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ABSTRACT

Effective marketing has always been an important factor in business success. Without the ability to identify customers and convince them to purchase the product or service being offered, businesses would not survive. Recent advancements in technology have given rise to new opportunities to engage customers through the use of electronic marketing (e-marketing). E-marketing draws from traditional marketing principles, while also expanding the types of strategies available to companies. Websites, social media, and online marketplaces are just some examples of how businesses are leveraging e-marketing approaches to connect with potential customers. In formulating sound e-marketing strategies, it is important for businesses to consider a number of factors, including methods for identifying and attracting the target market population, engaging customers, making the case to bring them to the point of sale, and tracking metrics that indicate which approaches are making the most significant financial and non-financial impacts on return of investment. As a relatively new branch in the marketing field, there is more to research and discover when it comes to effective e-marketing strategies. However, businesses that are willing to invest resources in these e-marketing strategies can build their customer base and increase return on their investment.

***Keywords**: Electronic Marketing Strategies, Social Media, Tracking Metrics, Engaging Customers, Leveraging E-Marketing, Online Marketplaces*

INTRODUCTION

For as long as business has been conducted throughout history, the face of business has gradually evolved. However, in recent years, with the advent of computer technologies and the Internet, this evolution has taken place at a much more rapid pace. As shown in Figure 1, the electronic business (e-business) has opened up new channels for existing companies, as well as created an environment

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in which new businesses could form. In order to thrive, these companies have needed to adapt their marketing strategies to both accommodate and capitalize on these changes.

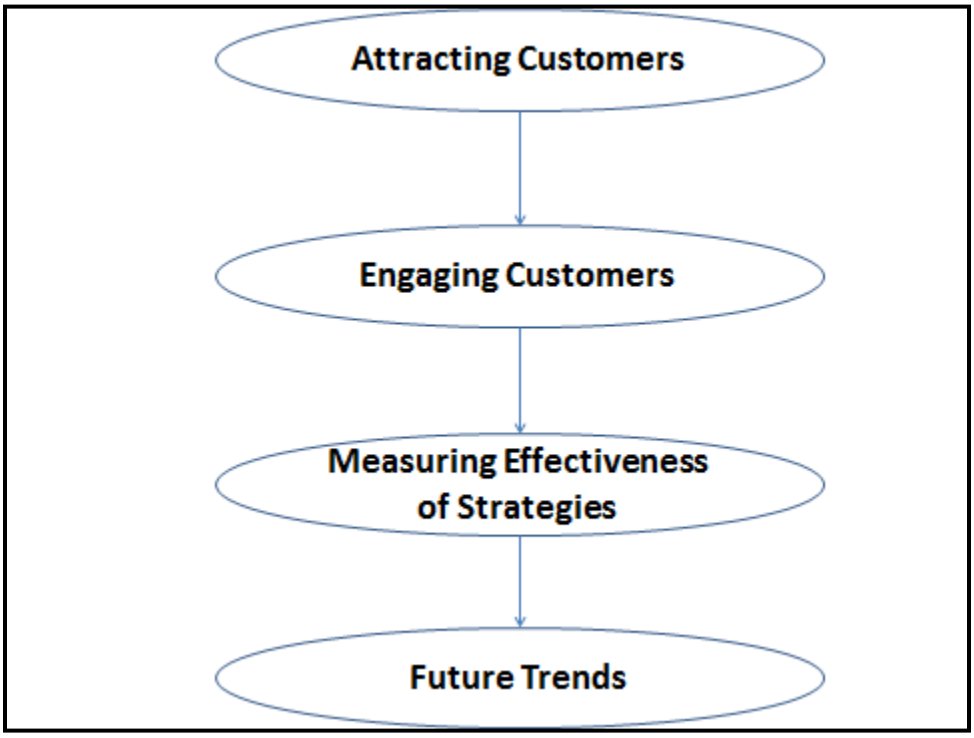
In the case of traditional brick-and-mortar stores, the challenge has been to create a seamless connection between their physical store locations and the online storefront. It is important for products to be comparable, so their online merchandise truly serves as an extension of their in-store merchandise. They also need to ensure that their branding is consistent across platforms so their customers can easily recognize them regardless of how they are interfacing with the company. For instance, Redbox's website allows customers to conveniently browse the latest movie and game releases, select titles to rent, and complete the check-out transaction—all before going to the physical location to pick up their selections.

In the case of online-only products and services, they need to devise unique ways of advertising to their customer base and differentiating themselves electronically since they do not have the advantage of physical locations. However, online stores can meet the needs of niche markets and typically have less overhead than traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

Current interactive marketing strategies emphasize the need for businesses to engage consumers in order to drive sales. The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) defines interactive advertising as "all forms of online, wireless and interactive television advertising, including banners, sponsorships, e-mail, keyword searches, referrals, slotting fees, classified ads and interactive television commercials" (Tan, Kwek, & Li, 2013, p. 90). Business owners also use integration marketing communication through electronic media to form a relationship with consumers, ensuring that all brand messaging is consistent across both traditional and non-traditional marketing channels. This way, the firms can communicate and connect with their customers on a personal level (Peltier, Schibrowsky, & Schultz, 2003).

Technological innovations relating to the constant developments of hardware, software, and big data assist electronic marketers in analyzing the effectiveness of specific promotional and organizational objectives by using tangible indicators in achieving successful consumer engagement. To date, with the advancement in technological innovations, a lot of companies worldwide are collecting data from customers every second to make better decisions and competitive advantages. For examples, online companies and firms are using cookies to monitor web users and online visitors shopping behaviors online for target advertising/marketing (Idemudia & Jones 2015). The electronic marketing (e-marketing) approach includes the principles and practices used to change knowledge, attitudes and ultimately the behavior of consumers which "highlights the role of the consumer in determining the effects and effectiveness of advertising" (Pavlou & Stewart, 2000, p. 62). Since commercial sales are an end goal, measurement of consumer engagement would not be complete without a review of the consumer intentions to purchase within the e-business environment. Therefore, a qualitative analysis of key performance indicators provides stakeholders with the relevant data needed to assess the firm's return on e-marketing investment. This data is not only crucial to the company's bottom-line, but the data can be used to compare company performance against industry benchmarks. Figure 1 illustrates the e-marketing strategies framework. When e-marketing strategies are comprehensive and utilized properly, they can be effective in attracting customers, engaging them to the point of sale, and measuring the effectiveness of the chosen methods.

Figure 1: The E-Marketing Strategies Framework.

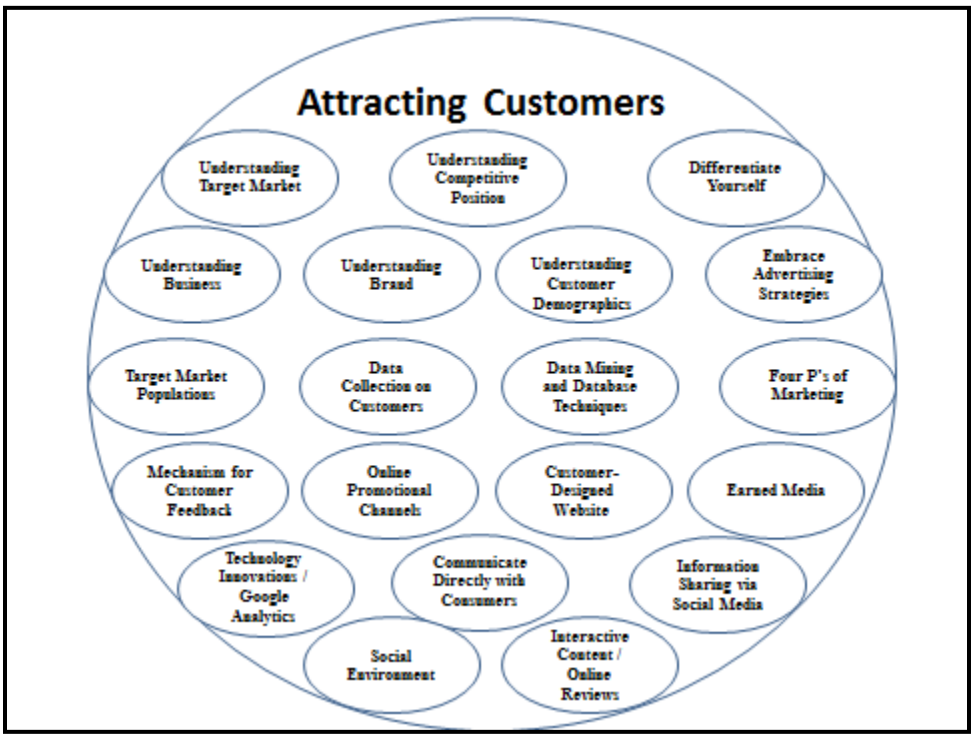


ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS

The Attracting Customers Model is shown in Figure 2. It should be noted that Figure 2 shows some important factors top managements and key decision makers should implement to attract customers and exceed customers' expectations. As illustrated in Figure 2, some of the factors that influence attracting customers are: (1) understanding target marketing, (2) understanding competitive position, (3) differentiate yourself, (4) understanding business, (5) understanding brand, (6) data collection on customers, and (7) four P's of marketing. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, "a marketing plan includes everything from understanding your target market and your competitive position in that market, to how you intend to reach that market (your tactics) and differentiate yourself from your competition in order to make a sale" (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d., para. 3). Successful enterprises understand their business, brand, and customer demographics. They embrace advertising strategies that influence consumer behavior and increase market demand. Since there are many different types of customers, tracking and analyzing customer website and mobile behavior "can reveal valuable insights by both identifying meaningful differences among the ideal customer segments" (https://meclabs.com/about/methodology) and which advertising initiatives are most successful.
Since online businesses do not interface with consumers in the same way as physical store locations, there are several programs available that can track and collect big data on customers to identify key target advertising and marketing populations. Data mining is vital as it can lead to better decision-making. To keep on attracting and exceeding customers' expectations big data is gathered in both numeric and text formats (i.e. structured and unstructured big data) using cookies

and log files with varying degrees of complexity and multiple sources. Data mining is a process by which patterns in the visitor data are analyzed to determine the types of consumers who are interacting with the website as well as to develop customer profiles. A database is required for storing the massive amounts of information being generated (Laudon & Traver, 2015, Chapter 9). When a business utilizes e-marketing, it is easier to identify and define the target audience through consumers' behaviors, demographics, and sales history. Therefore, data is collected and used to analyze consumer groups and project future behavior patterns (Fayyad, Piatetsky-Shapiro, & Smyth, 1996). This analysis is called business analytics.

Figure 2: Attracting Customers Model.



Once the target market segment is identified, a company can customize the traditional four P's of marketing (Product, Place, Price, and Promotion) to the online environment. In some instances, the "products" that are sold in brick-and-mortar stores are the same as those sold online; other times, products and services are unique to the online platform. For example, the website design and development industry is focused almost exclusively online. "Placement" of items online incorporates features on an e-business' website. In addition, location-based marketing pushes advertising to mobile devices in a specific geographic location using Global Positioning Software (GPS). "Pricing" online can sometimes be lower than brick-and-mortar stores; however, in order to be competitive, e-businesses need to take into account the additional shipping and handling charges faced by consumers online. "Promotions" can be offered through online coupon codes, featured discounts on the home page, and email marketing announcements. Ultimately, the combination of these four marketing elements promotes a company's product at reasonable prices and convinces the customer to purchase the product.

There are many different marketing distribution channels. Traditional offline marketing is "pushed" one-way to consumers without a mechanism for customer feedback. It includes television, newspapers, magazines, and billboards, and is often used along with web-based services since it has a history of being effective in reaching target audiences. These "old-school" tactics sometimes provide a mobile link, such as through the usage of Quick Response Codes (QR codes). A mobile phone or tablet scans a two-dimensional image with its camera to instantly display additional web content. One challenge for advertisers in the twenty-first century is identifying which advertising campaigns are better suited for traditional media versus online promotion.

Online promotional strategies have "become a very important channel for retailers over the last two decades, driven by the quicker delivery, lower prices, and faster purchasing time that it enables" (Wu & Ke, 2015, p. 94). Online promotional channels include websites, search engine optimization, original content generation, product reviews, emails, banner ads, viral video campaigns, and social, mobile, and local marketing networks.

Websites are at the core of most e-businesses since they mostly serve as their online "storefronts". They give e-businesses the opportunity to highlight their products and services, process transactions, and provide an initial point of contact for customer service. However, even the most beautiful, custom-designed website will be meaningless without regular traffic from potential customers. Therefore, it is not only essential to create quality content but to promote the content actively. "Understanding viewer intent and need-states is mission-critical for content creation and amplification" (iAcquire, 2013, para. 19).

Through search engine optimization, companies can position their websites higher on search result lists (Laudon & Traver, 2015). This way, when customers enter in search terms describing a key product offered by the company, the search engine will identify the e-business as a good match, which can ultimately drive additional traffic to their website. Also, content should be promoted across paid and earned media. These are essential for increasing brand awareness and reaching new customers. For example, Facebook can target specific users and send customized advertisements that reach the actual target market the business wants to influence. StumbleUpon's search engine engages consumers by suggesting websites that appeal to their personal interests.

Earned media is arguably the most important form of advertising in both the digital environment and offline. The efficacy and credibility of earned media "makes amplifying an earned media win dramatically more valuable than a comparable amplification of owned media or straight paid media" (BuzzStream, 2013). Starbucks Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Howard Schultz, believes that "authentic brands don't emerge from marketing cubicles or advertising agencies…[M]ass advertising can help build brands, but authenticity is what makes them last" (Goodreads, n.d., para. 2). Starbucks enthusiasts help the brand stay relevant by keeping the dialogue going and generating content to share with their social networks.

In addition to having a website specific to the e-business, companies can increase brand awareness by creating original content for publication on external sites. For example, a footwear company might publish a health article about proper arch supports on a running site and then include a link back to their main website at the bottom of the article. Similarly, MyFitnessPal, whose parent company is Under Armour, is an application devoted to tracking users' caloric intake and exercise

activities. They post regular community articles about health topics and include articles about the benefits of Under Armour products in the mix. By building public trust and becoming a go-to destination for relevant information, e-businesses can build a following.
As an e-business attracts followers, the business can communicate directly with consumers who are interested in their products. One way to accomplish this is through email marketing. Businesses use email marketing to send communications to customers who have opted-in because they have an interest in receiving messages from that business. Often, the marketing emails include updates, promotions, contests, and other strategies to solidify brand recognition, remind people to interact with their business, and to drive sales.

Although messages directly from companies can be both interesting and efficient, perhaps even more effective is word of mouth (WoM). In the online environment, that often takes the form of online reviews and information sharing via social media. Consumer reviews are the principal influencer of consumer behavior and are vital in attracting new customers. Businesses use social amplification to benefit from positive endorsements of their brand. Amplification is achieved when "content is shared, either through organic or paid engagement, within social marketing channels thereby increasing [their] word-of-mouth exposure." (gShift, 2015, para. 4). Travelocity and Yelp are prime examples of how customers turn to review sites to gather useful information about places, restaurants, products, and businesses of interest. In a survey conducted by Dimensional Research, "90% of customers responded that their buying decisions are influenced by online reviews. A similar study conducted by Retailing Today found that 81% of consumers conduct online research before making major purchases" (MarketingExperiments, 2015, para. 3). Therefore, businesses are incorporating social media tactics as part of their marketing strategies (Mangold & Smith, 2012).

Research conducted by Dr. Raffaele Filieri about the proliferation of social media usage shows that "online communities and Internet forums are a social environment that facilitate social interaction of individuals" (Hajli, 2015, p. 184). Participants of online communities support one another through their social interactions in the provided platform (Hajli, 2015). The personalized elements of social media allow marketers to capitalize on consumers' requests for more interactive content. The user-generated content is ubiquitously accessible through the web (Batrinca & Treleaven, 2014). Technological innovations have facilitated "inexpensive content creation, interaction, and interoperability by online users" (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013, p. 56). When properly implemented, social media is a very efficient and cost-effective method to launch new products and services. Social media includes collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, blogs, user-generated content communities such as YouTube, social networking sites such as Facebook, computer-based simulated game environments like EverQuest, and virtual social worlds like Second Life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

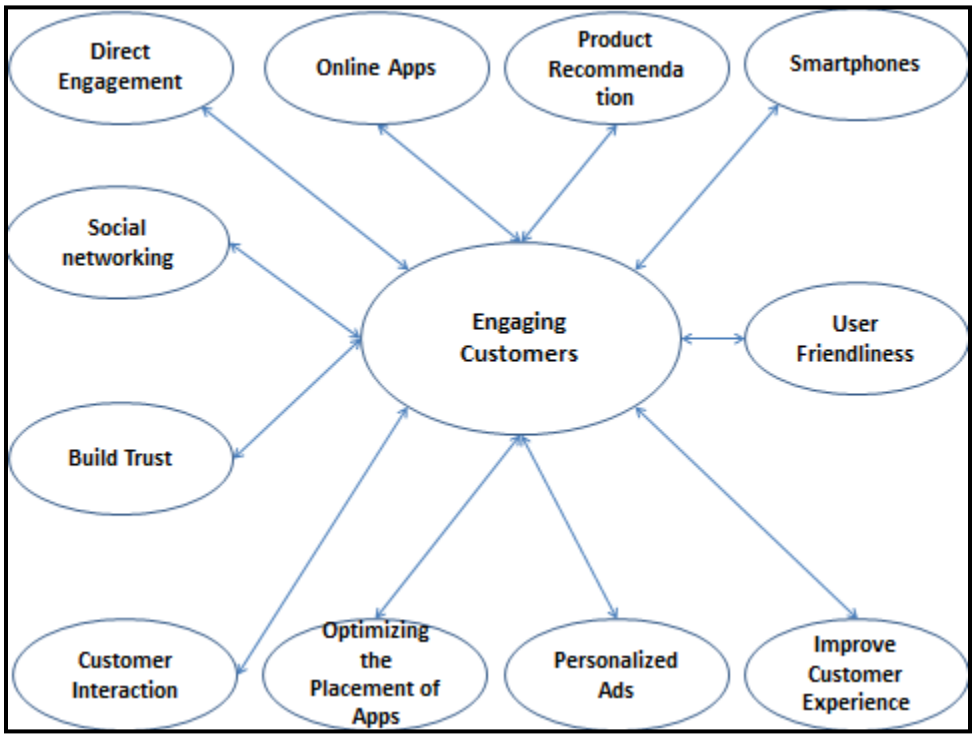
Social networking sites use ad-funded online games for advertising and branding efforts. Research conducted by Shintaro Okazaki and Charles Taylor found that "in addition to the ability to build the brand via image transfer, games help firms to increase the sites' entertainment value and thereby enhance the 'stickiness' factor…stimulating electric WoM about both the brand and the website" (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013, p. 63). Google Analytics tracks the number of hours gamers spend online chatting and engaging in social exchanges (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Studies have shown that chatting increases conversation rates that translate into higher sales. These so-called

"advergames played on computers can be persuasive forms of advertising, especially when players are highly involved or experience telepresence ('being there' in the game)" (Bellman, Kemp, Haddad, & Varan, 2014, p. 276). Ad placement appears in games both overtly and in the background, which provides a new way to access customers that are not likely to watch or read traditional advertising (Bellman, Kemp, Haddad, & Varan, 2014).

ENGAGING CUSTOMERS, MAKING THE CASE, AND GETTING THEM TO THE POINT OF SALE

The Engaging Customers Model is shown in Figure 3; and engaging customers begins with relationship management. The increased use of smartphones and online apps provides business with new methods of "direct engagement, payment, and targeted advertising" (Mosaic, n.d., p. 1) and has opened up new social networking capabilities that facilitate consumer interaction with brands. Therefore, by optimizing the placement of the apps, businesses can increase the number of consumer downloads.

Figure 3: The Engaging Customers Model.



Through regular contacts, responses to social media postings, and systems that track customer activity, companies can raise their profile and improve the customer experience. Moreover, tailored options during the purchasing process, as well as product recommendations based on previous selections, can make the consumer experience feel more customized. Amazon.com is perhaps the best example when it comes to product recommendations. They track and display a user's recent search history and offer suggestions regarding other products viewed by customers who looked at the currently selected item. This allows the user to meander through the product

selections more seamlessly, thereby increasing the likelihood that the user will find what he or she is looking for.

Personalized advertising is not a new concept. Consumers have interacted for decades with "television, the Internet, and other interactive technologies" (Pavlou & Stewart, 2000, p. 67). However, personalized advertising today is a more viable vehicle than even five years ago.

A good example of engagement is the online personal fashion stylist service, Stitch Fix. An active dialogue is encouraged between its customers and stylists. For instance, a customer indicates preferred styles and works with his or her online stylist to select clothing. This "allows the customer to play an active role in their subscription, encouraging them to be involved with [the] brand." (MarketingSherpa, 2015, expression 5). A healthy customer relationship is crucial for customer satisfaction and retention. Research shows "that online consumer repurchase intention is determined by satisfaction, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and Internet shopping self-efficacy" (Chen, 2012, p. 38). This paradigm shift, where customers are active participants rather than passive viewers, recognizes that consumers must be seekers of future marketing messages (Pavlou & Stewart, 2000). Therefore, customer engagement is fundamental to the success of social media marketing.

The online environment adds an element of uncertainty to the consumer's purchase. Therefore, the more the e-business can address the customer's individual concerns about ordering online through the company's website, the more likely the customer will follow through with the purchase. To get the customer to the point where they feel comfortable making the sale, e-businesses can make the process more convenient, improve the user-friendliness of the online interface, offer unique products not available elsewhere, build trust, provide quick delivery options, and have excellent customer support and return policies. Another way in which businesses reduce the perceived risk of the consumer is to offer trial periods. Open Language, which features subscription-based podcasts in some foreign languages, has a one-dollar month-long trial of the service before having the customer commit to the regular subscription price. This gives the customer the opportunity to explore the service and determine if it is a good fit before making the final decision about paying the premium subscription price.

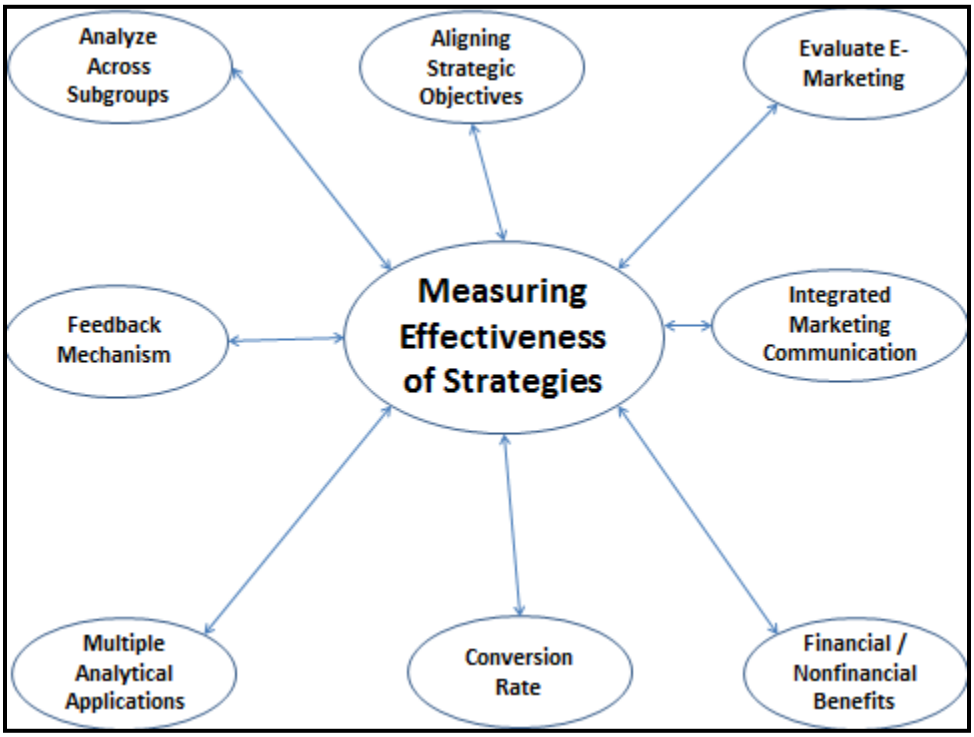
Once customers have developed a sense of confidence in using the e-business' site, there are some ways companies can increase conversion rates. For example, the e-business could offer an online shopping cart where consumers could store products of interest during their searches. They could also hold promotions with limited-time offers to increase the sense of urgency on the part of the buyer. Furthermore, they could send out reminders about the products that were waiting in the cart or pay for targeted advertisements based on the customer's search history, which would appear as banner ads or pop-ups on other sites visited by the customer.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIES

The Measuring Effectiveness of Strategies is illustrated in Figure 4. There are a number of important reasons why businesses should measure the effectiveness of their marketing strategies. Companies spend billions of dollars annually on one-to-one promotion of their products. Measuring the effectiveness of their e-marketing enables stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of advertising efforts, strengthen the case for pursuing different marketing strategies, and evaluate

whether the cost of e-marketing is justified and whether it yields a positive return on investment (ROI). Measurements are essential to continuous improvement plans, and a metrics dashboard can be a useful tool for aligning strategic and financial objectives. Metrics are helpful to organizations because they can provide a basis for communicating objectives and activities throughout the organization, add specificity to the organization's definition of success, track outcomes, make the drivers of success more visible, lead to more efficient utilization of resources, and provide a means to monitor and reward accomplishments. The statistical information and ability to analyze across subgroups also provides actionable feedback for future communications and marketing strategies for consumers. If one strategy were less effective than desired, a new plan could be formulated in its place.

Figure 4: The Measuring Effectiveness of Strategies Model.



Some metrics are collected without the consumer's direct feedback. In fact, e-businesses have a unique opportunity to collect such data because of digital footprints. Examples of this include data mining, keyword research, and web analytics. When done right, "the collection of the data does not interfere with the natural flow of behavior and events in the given context" (Huttenlock & Malone, 2013, p. 369). Other metrics are collected through the active participation of the consumer. Surveys, online reviews, and customer service inquiries are examples of such active feedback mechanisms. "Feedback is important to the speed and effectiveness of advertising because it enables the marketer to determine the extent to which consumers understand the message and whether the marketer should adjust the message presentation accordingly" (Pavlou & Stewart, 2000, p. 68).

There are multiple analytical applications available to businesses. Google Analytics (GA) is a prime example. This application uses predictive algorithms and sophisticated, integrated analytics to provide companies with real-time data about user activity on their e-business websites. Businesses can set the application to monitor events monthly, during a given period, or during a promotion deal. Businesses then "analyze statistically relevant patterns across volumes of quality data" ("The definitive guide to data-driven attribution," 2014, p. 8). The application tracks statistics like the number of visits to the website, unique visitors, repeat visitors, and the amount of time spent on each page. It also provides a dollar amount spent per visit per page view, the number of different websites referring people to the business website, and the bounce rates (Google Analytics, n.d.).

Conversion rate trends are considered the most important indicators of e-business performance; however, it is also dependent on the business model and quality of the site traffic (MarketingSherpa, 2015). This can be measured in terms of the percentage of customers who followed through to the point of sale, the return rate of visitors, and a variety of other factors.

Return on Investment (ROI) is another important indicator of e-business performance. ROI inputs include system resources, system structures, and leadership buy-in. Return on Investment (ROI) is a financial ratio that quantifies the profit over the cost spent to invest. Outcomes include increased revenue, accelerated cash flows, lower costs, shareholder value, return on investment, and profitability (Epstein & Yuthas, 2007, table 1).

Return on investment and statistics like conversion rates do not capture all the benefits of marketing strategies. Although the ultimate goal is for marketing efforts to attract customers and get them to the point of sale, it is equally as important to increase brand awareness and trust in the company's brand—factors that are not directly reflected in sales numbers. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the non-financial factors to get a broader picture of the impact. "Brand equity encompasses (a) value related to sales, such as market share and price premiums attributable to the brand, and (b) value flowing from stakeholder relationships, trust, and loyalty" (Epstein & Yuthas, 2007, p. 27). Therefore, metrics should integrate both the financial and non-financial benefits of e-marketing efforts.

Marketing firms use different methods of integrated marketing communication to advertise, interact, and influence consumer decision making. They accomplish this by monitoring the effectiveness of interactive advertising on purchase intentions and how brand awareness affects results. Relevant brand messaging is aimed at directly influencing buyer behavior and building relationships with customers.

FUTURE TRENDS

Regardless of how the consumer is engaged, the purpose of developing a marketing strategy is to detail how a company will enter a market, attract new customers, and create consumer interest that later translates into sales (Laudon & Traver, 2015). The success or effectiveness of the marketing strategy, therefore, is measured by how much it can engage a consumer's decision to purchase the company's products and services. Laudon and Traver emphasized, "the best business concept, or idea, will fail if it is not properly marketed to potential customers" (Laudon & Traver, 2015, p. 67).

As customers' needs, wants, and preferences change over time, strategies need to shift to address this transition. The rapid emergence of communications tools is driving a radical shift in how people of all generations consume advertising. A recent Pew Research Center survey found that 85% of adults are Internet users and 67% are smartphone users (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 2). In the year 2000, only 14% of seniors used the Internet; however, now a clear majority (58%) of senior citizens uses the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2015, para. 3). Nowhere is this trend more apparent than with millennials. With technology seamlessly woven into their daily lives, millennials are the "driving force of online communications. The Internet, social media, and interactive technologies are empowering millennials to be more active in the promotion and advancement of products and brands" (Mangold & Smith, 2012, p. 141). Their generation is changing the way advertising is consumed and is a major driver of new marketing strategies.

CONCLUSION

Many factors are involved in measuring the effectiveness of e-marketing, including both financial and non-financial data. Companies that can adapt their marketing strategies to meet the needs of their customers will have a competitive advantage over companies that continue to utilize traditional marketing methods only. In order to quantify the e-marketing results, companies must set specific, measurable goals that align with business objectives. This will set the stage for managing according to those measurements and provide a roadmap for future investments.
The effectiveness of multi-channel marketing, whether online or offline, should be analyzed to the point of sale and beyond. Although there are no widely accepted standards for benchmarking methods and measuring e-marketing effectiveness, metrics like click-through rates, conversion rates, and repeat customers provide insights and understanding from data that is relevant to managers and ultimately the e-marketing return on the investment.

Each company must determine which marketing strategies are best suited to its values and goals and define which metrics are most beneficial in evaluating the effectiveness of its advertising. What is effective for one company may not produce the same results for another company. Therefore, managers need to consider the nature of their specific business as well as the context in which they are making decisions about their marketing strategies. Oftentimes, a single marketing strategy is limited in its reach; therefore, marketing managers should consider a combination of marketing approaches and how they work together collectively. As Laudon & Traver (2015, p. 399) explained, a study of the comparative impacts of offline and online marketing concluded that the most powerful marketing campaigns used multiple channels including both traditional and e-business marketing solutions.

As technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace, conversations and real-time sharing of ideas with consumers through social networks will allow for quicker response rates. Since smartphones and tablets are increasingly being used to access this information, mobile compatibility has become critical to the success of marketing campaigns. Relationship building will also help maintain long-term brand loyalty based on trust. Companies should no longer view consumers as merely receivers who are passively influenced by one-way messages; instead, customers should be viewed as active participants in the marketing process.

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We are entering an exciting time when it comes to the potential to reach and engage new customers through e-marketing. The possibilities seem almost endless, and both traditional and emerging marketing strategies will enable management teams to more accurately identify and reach target markets, directly interact with customers, and obtain real-time feedback about the results of their efforts. Though the face of e-marketing will continue to change for centuries to come, one thing remains certain—effective marketing will always be an essential ingredient to business success.

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