



Marketing 2010: Who's in Control?

Dramatic Changes in Customer Buying Habits Force a Major Marketing Reset

In the last five years, changes in economic, technological and social climates have brought about unique challenges and opportunities in marketing, including:

- 1. Tight budgets are stimulating marketing innovation.** The recession and slow recovery not only forced budget cuts, but at the same time also motivated marketers to learn how to work and live with less and to be more creative in how they spend.
- 2. Technology is becoming even more integral to performance.** Marketers are learning to leverage technology to gain a business advantage and measure its results. We're taking the time to analyze the value each system can deliver. Sure, we've always said we could/should measure, but now it's routine.
- 3. Online efforts are causing fear, uncertainty and doubt.** We've been told that the more we connect, the more visible we become, and the more visible we become, good things will happen. Results. Recognition. In some cases, such as with social media, we're still trying to understand how these methods and their associated metrics support sales and lead to revenue.

At no time in history have we, as marketers and sellers, seen such a far-reaching shift...not only in how we market our products/solutions, but in how we sell them, as well. We must rethink how we reach out to customers and revamp how we activate our sales teams to carry business to close. Conversations take on new meaning as we start them digitally and transition them to salespeople with seamless hand-off. Thought leadership is no longer an isolated activity but part of core messaging that is infused in every aspect of marketing and selling.

Without warning or a path to follow, we've moved into a new business model where *the customer is in control of the buying cycle*, completely changing the rules on when and how we engage.

Further, the International Data Corporation (IDC) Executive Advisory Group forecasts that global marketing expenses — despite ever-tightening budgets — will still outpace worldwide IT spending rates in 2010, motivating tech marketing executives to drive efficiencies through smarter sales and marketing alignment programs, including sales enablement, content audits and campaign-driven go-to-market programs.

These changes have affected us all. So much so that organizations such as our own — which has always been dedicated to helping companies maximize buyer and seller interactions — must uncover the opportunities that result from this evolution. We must study them and create strategies that our clients can use to improve their own program performance. As always, we need to keep our clients and colleagues three steps ahead of everyone else.

Launch International's Integrated Enablement Marketing™ methodology — which helps companies align their marketing programs to their actual sales processes — has therefore been updated to consider these shifts and changes in buyer and seller behavior (Figure 1). This paper shares the proof needed to make the adjustments in your marketing programs required for better results in a new marketing era.

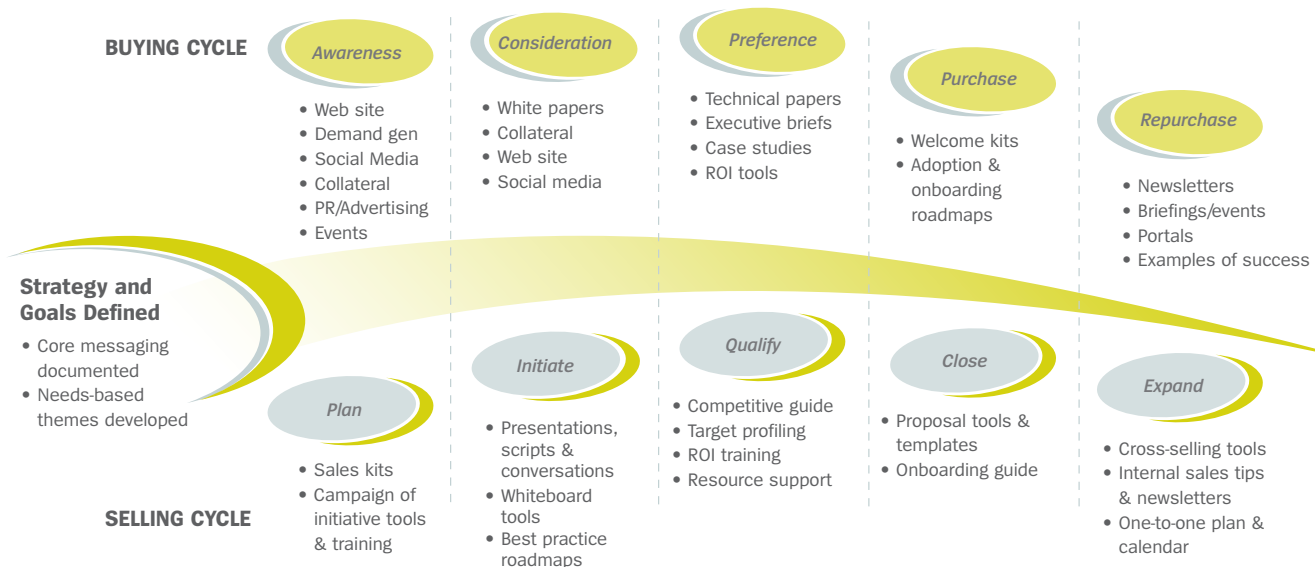


Figure 1: Launch's Integrated Enablement Marketing process with examples of tools that may be appropriate during buying and selling cycles.

Messaging and Content Development

Messaging is at the core of all marketing efforts. We've always believed that, and there finally seems to be a tremendous amount of media hype about the value of the messages your company produces. But, many companies remain at a loss about how to build them, and even more fall short in how to carry those messages into their respective markets. In fact, Corporate Visions Inc., in its *2009 Sales Messaging Report*, asserted that only 38% of survey respondents believed that their company's message stands out in the marketplace.

So where do solid messages come from? In an industry where total solution selling makes everyone look freakishly similar, how do you build value propositions and related content that truly resonate with target audiences? It requires two parts persona, one part creative genius.

Truly understanding the challenges and needs of your target audiences, and then defining and building profiles or "personas," helps marketers create conversations that are timely and relevant (Figure 2). The result is a much stronger focus on how and what type of content is subsequently created — with an eye toward making it easy to consume and highly reusable. Copywriting is easy. Content development is not. Creative genius is built upon a foundation of business acumen, industry/technology expertise and writer sensibilities.

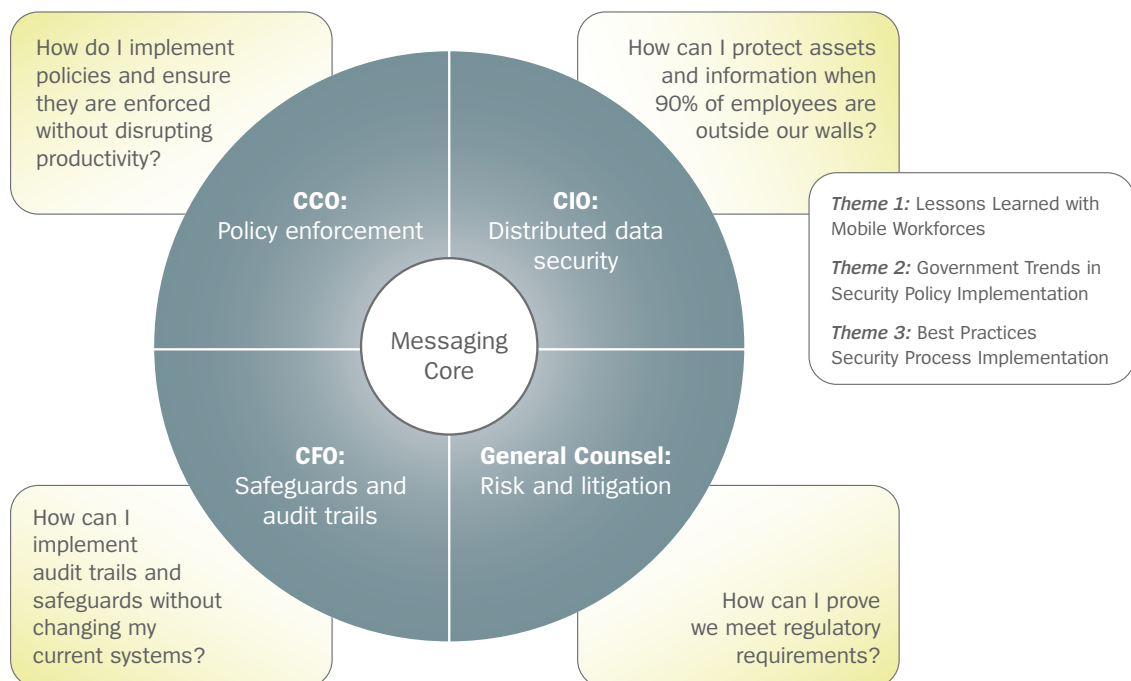


Figure 2: Examples of mapping audience needs to messages and themes.

What's new and different about this?

For the first time ever, executives in and outside of marketing departments are realizing that content is strategic and has measurable value to an organization in terms of its role in nurturing customers and prospects toward spending. This has forced marketers to rethink how content is developed, managed and kept current and relevant — *a challenge that has nothing to do with the technology it sits on or the technology used to distribute it*. Indeed, the core issue is the quality and value of the content itself.

Are you on track?

Be sure your core and needs-based messages are aligned with your company's strategic initiatives and revenue objectives prior to any campaign development. Document all messages and show how they are mapped to specific content assets across buying/selling cycles.

Changes in the Buying Cycle

According to Marketing Sherpa's *2008 Technology Benchmark Study*, 80% of buyers think they found their vendor, versus the vendor finding them. And, the same study identified that 80% of technology buyers had a specific problem to solve and went looking for a supplier. These statistics represent real changes in buyer behavior and allude to the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, your company's first introduction to a customer is electronic, and you're competing against Google and TechWeb for mindshare.

In the past, marketing organizations spent significant amounts of money — as much as 75% — on basic awareness activities, such as advertising. Today, however, savvy buyers are searching for white papers, reading blogs and leveraging a variety of other social media outlets to proactively find products that meet their needs. And not only do they find the products, they spend time researching everything about them — *including feedback from other users*. Buyer self education blinds marketers from behavioral studies unless they can track electronic performance.

We've moved into a new business model where the customer is in control of the buying cycle.

In the last year alone, there has been a substantial shift in spending from awareness to the consideration and preference stages and beyond to customer retention, causing a reduction in awareness spending to less than a third of the overall budget. By balancing budgets across the entire buying cycle and investing in high-impact, high-value content assets, marketers support the sales process longer by carrying prospects further along the cycle.

In fact, according to Eccolo Media's *2009 B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report*, white papers (consideration stage) are the most influential form of collateral for technology buyers. The second was brochures (awareness stage) and then case studies (preference stage). Interestingly, the three most important tools balance the three key buying stages of awareness, consideration and preference.

Turning well-honed persona- and need-based messages into creative deliverables across the buying cycle helps to ensure that customers and prospects are hearing from you consistently and with information that is relevant.

What's new and different about this?

Marketing organizations traditionally don't define specific content assets allocated to consideration or preference stages in a buying cycle. In fact, in many organizations we serve, nobody really knows who owns thought leadership assets, such as white papers and executive briefs. Many of them were developed reactively as part of a specific campaign effort. To be successful moving forward, marketers must define a more robust set of messages, from core definitions through needs-based "hooks" for thought leadership, at program onset to ensure proper usage and placement across the entire purchase and repurchase process.

Are you on track?

Be sure your awareness activities (PR, demand gen, web content, blogs and tweets) leverage the value of your needs-based messages. Are consideration/preference assets defined as a reactive afterthought or part of your launch program? Can you create modularity across assets so they can be easily updated, modified and reused?

Changes to the Selling Cycle

The evolution of buyer behavior forces us to relook at how and when sales organizations engage with prospects, and what kinds of tools are appropriate to carry them to a closed sale.

There are some interesting facts floating around the industry about the marketing/sales disconnect. First, according to a recent study by Sirius Decisions, 82% of surveyed executives claim that their sales reps are unprepared for meetings. Yet, according to Forrester Research & IDC Sales Advisory Service, the average salesperson spends seven hours per week looking for relevant information to prepare for a sales call and, in their opinion, only 10 percent is “made available in a useful format.” Further, the American Marketing Association (AMA) reports that as much as 80% of marketing content goes unused by sales.

It's clear that the long-standing challenge of giving the sales force meaningful information in a way that's easy to access and use remains a high priority. And, while many organizations have looked at automated solutions to solve “the content access problem,” too few have focused on the quality of the information itself. *What goes in comes back out. And if it's not right, the result is an underproductive sales team.*

Since marketers are nurturing prospects further along the buying cycle, they must determine the point at which the relationship needs to be carried forward by sales, and empower customer-facing individuals to step in with a continuation of the same value-based story. That means creating a process that integrates technology and humans, synchronized with the same themes and goals. When that happens, performance is harmonious, and everyone's efforts support one common strategy. Bottom line, if salespeople cannot bring more value to “the conversation” or interaction than what is available online, there is no purpose to the engagement and the customer will not engage.

Content management applications do not solve the content quality problem.

What's new and different about this?

Gone are the days when prospects download a white paper that their salesperson has never seen. Gone are the days when salespeople are unprepared to talk about business problems as easily as the products and services they represent. Successful marketers realize the path to revenue is being able to document an integrated course to customers and prospects that balances electronic and human (sales) activities, and where each is provided with the proper assets to reach their intended purposes. Marketing content is no substitute for sales aids and therefore a specialized, yet complementary, set of assets, such as sales guides and whiteboards or conversation tools, is required.

Are you on track?

Be sure the content or tools you're providing your sales organization are relevant to where they are in the selling process and aligned with your messaging strategy. Do you know which assets are most valuable to sales, and are all assets current? Is your access to sales for information distribution as agile as required in this new era?

See the Signs of Change — and Adapt

Forces beyond our control have transformed the business landscape. Whether you point to a tumultuous economy and budgets shrinking in its wake, or the confusion and uncertainty swirling around the growing giant that is social media, the signs of change are everywhere. The question is, how do we, as marketers and sellers, not only survive, but thrive in this new world?

We must rethink how we market and sell in today's environment. We must create core messaging that feeds unique and authoritative thought leadership. We must position strategic content to meet prospective customers halfway and immediately engage them — because they'll find us before we find them. And finally, we must enable our salespeople with compelling materials, such as whiteboards and conversation tools, that they can use to drive prospects through the sales cycle. In a business model where the customer has taken control of the buying cycle, it's up to us to adapt and capture the opportunities this evolution has created.

More Quick Tips for Your Marketing Reset

1. RECOGNIZE THAT TIMES HAVE CHANGED.

Think about the evolution of your own marketing organization over the last one to three years, including changes you've made to your marketing mix, how you engage with prospects and how you are integrating with sales organizations. Recognize that evolution requires a different baseline of tools than you created even three short years ago.

2. REASSESS YOUR MESSAGING ARCHITECTURE.

One thing that is fairly inconsistent across organizations is when, where and how core messages are documented. At a minimum, standardization is essential. Further, there must be a well-defined model for creating the content quality and depth required for differentiation in your market space. That includes defining profiles and personas and identifying need-based messages and themes that can be carried across buying and selling cycles.

3. TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT YOUR CONTENT AND DELIVERABLE REQUIREMENTS.

Map content assets across both buying and selling cycles to identify excess and shortages. It's likely you'll discover that, despite a healthy volume of assets, many contain messages that are off or not as relevant as they could be. Take the time to modify and improve assets that exist, and clearly define the assets you're missing. Make sure whatever assets are developed are on-target and modular, so they can be easily updated or removed based on need. Most importantly, eliminate any on-line assets, including blogs, tweets and campaign activity, that aren't completely aligned with your messaging strategy. Instead of carrying a prospect along, you'll be creating confusion and contributing to the clutter.

4. SCHEDULE FREQUENT REVIEWS.

Three years ago, we never would have predicted the marketing landscape would look as it does today. Three years from now, it will be vastly different again. So, waiting three years for a reset will have you at the bottom of the competitive heap. Plan for change.

About Launch International

Located in suburban Philadelphia, Launch International is a WBENC-certified strategic marketing and sales enablement company dedicated to building the high-value content and associated deliverables that help salespeople sell faster and customers buy smarter. By balancing strategy and execution, the company is able to define and develop "right time, right place" tools that can accelerate buying and selling cycles.