



## **Managing Marketing Content Across the Customer Lifecycle**

By Laura Patterson, President

Considering our purpose as marketers, we should be placing customers at the center of our marketing efforts. That's truer today than ever before, because customers have more choices, more control, more ways to connect, and more access information.

No wonder marketers everywhere are scrambling to develop content and make use of the myriad of channels to reach and connect with prospects and customers.

Many marketers have gotten so caught up in the creation of content, however, that they have forgotten how important it is to match marketing content with the customer buying journey and lifecycle. Content delivered in the right channel at the wrong time can be a wasted touch point.

Too few marketers have mapped their customer's buying journey and moved from profiles to personas, and therefore few clearly understand their customer's lifecycle.

Because keeping a customer is more cost effective and profitable than acquire a new customer, knowing both the buying journey and the customer lifecycle is important.

### **The Customer Lifecycle**

One common definition of customer lifecycle is "the progression of steps a customer goes through when considering, purchasing, using, and maintaining loyalty to a product or service." The key point is to recognize that the lifecycle defines an ongoing relationship and continuous dialogue.

Forrester defines the customer lifecycle as follows: "The customers' relationship with a brand as they continue to discover new options, explore their needs, make purchases, and engage with the

product experience and their peers." In our company, we talk about the Six Cs associated with this process:

1. Contact
2. Connection
3. Conversation
4. Consideration
5. Consumption
6. Community

Whether you use this approach or another, the premise of the customer lifecycle is the same: Capture potential and existing customers' attention, preference, purchase, and loyalty.

As marketers, we can and should use the customer lifecycle as the basis for every marketing investment decision we make that's designed to acquire, retain, upsell, cross-sell, and create customer advocates. Only by understanding the customer lifecycle can marketers make better decisions about the additional marketing investments of time, people, and cash on customer-targeted efforts.

### **Content and Lifecycle**

The purpose of content marketing is to deliver high-quality, relevant, and valuable information to prospects and customers in the right channel at the right time to drive profitable customer action.

Content marketing is not the same as running a campaign. Content marketing looks more like publishing, where you serve as the architect of useful and compelling information that will inform, educate, engage, and entertain customers and prospects. Content marketing is part of the marketing mix, not a substitute for it.

If you serve more than one market or region, and your product requires a consultative approach, you will likely have multiple customers and will therefore need to map content to multiple buying journeys and lifecycles.

Perhaps the following examples will help bring this point home.

Let's say you currently market and sell a technology product to IT buyers and decision-makers in the federal government. Your research suggests that there may be a strong growth opportunity in the Emergency 911 system—a quasi-governmental system. If you didn't map the customer buying journey, you might assume that the buying process for the Emergency System was the same as for any other government agency. And you might also assume that the profile of the IT buyer at these sites would be the same as the IT buyer at the agency. Only by mapping the buying process would you learn that these are two very different personas and two different buying processes with different marketing content implications. Whitepapers and tradeshow events may be far more important in the early stages of the government-agency buying process, whereas webinars and videos of the system in use are more important in the early stages of the buying process for the emergency services sites.

How can we record this process when most customer buying journeys and lifecycles are not linear? Though it is impossible to completely capture and monitor the entire buying journey and decision, mapping the process helps you capture channel preferences and interactions. You may not be able to know exactly which colleague, analyst, online and offline channels a customer used, or which publication informed the decision, but mapping the buying journey and customer lifecycle will give you insight into when and how they are influenced.

### **Mapping the Journey and Lifecycle**

The approaches to mapping differ. Regardless of the approach you take, you should include input from all internal people who are in contact with customers (Sales, Marketing, Customer Service, and Product Marketing) as well as input from the customers themselves. The mapping process should take into account the following:

- Initial triggers that lead to first contact
- Steps they take (industry reports, product reports and reviews, whitepapers, demos, etc.) and the conversations (analysts, colleagues, event encounters, call centers, salespeople, etc.) they engage in to solve their problem and find a specific solution
- Steps and experiences leading up to their purchase (the RFP, reference calls, pilots, etc.)
- Steps associated with the purchase and consumption (the onboarding process, purchasing processes, implementation, invoicing, etc.)

- Ongoing experience and reaction to their purchase (problem resolution process, new product offers, community participation opportunities, etc.)

Once you've mapped the process and organized each step into the appropriate stage, you can begin to match marketing content with the buying process and lifecycle.

Two important benefits of the mapping initiative are improved Marketing and Sales alignment and a more behaviorally based opportunity-qualification process.

### **Matching Mix, Content, Channel, and Lifecycle**

The links between marketing activities, content, and the customer buying process and lifecycle will become clearer once you complete the mapping process. You'll realize that different programs and content will be more valuable and appropriate at different stages depending on the customer process.

The map will serve as a guideline for improving the utility of your mix and the content you use to connect and engage with customers and prospects, as well as to enhance existing customer relationships.

For example, you may learn from the mapping process that traditional in-person events and presentations are far more valuable at creating contacts and connections for a specific segment than social media and blogs are. Your map may reveal that webinars with industry experts are a viable touch point for consideration for some customer segments while online chats with existing customers and traditional telemarketing are more effective for other segments. Through the process, you may learn that traditional e-newsletters are ideal for staying connected with one set of customers, whereas an online community with guest posts is better for another.

Marketing will then need to select the program and build the content that supports the preferred channel for particular touch points in the process.

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