



Does Your Marketing Dashboard Pass These Three Tests?

By Laura Patterson, President, VisionEdge Marketing

In reviewing a number of marketing dashboards, it's clear there are online metrics abound – from website metrics such as site visits, page views, open rates and click-throughs, to social media metrics such as fans, followers, likes and online rankings such as MOZ and Klout. Some companies are exploring ways to link online activity to the pipeline such as visit-to-conversion or engagement-to-conversion ratios. While all of these may be helpful, the buying process in the B2B world is often long and complex. Buyers may follow you and visit your site numerous times before making a purchase. As a result, you need to focus on metrics beyond traditional conversion models.

It is quite possible that early visits are a part of the evaluation and consideration phases and a precursor to action. As a result, companies should consider expanding online metrics beyond visitor-conversions, to metrics that connect online behavior with how well you've created preference and consideration in the buying phase. This will require research and A/B testing to track which areas of your online communication efforts best support your customers buying process.

The key is to develop a way to understand how customer online behavior impacts the buying process. The more you can connect online behavior that relates to engagement, experience, consideration, preference, and consumption, the more likely you'll be able to increase profitable sales. There are three areas to monitor and measure.

A. *Experience:* In today's environment, face-to-face contact with a customer may come later rather than sooner. Customers use a number of online experiences when considering a company to give their business. These experiences include those you can control – your website, your blog, your emails, and those you cannot control – reviews, comments, and tweets. Therefore, the more ways we can monitor and measure experience and create opportunities to help customers with critical steps in the buying decision, the better. These critical steps are often decision points in the buying process. Focus on creating a positive experience for those steps or decision points in your customers buying process, especially those that will help them decide to actually reach out and engage in a voice or face-to-face conversation. Tie online experience metrics to cost of sale and time to purchase.

B. *Convenience:* Everyone is busy. Convenience has become table stakes. In the B2B world, it's common for customers to need something that's not "off the shelf" or additional components to complete the product. Explore ways to make these options and components easy to find on your website and more convenient to buy. Tie convenience to average order value.

C. *Differentiation:* It important to present product information as clearly as possible. Customers expect to learn about products, features, and benefits through text, photography, and video. Consider how can make it possible for customers to experience the product/service online and for this experience to resemble the actual product. Tie time to purchase, rate of customer acquisition, and preference to behaviors connected to your differentiation efforts.

By monitoring experience, convenience, and differentiation, you will start to craft a much more omnipotent view of your online presence and thus the effectiveness of your online campaigns. Since we are measuring customer behavior, it is important to match these metrics with your perception of the customer experience. Although it is sometimes hard to put yourself in the customer's shoes unbiasedly, peers and colleagues can be an extremely useful devil's advocate. As we have come to realize in the past decade, almost anything is quantifiable. With this realization comes the next: Numbers rarely lie.

Laura Patterson I @LauraVEM

President and Founder, VisionEdge Marketing

Want to prove and improve the value of your marketing? For 20+ years, Laura has been helping CEOs and Marketing Executives at companies such as Cisco, Elsevier, ING, Intel, Kennametal, and Southwest Airlines do just that. She was an early advocate of using marketing data, processes, automation, metrics, and dashboards to link marketing initiatives and investments to business outcomes. She's an experience practitioner with an extensive marketing and sales career in the financial services and technology industries. Laura has authored three books on marketing performance management, including the most recent: *Metrics in Action: Creating a Performance Driven Marketing Organization*. You can see Laura in action online at *Marketing Made Simple*, *MarketingProfs*, and *Software Advice*.

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