

Asia-Pacific Marketers Face Hurdles in Meeting Strategic Goals

Amid rampant change in buying behavior, marketers work to overcome obstacles to customer engagement.

BY LAUREN GIBBONS PAUL

Social media, smartphones, the mobile Web, always-on access to information—these influences are changing the traditional relationship between businesses and customers. With more knowledgeable and digitally connected consumers, organizations the world over are pressured to meet increased customer expectations, provide a consistent experience across all channels of interaction (mobile, Web, bricks-and-mortar, social, call center, etc.) and turn their vast amounts of structured

Methodology

LinkedIn and **SAP** launched a global survey in fall 2013 to study the views of marketing executives in Australia/New Zealand and India.

A total of 1,640 respondents from the following regions were surveyed:

- **Australia/New Zealand:**
462 respondents
- **India:** 1,178 respondents

Their titles included:

CXO
Vice President
Engineer
Business Owner

and unstructured data into insights that enable personalized customer engagement.

These disruptive changes can be an opportunity to elevate the marketing function to a strategic role in helping businesses meet customer expectations in a digital world. But first, marketers need to secure a place at the leadership table, says Katharine Schäffli, director of Marketing Society, Asia, and clear away other organizational and technological obstacles. The Marketing Society plans to launch a chapter in Hong Kong to inspire bolder marketing leadership in Asia.

In a recent LinkedIn poll of senior marketers in Australia/New Zealand and India, respondents revealed their top-of-mind concerns in fulfilling the marketing role. Here is what the poll found:

■ **Too much complexity.** It is no wonder that senior marketers—43 percent of poll respondents from India—are feeling overwhelmed (see Figure 1, “In India, Marketers Grapple with Complexity, Seek Holistic Customer View”). Today’s digital consumers are more empowered than ever, and they expect to get what they want, when they want it and at the best price. Additionally, they have a powerful way of expressing their dissatisfaction—and delight—through social media posts, blogs, tweets and other online commentary. Marketers can gain insight into customer trends, as well as perceptions of their products and services, by using social listening tools that help monitor and analyze social commentary. Additionally,

In India, Marketers Grapple with Complexity, Seek Holistic Customer View

Too much change and siloed systems are top concerns for marketers in this region.

Too much complexity and change



Siloed view of the customer



Orchestration across the company



Staff turnover



FIGURE 1 Base: 1,178 respondents
Source: LinkedIn Poll

they can blend these insights with other structured and unstructured data that either resides on internal systems or is available from third parties.

Though coping with complexity was the top concern of Indian marketers, one respondent struck a different note, saying the flood of online information makes it much easier to glean insights into customer desires. “If anything, the customer is ‘simpler’ today,” he wrote. “She tells you what she wants through a plethora of social media posts; she allows you to track her and customize promos for her through geo-tagging and virtual media.” The problem, he concluded, is outmoded business models and associated practices more so than complexity.

■ **Siloed customer view.** For poll respondents in Australia/New Zealand, the top concern was the lack of a holistic view of customers due to isolated technology systems, or silos, and a lack of collaboration among business functions (see Figure 2, “In Australia/New Zealand, Marketers Seek Holistic View of Customers, Collaboration”). One-quarter of respondents from India also cited this concern. This is hardly a surprise, as many companies across all major markets still struggle to create a 360-degree customer view that incorporates data across all touchpoints. With siloes still mostly

intact, the challenge is twofold: providing consistent service and information across channels, and extracting relevant customer data and integrating it in one place to discover insights through analytics.

Customer-facing processes also need to be harmonized across channels, to avoid confusing or even alienating customers. The task is great, wrote one Australia/New Zealand poll respondent. “Creating a single customer view and influencing a multi-faceted business to develop that view operationally is an enormous challenge. But it’s a worthwhile mission.”

As another respondent from India put it, “Multiple customer touchpoints and increased transactions have pushed us into compartmental modes where our view of a customer is siloed and varies from touchpoint to touchpoint. This makes it harder for marketers to create one true profile on customers, thereby making the planning of targeted marketing initiatives difficult.”

It is no wonder, then, that in a study last year by Bloomberg Businessweek Research Services organizations said it was extremely important between 2012 and 2014 to integrate existing data and systems and to invest in analytics tools to gain new insights and a complete view of customers and inventory.

■ **Orchestration across the company.** Marketers also expressed concern about their ability to collaborate and stay on the same page with other business functions across the company. Without a mechanism for automatically orchestrating cross-functional processes company-wide, it is difficult for marketing to support omni-channel commerce. And senior marketers also cannot hope to extract critical insights from big data without the help and support of the organization’s top IT executives. Companies from Australia/New Zealand are addressing this issue, with nearly one-third of respondents from this region citing orchestration as a concern. “My biggest concern is orchestrating the customers’ experience of the brand across all interaction channels,” commented one respondent. In India, 16 percent of respondents noted this concern.

■ **Staff turnover and human capital management issues.** Achieving a more strategic role within the

“Creating a single customer view and influencing a multi-faceted business to develop that view operationally is an enormous challenge. But it’s a worthwhile mission,” said one Australia/New Zealand poll respondent.

In Australia/New Zealand, Marketers Seek Holistic View of Customers, Collaboration

Siloed systems and lack of orchestration are top concerns for marketers in this region.

Siloed view of the customer



Orchestration across the company



Too much complexity and change



Staff turnover



FIGURE 2 Base: 462 respondents
Source: LinkedIn Poll

organization is clearly not possible with high turnover rates, and that is the worry of some respondents in Australia/New Zealand and India—12 percent and 14 percent, respectively. Marketing organizations can maximize their workforce performance by boosting and sharpening their talent management strategies, including recruiting, onboarding, learning and performance management, and succession planning.

One respondent from Australia/New Zealand voiced the concern that inadequacies in corporate culture play a role in high staff turnover rates and expressed the need for “more open leadership, transparency and a culture that values employees (like Southwest Airlines) and encourages innovation by removing the fear.” Meanwhile, a respondent from India felt the fault lies more with individuals. “Industries suffer from so-called professionally qualified manpower, people who believe hopping jobs will take them to the top,” he wrote.

Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, today’s senior marketers share the curse of living in interesting times. As they strive to be viewed as a strategic function within the organization, marketers are also juggling increasing complexity and the siloed mentality that is a holdover from a former way of doing business. Stepping up to the task of meeting new customer expectations will require people, systems and processes working in concert toward the goal of making customers happy. ■

Lauren Gibbons Paul has written extensively on customer relationship management and customer experience management for more than 15 years.

This research project was funded by a grant from SAP.