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SOUNDINGS

DAILY NEWS FOR MARINE INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

Menu

[TradeOnlyToday](#) > [Columns & Blogs](#) > [Marketing Insight](#) > Is your marketing IQ stuck in analog?

Is your marketing IQ stuck in analog?

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7

6



How would you score your marketing IQ?

Are you still operating as you did 10, five or even three years ago, or are you plugged in to the latest marketing strategies? Does your marketing team have a solid working knowledge of the technologies, tools and opportunities now available?

Anyone who has followed this column knows I'm a devoted student of marketing and lover of knowledge. One of my early industry mentors, the late Paul Kuck of Regal Boats, instilled in me early in my career the importance of continuous professional development. He regularly gifted the entire management team with best-selling business books, accompanied by lively conversations and debate. I miss those days and exchanges. I learned and grew much as a result of his inspired tutelage.

I have been honing my craft now for more than 35 years. I'll be the first to admit it's not easy these days — in fact, it's downright challenging. Marketers today operate at lightning speed in a feverish, fast-changing world, and most of us wear multiple hats. I believe my colleagues would agree it's often exhausting trying to keep up with it all.

As we gain expertise on a new platform or front, boom! Overnight, it seems, what we've just mastered becomes upgraded or replaced with newer, faster and better strategies or technologies. Just like that, we're back at square one.

Nevertheless, I've always heeded the advice of my mentor and advocated continuing education and professional development. I'm always hunting for the next great marketing read or best-practices white papers or signing up for a webinar, or watching a YouTube tutorial or accessing content in any number of places that is relevant to my work. I also make it a practice to talk business with colleagues, within and outside the industry, to discover what's new and working.

Staying on the leading edge of marketing change and development is more than a smart strategy — it's a necessity. I've tasked marketing departments and agency teams over dozens of years to engage in educational initiatives that are designed to keep each of us current. It's perhaps no surprise that one of the characteristics I most value in other marketers and prospective employees is a bone-deep passion for learning and professional growth.

In a recent online search I conducted to analyze the latest marketing trends, I discovered a well written, highly insightful feature story published by Angela Stringfellow in All Things Productivity. Her piece included brief excerpts from 72 global digital marketing experts who cited their respective opinions about top digital trends of the year. These dynamic thought leaders were plucked from a wide range of marketing and agency disciplines, each providing unique perspectives and priorities. As is typical, I experienced a few heady aha! moments while absorbing a palette of stimulating ideas and concepts.

I've earmarked 21 marketing buzzwords here that capture the essence of these top digital trends. Do you know what these terms mean and why many marketers consider them to be the top digital initiatives of 2016?

For fun and introspection, test yourself and define the following marketing terms, tools, platforms and practices to gauge the status of your own current digital marketing intelligence and proficiency.

Micro moments

Content distribution networks

Instant articles

Accelerated mobile pages

UGC and quickly digestible content

Link building

Native advertising

Online reputation

Mobile video

Retargeting

Influencer marketing

Ad blocking

Vlogs and vloggers

Snapchat

Instagram

Pinterest

Personalized UX

Facebook Live, Periscope and Meerkat

Footfall attribution

Brand intimacy

BLE beacons

If you scored 100 percent and are totally familiar with each of these buzzwords, bravo: You're on top of your game. If you knew fewer than half and you're involved in marketing for your company, let this simple test serve as a wake-up call. I encourage you to invest in your own ongoing marketing education.

Besides encouraging individuals, I also would recommend that employers grasp the importance of supporting their marketing staff members by investing in and providing opportunities for growth and education. Suggestion: The industry's MDCE meeting every year is a great hub for top-quality educational training in sales, marketing and service. MRAA vice president Liz Walz does a tremendous job of lining up speakers and best-practice panelists and pairing them with trending topics that are relevant to our world. Local colleges and professional marketing or advertising associations are also prime providers of educational programming.

In regard to the top digital practices cited for 2016, I don't have the space in this column to summarize or explain each that made the cut, nor was that my intention. If there are terms, however, that you don't know, start your search and let the learning begin.

I have chosen, however, to comment on a few of the terms that rose to the top of the rankings.

First, although UGC is not a new concept by any stretch, it has nudged to the top of the leader board for many digital marketers. UGC is an acronym for user-generated content, which refers to everything from blogs to social media posts, chats, videos, forum chatter, tweets, digital images, podcasts and more.

Anyone operating in the digital space (and who isn't?) understands that in today's saturated marketplace, content remains king, queen and the royal family all rolled into one. To be relevant, boating businesses should invest significantly in content development strategies in all of their applications, including those that tap and propel customer contributions.

A second content characteristic noted in the trending survey was the need for quick, easily digestible content. With the widespread use of smartphone video technology, coupled with the public's trust and acceptance of non-commercialized packaging, it's easier and more cost-effective than ever to get the job done. Video is a powerful weapon in today's marketing arsenal, and boating industry marketers would be wise to incorporate it as often as possible.

Who owns this critical role for your company? Who is your best and brightest storyteller? You may have to go outside to tap a qualified content producer. Besides simply writing and publishing content on a variety of platforms, you really need someone who is well versed and experienced to develop the overall content strategy.

Another term, micro moments, refers to an emerging consumer behavior exhibited by prospects who demonstrate their intent during the buying journey.

An example? Let's say Mr. Jones is visiting the boat show, and while heading to the gate he turns to his smartphone and searches the show not for a particular brand, but for center consoles.

Or, say I'm visiting a new city and looking for a Mexican restaurant. Or a spa. Or whatever.

A company's ability to immediately capture and access customers in real-time micro moments while they are hot in the hunt is critical. Technology to directly address micro moments is turning heads and commanding the attention of marketers today.

Influencer marketing is my personal top strategy for this year and next. In case you're baffled by the term, it's all about how you engage, embrace and empower your most loyal customers and turn them into brand champions who are able to exert a positive influence on prospective buyers.

My marketing department at Freedom Boat Club is studying and applying many of the principles found in the marketing classic by the late Marc Gobe, titled "Emotional Branding." It's one of my all-time favorite, dog-eared marketing books. Gobe's skillful explanation of "sneezers" — alias key influencers — and their exceptional value to a brand deserves in-depth study and development. I believe too many companies and marketers either fail to harness the considerable power of key influencers or mistakenly try to control their organic conversations and activities.

Influencer marketing should be a top strategy for all boating businesses. It not only helps to distinguish your product and/or service from others as your champions tell your story from their personal perspective, but it also helps immensely to counter any negative content that may be lurking in cyberspace. This reveals another winning strategy involved in reputation management, also cited among the top digital trends.

Brand intimacy is a highly desirable digital strategy that I endorse and make every effort to achieve. It's an area that requires continued collaboration and nurturing from all corners of your business.

How does your company develop intimate relations with your customers that can truly transcend the sale? Brand intimacy entails all of the activities that create an authentic bond between customers and their brand of choice.

How is your company faring on the brand intimacy front? Do your customers enthusiastically embrace your brand? Do you have any idea?

I hope that sharing some of these digital strategies have piqued your interest and convinced you of the need to dig in to the wealth of good marketing materials and educational opportunities available.

One thing I can promise, with certainty: If you don't immerse yourself in the latest marketing opportunities and keep your finger on the pulse of change, your business will eventually suffer the consequences. Now is the time to take control and throttle forward or be left behind in the wake.

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