of Starbucks, relevance could be a personalized e-mail (or SMS text) sent to a customer at the time of day when he or she frequently makes a beverage purchase. The e-mail could feature the signature Starbucks' cup and, as in Figure 1.10, include the customer's name and maybe his or her favorite drink order.

Or relevance could take the form of a personalized video or a Pinterest-like digital bulletin board, sent to a prospect who has recently visited a retailer's website to evaluate and price televisions.

**Figure 1.10   Starbucks Customizes Its Customer Interactions**

The content could provide additional information about the models that caught their attention, including customer ratings, details about nearby stores where the selected models are presently in stock, and a link enabling an online purchase.

### *Invite Participation*

The interactions that Amazon, Nike, and Marketo enjoy with their customers incorporate another important component of today's customer-centricity: participation. This broadcast era of one-way

messaging is gone; effective communication now is about engagement. Customers are often looking for us to provide more than just a product or a service: They are looking for experiences.

Experiences can be digital, physical, or some combination of both. The interactive mobile app, Stylewhile, for example, adds a new dimension to the digital shopping experience.[26] Shoppers can visualize what outfits will look like by dressing an avatar, whose skin tone, hair, and body size can be adjusted to resemble the person for whom the item is being purchased. The app facilitates a fun and novel experience, while removing one of the challenges of purchasing clothes online: visualizing how clothes will actually look.

Similarly, retailers who adapt their in-store experience to leverage the unique capabilities of mobile are finding that it increases sales.[27] The Sprooki shopping app, for example, enhances the in-store experience for shoppers in Singapore.[28] While in or near the mall, shoppers receive deal alerts on their smartphones from participating retailers. If intrigued, would-be buyers can browse and purchase the items directly from their smartphones and pick them up at their convenience.

Creating digital communities around our brands provides our prospects and customers with some of the richest experiences. It might be hard to conceive that people want to connect around diapers, but they do. The Huggies Community, for example, brings together parents to talk about all things child-related. Dell Ideastorm invites customers to cocreate new products and services and to enhance existing offerings. One of the first companies to publicly tap customers for ideas since the site's launch in 2007, the company has garnered more than 15,000 ideas from interested users and implemented close to 500 from them.

### Engage Before, During, and After

Our customers want to be educated and engaged on an ongoing basis. According to a study conducted by JMW, this is especially true for customers who say that unique brand experience impacts their brand choice.[29] Many want self-service access to content early in the customer journey, so that they can evaluate potential purchases before they contact a salesperson or walk into a store. Some

want ongoing connections after a purchase is made—timely information that keeps them in the know, invitations to special events, and opportunities to share their experience and opinions. By inviting engagement throughout the customer experience journey, we can develop relationship-based loyalty, rather than the more fickle transaction-based version.

To keep its fans engaged, Scrabble set up free Wi-Fi hotspots across Paris in areas lacking coverage. To access the Scrabble network, people were invited to play a digital version of the game, which unlocked the necessary password. The length of time awarded on the network was based on the player's Scrabble score; better spellers were rewarded for their skill with more time. In addition to enabling the brand to connect with its fans, the experience prompted Scrabble players to try the digital version of the game.

### *Keep It Simple*

Ease of use is highly important to today's customers, who have short attention spans and little patience for anything lengthy, delivered slowly, or technically imperfect. The average attention span of adults has decreased from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2012, giving us the distinction of now having a shorter attention span than a goldfish (9 seconds).[30] The average American in his or her twenties switches media venues 27 times per non-working hour. He or she also multiscreens, browsing multiple screens at once, often absorbing unrelated content simultaneously.[31]

As a result, interacting with us has to be easy, inviting, and hopefully fun, or our customers will go elsewhere. At its best, the technology we employ to engage with our customers should be so simple that it is invisible; the experience that the tools are trying to deliver should be what is remembered. When our customers connect with us in person or over the phone, our employees should be so helpful and the processes so streamlined that people notice—and are perhaps even delighted.

Ease of use also means that our engagement with customers takes place where they are, not where it is most convenient for us to be. We can assume that our customers want to communicate with us in

a variety of ways depending on where they are and the nature of the interaction—e-mail, voice, SMS text, apps, call centers, and in person. This means we need to be able to deliver a seamless and interconnected brand experience across channels and devices. While challenging to deliver, this omni-experience can capture the attention of distracted customers by creating a consistent surround sound as they migrate across channels.

### Be Real and Be Worthy

Social media offers an interactive marketing experience where we can engage directly with our prospects and customers as individuals. As we draw closer to these constituents, we become more like friends in a neighborhood, rather than buyers and sellers. Many of our communications happen in their Facebook and Twitter streams, right above or below their friends' and family's updates. Mobile devices offer access to our customers throughout their day, whether they are in budget meetings, at the soccer field, or on a first date. This intimacy has changed the social contract between businesses and their customers, requiring a new level of responsiveness, respect, and transparency from companies.

To be worthy of this connection, we must be mindful and respectful of our expanding role in people's lives. Are we truly being useful? Is our cadence right? Are we listening? Are we being too intrusive? Are we being good stewards of the customer data that makes these highly personalized interactions possible? A breach of security or a sense of being too closely observed or intruded upon will turn the dial backwards, perhaps irreparably, in terms of customer-centricity.

Involvement in social environments challenges marketers to be transparent about the ways our companies do business. Everlane, an innovative e-commerce company that creates quality tees, shirts, sweaters, and accessories, has built its brand around this quality. It encourages its customers to "Know your factories. Know your costs. Always ask why."[32] Colorful photos on its website take us behind the scenes to see exactly how their fabrics are created, cut, sewn, dyed, finished, pressed, and packed. Descriptions and snapshots of the factories that manufacture Everlane products tell the story of the

company's partners: where they are located, how many people they employ, how Everlane discovered them, and reassurances about the integrity of each partners' workplace. The company also discloses its costs and profit margin, openly making the case for why it can provide quality, value, and ethically manufactured products simultaneously.

### *Be Meaningful*

Everlane is tapping into another key component of remarkable customer experience: a vehicle for people to live out their values. John Maeda, the former president of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), explains, "What people want today goes well beyond technology and design. What people are looking for now is a way to reconnect with their *values*: to ground how they can, will, and should live in the world."[33] Many of our prospects and customers want us to be meaningful brands, brands with a point of view that is larger than our product lines; brands with a true connection to underlying values, not a superficial greenwashing.

Dove, which manufactures skin and hair care products, is consistently seen as a brand that is making a difference. Inspired by market research that indicated that only 4 percent of women consider themselves beautiful, Dove is committed to "building self-esteem and inspiring all women and girls to reach their full potential."[34] Toward this end, the company launched the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. Encouraging men and women to "imagine a world where beauty is a source of confidence, not anxiety," the brand has brought discussion of "what comprises beauty?" into the public arena.

Dove continues to push forward the conversation, most recently with its Dove Real Beauty Sketches. In this latest social experiment, Dove uses videos of women describing their appearances to illustrate how they are often their own worst beauty critics. In the video, several women describe their looks to a forensic artist who sketches them unseen, based solely upon their description of themselves. These sketches are compared with drawings created by the same artist with one important distinction: they are based upon strangers' descriptions of the women. The differences are stark; the strangers' images are far more accurate—and attractive.

Though these initiatives are at times controversial, Dove is putting a stake in the ground, boldly articulating what it considers to be important. In so doing, the brand attracts and builds bonds with prospects and customers who feel similarly. It has also earned the distinction of being a meaningful brand.

What comprises a meaningful brand? The communications company Havas Media developed the Meaningful Brands Index (MBi) to measure and assess the correlation between financial performance and the benefits brands bring to people's lives in terms of health, happiness, finances, relationships, and community, among others. Their findings are important: Being a meaningful brand is not just a nice idea; it pays. In 2013, Meaningful Brands outperformed the stock market by 120 percent.[35] Dove is among them.

### How Remarkable Do We Need to Be?

Throughout *The Digital Marketer* we encourage companies to set their sights on delivering remarkable customer experience. What do we mean by remarkable? We like the definition put forward by marketing guru Seth Godin: "worthy of remark."[36] Remarkable experiences do not have to be accompanied by fireworks or a parade. Some of the most remarkable moments are everyday experiences done well. Think Amazon.

How remarkable do *we* have to be? It depends upon our customers, competition, industries, and businesses. Although customer experience leaders are raising the bar for every organization, *our* criteria for customer experience must reflect our value proposition and the factors that are most important to our customers.

JetBlue is a customer experience leader in the airline industry. The company goes to great lengths to understand the key factors that impact its customers' travel experience, measure those influences regularly, and incorporate this insight into its day-to-day operations. As a result, its everyday experience is worthy of remark. Indeed, as the Twitter exchange in Figure 1.11 captures, one satisfied customer did remark, quite publicly and colorfully, about her positive experience with the airline. Knowing that responsiveness is a key driver of remarkable customer experience, the airline offered a witty reply.

**Figure 1.11   JetBlue Delights Its Customers**
*Source:* **https://twitter.com/JetBlue/status/1768096120**

On some occasions, we may choose to take our customer experience efforts up a notch as Morton's Steakhouse did for one its customers, author and entrepreneur Peter Shankman. After a long day of travel and before boarding his last flight, Shankman sent a lighthearted tweet to Morton's Steakhouse, a restaurant chain where he dines frequently, facetiously asking them to meet him at Newark Airport with a porterhouse steak when his plane landed. Two hours later when he landed in Newark, he was surprised and delighted to find that his dinner awaited him. What is more, it was hand delivered to the terminal, free of charge, by a tuxedo-clad server. Shankman summarized the experience in his blog: "I. Was. Floored."[37] That is a remarkable, out of the ordinary, experience.

Whether a unique happening that surprises and delights or the consistent efficient and effective delivery of something more routine, remarkable experiences cause people to take note, perhaps crack a smile, breathe a sigh of relief, or make a remark. That is how good we want to be.

### Will We Ignore Change, Grow with It, or Drive It?

Many marketers feel unprepared in this dynamic, confusing, and highly promising environment. The question for each of us is, "Will we ignore change, grow with it, or drive it?" The fact that you are reading *The Digital Marketer* suggests you want to grow and perhaps drive change going forward.

In the pages that follow we explore the 10 essential skills necessary to be relevant in today's marketplace. As marketers we do not have to become experts in all 10 skill areas, but we do need to understand their benefits and limitations, and how they can contribute to delivering remarkable customer experiences. Here is a quick overview.

## 1. Build a Successful Marketing Career

Success in this marketing landscape requires that we be agile—learning, unlearning, and relearning—in order to be marketers who can adapt to change. It can be a challenge to let go of ideas, practices, and perspectives that have worked well and even made us marketing stars in the past. Research shows, however, that those proven leaders who cannot let go of entrenched patterns, however, do not thrive in turbulent times.[38]

Living in a state of discovery can feel exhausting and unsettling, but consider this: In a world where the terrain is shifting, standing still is an extraordinarily risky proposition. While we instinctually seek safety, a more successful approach is adaptation. As Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn and coauthor of *The Start-Up of You* warns, "Without frequent, contained risk taking, you are setting yourself up for a major dislocation at some point in the future."[39]

Plenty of opportunity exists for those of us who can successfully re-envision our roles and expand our skillsets to match the needs of this new marketing environment. Positions like Content Strategist, Community Builder, Converged Media Specialist, Marketing Technologist, and Manager of Customer Experience reflect some of the new competencies that companies are developing in their quest for customer-centricity. Several new C-level positions that focus on the customer are opening new career paths. (More about this in Chapter 2.)

To take advantage of the opportunities that this new landscape offers we must actively manage our careers to identify the skills and experiences we need, and how we are going to acquire them. Intentionally building our networks creates vital and vetted

information flows that keep us up-to-date and augment our resource base. Branding ourselves and being thoughtful about proactively managing our reputation and contributions to the field have become essential. Seeking out developmental relationships including mentors and sponsors can offer necessary support to boost our careers. Finally, consciously putting ourselves in situations where we can feed and flex our creative muscles kindles our imagination, uncovering new possibilities for how we can contribute.

## 2. Design Valuable Customer Experiences

In an environment in which customer experience is increasingly critical, the thoughtful design of individual customer experiences, and of how multiple touchpoints work together as a whole, is too vital to be left to chance. Knowledge of design thinking, a disciplined process of observation, idea generation, and rapid iteration of products, content, and experiences, jumpstarts our organizations' creativity and transports us beyond our "go-to" options, unlocking new opportunities for creating shared value. An understanding of basic tenants of behavior design and the persuasive impact of technology enhances our ability to create interactions that prompt people to act. Mapping the customer journey of each of our market segments deepens our understanding of when, where, and how our prospects and customers interact with us. By tracking their sentiment across each of these touchpoints, we can evaluate the effectiveness of each of these encounters, prioritize our efforts, and optimize our customer experience.

For example, working with MCorp Consulting, a customer experience and brand consultancy, a large commercial real estate lender that struggled with low rates of customer satisfaction and retention realized significant improvements in its customer experience. By mapping its customer touchpoints, the company was able to evaluate the effectiveness of its interactions and identify those who were most essential for driving customer engagement. Drawing from this insight, the company was able to improve or eliminate underachieving touchpoints, create new processes, redefine roles and responsibilities, and

establish relevant metrics, enhancing its customers' satisfaction and loyalty, and increasing overall loan volume.[40]

### 3. Find Actionable Insight in Big Data and Marketing Analytics

Big data and marketing analytics can be powerful tools for marketers. Indeed, after analyzing more than 250 customer engagements over the span of five years, McKinsey concluded that companies that put data at the center of the marketing and sales decisions have been able to improve their marketing return on investment by 15 to 20 percent—that equates to $150–$200 billion of additional value based on global annual marketing spend of an estimated $1 trillion.[41] Best Buy is among those companies that are realizing gains. As an example, the consumer electronics retailer was able to double membership in its Red Zone loyalty program in three months through a razor-targeted e-mail campaign prompted by insight derived from advanced customer analytics.[42]

Finding the business value in clicks, shares, swipes, and pins is easier said than done, however. It requires an ability to capture relevant data, integrate disparate data sources, maintain and store massive amounts of information, and apply advanced analytics to detect the important signals amid a lot of noise.

How technical do marketers need to become in order to realize this value? Going forward it will be impossible to separate marketing from technology—software, content, creativity, and infrastructure will be completely interwoven. However, this does not mean that marketers must become data scientists. We do need to be capable of broad analytic thinking so that we can ask the probing questions that frame solid data analysis and be able to build and manage technically savvy teams. Given how critical the insights derived from big data and analytics are to the success of our marketing efforts, we must also be informed enough to influence or own the purchase of the necessary technology and ensure that it can be readily adapted for use by front-line marketing managers.

### 4. Employ Entrepreneurial Thinking for Discernment and Agility

In markets characterized by high levels of uncertainty and rapid change, an entrepreneurial approach to decision-making enables us to act quickly in response to changing market conditions, even in the face of ambiguity. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is notorious for his entrepreneurial decision-making style. Favoring intelligent action over intelligent inaction, Bezos has a "ready, fire, steer" style, as opposed to the traditional "ready, aim, fire approach." Bezos encourages his employees to spend less time aiming and more time doing in order to drive creativity and innovation. One of the company's internal awards, "Just Do It," recognizes employees who take the initiative to do positive things for the company without having to involve their boss.

Entrepreneurial decision-making does not mean shooting from the hip. Rather, it means creating evidence for or against our ideas through immediate and frequent testing. This iterative process allows us to continuously act and learn, enhancing our organizations' knowledge, experience, and agility. Entrepreneurial decision-making also includes practices such as determining budgets by defining acceptable losses, pursuing multiple options simultaneously, and building purposeful partner networks. Being able to decipher when to apply entrepreneurial decision-making and when to employ traditional analytic methods is essential for today's marketer.

Consider the experience of the early stage company Carsurfing. Building upon customers' appetite for sharing services, Carsurfing set out to develop a mobile application to facilitate ride sharing to major cultural and sporting events. Before the app was ready to be launched, members of the Carsurfing team noticed a high volume of chatter in social environments about Burning Man, an annual art festival in Nevada. Recognizing the opportunity that the festival presented to test the validity of their product idea, the team moved quickly to temporarily shift their focus from building the app to creating a dedicated landing page for Facebook users that were planning on attending the event. The Company's ability to move quickly paid off.

By tapping into the conversations and creating a space for festival attendees to connect, Carsurfing was able to facilitate over 800 rides to Burning Man, attracting its first customers and validating their "barely alpha" product at the same time.[43]

### 5. Create a Winning Content Experience Strategy

Our customers have changed the way they connect with brands. Traditional broadcast messaging is no longer effective on its own; content now drives our interactions. Our ability to tell great stories and design engaging experiences to catalyze customer connection is critical to our being invited into the customer experience journey. Storytelling is quite different from writing ad copy or press releases. It facilitates our prospects and customers finding themselves in our story and often includes tools that bring them into the experience.

Consider what McCormick is doing to engage its customers around spices, as shown in Figure 1.12. Understanding the truth in
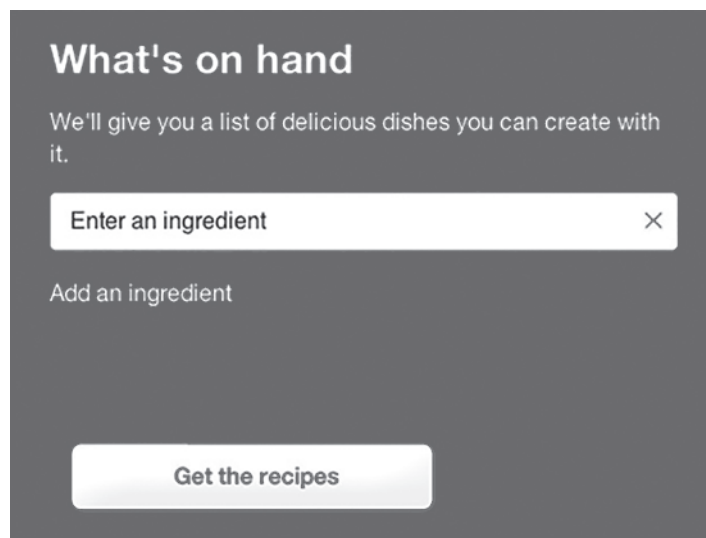


**Figure 1.12    McCormick Helps Customers Create Meals with Ingredients on Hand**

*Source:* **http://www.mccormick.com**

George Bernard Shaw's comment, "There is no love sincerer than the love of food," McCormick makes the world of flavors easily accessible to its customers. Cooks can plan their meals with the help of the company's website—even at the last minute—by simply inputting the food items and spices they have on hand. Acting like top chefs in a quick-fire challenge, McCormick generates recipes for a mouthwatering dinner.

To proactively design multiple menus around its customers' individualized food preferences, McCormick offers Flavorprint™. By filling out a simple digital survey, customers provide the necessary data to generate a footprint of their favorite flavors.[44] Based on this knowledge, McCormick recommends recipes that incorporate those flavors. Who knew that we would like Mojito Lime Grilled Lamb Chops and Smoky Montreal Steak Sauce Burgers? As cooks rate, search, and share recipes and products, Flavorprint™ gets smarter and more accurate with their taste bud preferences. All of McCormick's recipes and seasonings carry a FlavorPrint™ symbol that helps its customers make better selections even when they do not have access to these digital tools.

Understanding the power of peer-to-peer influence, McCormick encourages its customers to socialize their experiences and recipes in McCormick's multiple social environments including Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Each of these touchpoints offers McCormick and its customers an opportunity to get to know each other better and to share their solutions for leftovers, an abundance of zucchini, and a craving for cinnamon with a broader community.

## 6. Engage Customers via Social Communities

Social media has created virtual neighborhoods where our constituents spend an increasing amount of time. Ninety-one percent of online adults access social media at least once a month, and the average online adult spends 37 minutes on social media daily.[45] As a result, these networks and communities have become important touchpoints with our prospects and customers, often vital to cross-channel communication strategies. Conversations flow in

these environments and important insights can often be found. In many instances, these networks and communities are influencing the design, manufacture, packaging, delivery, and servicing of our products and services, putting our customers directly in the center of our organizations.

To successfully play in the social sphere, marketers need to be well versed in each community's individual culture and norms of engagement, and be clear about how to best participate. Prioritization is necessary given the sheer number of social spaces where we can have a presence. Engagement involves monitoring the conversation 24/7, actively managing our presence, generating appropriate content, distilling the insight, and sharing what we learn with our broader ecosystem.

In some instances we may choose to develop our own social communities. For example, through the branded social community IBM PartnerWorld, IBM offers a broad range of resources that help its business partners build, sell, and implement IBM-based solutions for their customers. Partners are able to take advantage of IBM programs like *Selling Through Social Insights*, which taps into the power of social listening to increase sales. Social Insights tracks data from over 280 million relevant social sources. The Social Insights dashboard synthesizes "who is talking" and "what is trending" in five strategic subject areas related to IBM products. Personalized recommendations for relevant content, combined with access to relevant IBM experts, provide rich resources for business partners to get up to speed on what is currently on their prospects' minds. Armed with this knowledge, business partners are better able to turn leads into sales.

### 7. *Maximize Marketing Effectiveness by Integrating Paid, Earned, and Owned Media*

During the past few years, much focus has been placed on the power of owned media—the content that marketers create. Content belongs at the center of any of our experience strategies—it creates

the customer experience journey. However, in many cases an integrated or converged strategy in which we combine our content with materials created by our customers (earned media) and amplify it with advertising (paid media) can maximize our impact.

Why is this the case? In a recommendation-based economy, earned media is paramount. It is what people find most credible. When we incorporate our customers' stories into our content, we are harnessing the most compelling advocates for our businesses: satisfied customers. New forms of paid media that draw from reservoirs of social media-derived customer data are creating unprecedented targeting opportunities, offering the promise of being able to reach our prospects and customers with highly relevant messaging in the channels they prefer.

A quick flip through a recent edition of *More* magazine, a magazine for "women of style and substance," illustrates this convergence via traditional media.[46] A two-page advertisement for L'Oréal's Visible Life CC Cream, features celebrity Andie MacDowell, who vouches for the color-correcting cream by saying, "No wonder it's my new best friend." On the adjacent page are before and after pictures of regular women who have experienced "the CC transformation," along with customer reviews from four happy users. Calls to action invite *More* readers to enter a contest to win samples of the product and to learn more about the cream on their website. Earned media (in the form of customer reviews) meets owned media (additional information about the product on their website) meets paid advertising (the ad itself).

## 8. Drive Sales with Intelligent Customer-Engagement Platforms

Our prospects and customers increasingly expect one-on-one contextualized interactions that reflect their behaviors and current situation–time, location, and device. Creating contextualized experiences is complex. It requires real-time capture of relevant customer data across channels and instantaneous application of predictive

analytics to proactively offer appropriate resources. While this is challenging to do for one person, imagine the complexity of delivering contextualized experiences at scale.

To scale one-to-one communication, marketers need integrated customer-engagement platforms that can steward our prospects and customers through the customer experience journey. Smart marketing automation systems can assess where individuals are in the customer experience journey and distribute content specifically selected for them. They also detect potential content redundancies, changes in cadence, and shifts in interest and priorities, based upon behaviors such as clicks, views, shares, time spent with materials and reflect, and adapts content streams accordingly. This means that our customers are only invited into experiences that have a high probability of meeting their needs, avoiding spam.

Marketing automation also allows us to trace the impact of each marketing interaction on our prospects' and customers' behavior, making it possible for us to continually assess and optimize our efforts, and to more accurately demonstrate marketings' contributions to key financial metrics. For many companies, marketing automation has also brought marketing and sales into closer alignment, helping to alleviate age-old conflicts.

## 9. Build Worthwhile Loyalty and Digital Couponing Programs

Brands can no longer feel certain about their customers' commitment. Loyalty erosion and customer defection are pervasive. Ironically, most loyalty programs do not do much to create loyalty. Although people enroll in the programs, the majority are not inspired to remain active. The best way to create loyalty is to ensure incredible brand satisfaction by creating remarkable customer experiences. For some companies, offering a loyalty program that enhances the customer experience can be a winning strategy.

Starbucks' loyalty program is leading the way. Designed to give its customers more of what they love—coffee—"My Starbucks Rewards"

grants free drinks and exclusive offers to customers based upon their usage. The first cross-channel loyalty program in the market, customers are rewarded for purchases made in Starbucks' shops as well as for Starbucks packaged coffee purchased in grocery stores.

The free mobile app automatically tracks and manages rewards, making participation in the program easy. The app also includes a scan-and-go purchase option, locates nearby Starbucks, and provides free downloads of new apps and music. One of our favorite features is the eGift, which makes it possible to send Starbucks' gift certificates to other loyalty members. Students love it when their parents send them a gift certificate for a fortified Red Eye during exams.

For some brands, a couponing strategy works well. A separate strategy from loyalty program offers, couponing may provide just the needed incentive to encourage potential customers to try, share, or act. Digital coupons and apps offer a faster and more convenient way for many customers to clip coupons.

Meijer, which operates groceries and superstores, offers its customers the opportunity to preview and select digital coupons and file them in their digital mPerks account, where they can be instantly redeemed at checkout. Their mobile app includes a find-it feature that makes it easy for customers to locate any item in the store.[47] The program enjoys a redemption rate of up to four times the national average.[48]

### 10. Ignite Customer-Centricity across the Organization

Customer-centricity requires a higher level of operational maturity than we have needed in the past, because multiple functions impact our customer experience. Acting like symphony conductors, marketers need to be able to collaborate across the entire business ecosystem to facilitate customer-centricity at every important touchpoint. This requires a realignment of efforts, the integrating of many processes and systems, and a shift in many of our organizations' culture. It is a tall order, but as we have seen, companies are rising to the challenge.

What is more, extraordinary value can be created when organizations move beyond their own borders to inspire customer-centricity throughout their larger ecosystems. By sharing end-user data and coordinating their efforts, an entire demand chain composed of manufacturers, retailers, and media companies can develop proprietary insights into demand. This enhanced, customer-oriented view creates unprecedented opportunity and competitive advantage for each partner and the network as a whole.

## What's Next?

Overwhelmed? Remember, marketers do not have to be experts in each of these areas. Being knowledgeable in these 10 essential skills will take us a long way toward career success. In the pages that follow, we invite you to explore each of these 10 marketing skills in a way that we hope is useful for new hires as well as for the most experienced marketers. Examples of how large and small companies are putting these skills to work bring them more fully to life. Suggestions for metrics to evaluate success are included, where applicable, and lists of resources accompany each chapter. Hopefully, in the pages that follow, we will convince you that it is, indeed, a great time to be a digital marketer.

### *Consumers, Prospects, Customers, and Constituents*

Throughout *The Digital Marketer*, we refer to consumers as prospects, customers, and constituents. This is intentional. By using the word *constituent*, we are challenging each of us to consider the needs and desires of the multiple stakeholders to which we are accountable—our prospects, customers, investors, regulators, employees, business partners, and more. We also hope to encourage thinking of our customers and prospects as more than transactions. This is not to imply that focusing on sales is not important. A business without revenue is not viable over the long term. A business that focuses exclusively on sales, however, is leaving far too much on

the table. In today's connected world, we believe that when you get the relationship right, most everything else—sales, loyalty, and advocacy—will follow.

As a result, throughout *The Digital Marketer* we refer to our lifetime of interactions with our customers as the customer experience journey, rather than the transaction-based consumer purchase journey. This reframing more accurately captures the richness of this more genuine and collaborative relationship.

Throughout *The Digital Marketer*, we often describe the experiences of Larry Weber and Lisa Leslie Henderson, the cowriters of this book. Larry is the CEO of Racepoint Global, an advanced marketing services firm. A globally known expert in public relations and marketing services, Larry has successfully built companies and brands and is passionate about the future of marketing. Lisa is an observer, synthesizer, and writer who draws extensively from her background in marketing and consulting. Lisa and Larry have collaborated on two books to date, *The Digital Marketer*, and *Everywhere: Comprehensive Strategy for the Social Media Era*. To stay current on their thinking, frequent www.racepoint.com/thedigitalmarketer and follow them at @TheLarryWeber and @ljlhendo.

In the following chapter we consider how companies are responding to the customer-centric era.

---

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Reflect on a recent experience in which you were the customer. What worked well? What needed to be improved? If you were in charge of improving the customer experience, what would you recommend?

- How important is the customer's experience in your industry? To your company? How well are you delivering? How do you know?

- How would your customers describe the essential Drivers of your brand experience, the make-it-or-break-it features?

- Which of the 10 essential skills do you want to further develop?

- What is your next step?

## RESOURCES

### Influencers We Recommend

- *Linda Boff*. As executive director of global digital marketing for General Electric (GE), Boff is the leader of the company's digital-marketing and global-advertising efforts. A self-proclaimed lover of modern art and *Mad Men* enthusiast, you can follow Boff on Twitter @lindaboff.

- *Chip Conley*. Founder and former CEO of Joie de Vivre Hospitality, Conley is a writer and thought leader in creating meaningful customer experiences. His titles include *Marketing That Matters* and *Peak*. Connect with Conley at www.chipconley.com and on Twitter @chipconley.

- *David Edelman*. Coleader of the Digital Marketing Strategy Group at McKinsey & Co., Edelman works across industries to understand the implications of the ever-evolving digital environment on organizations. A Top-5 LinkedIn Influencer, Edelman is a frequent contributor to *Forbes*, *The Economist*, and *Harvard Business Review* blog. Follow him on Twitter at @davidedelman and on McKinsey's *Latest Thinking* blog: www.cmsoforum.mckinsey.com.

- *Seth Godin*. Best-selling author, entrepreneur, and marketer, Godin writes about "the post-industrial revolution,

the way ideas spread, marketing, quitting, leadership and most of all, changing everything."[49] Read his latest thoughts, by literally clicking on the image of his head at www.sethgodin.com or follow him on Twitter @thisissethsblog.

- *Harley Manning*. Research director in the Customer Experience practice at Forrester Research, Manning is the coauthor of *Outside In* with Kerry Bodine. Learn the latest on what Forrester is uncovering in customer experience on his blog at www.blogs.forrester.com/harley_manning or on Twitter @hmanning.

- *Scott Monty*. Scott Monty, the global head of social media for Ford Motor Company, writes *The Social Media Marketing Blog*. Monty describes this personal blog as a "series of links about current events and trends in the worlds of technology, social media, mobile, communications, and marketing in order to keep the wider team up to date on the changes, newsworthy items, and content that might be useful in their jobs."[50] Find Monty at www.ScottMonty.com and follow him on Twitter at @Scott Monty.

- *Dharmesh Shah*. Cofounder and chief technology officer of HubSpot, an inbound software company, Shah is a serial entrepreneur, having built and shipped at least 10 commercial products across a variety of start-ups. He is the coauthor of *Inbound Marketing: Getting Found Using Google, Social Media, and Blogs*. Follow Shah on Twitter @dharmesh and read his contributions to www.onstartups.com.


**Hashtags to Explore**

- #customerexperience
- #cx (customer experience)

(*continued*)

*(continued)*

- #digital
- #digitalmarketing
- #marketing
- #mktg (marketing)
- #UX (customer experience)