

How to set your brand apart using digital, storytelling

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Marketing In 2016–And Beyond–Will Be All About Value

As the novelty of the new century diminishes, so, too, has the glow of a single **marketing** channel (**social** media) as the locus of all things “new” in **marketing**. In 2015, we observed a more practical approach to content **marketing** and a more rational view of the **marketing** mix, in general.

In 2016, we will participate in the resurgence of value in how marketers frame their strategies and messaging.

In a [recent CMO.com article](#), **Marcelo Prado**, chief **marketing** officer of GE’s Measurement and Control business, described how important it is to tell the right story about how a company’s products solve customers’ problems. This “tell the right story” insight is at the heart of the most transformational trend of the coming year(s). It is no longer sufficient to be present with a **brand** message in every new media channel. It is now up to the marketer to draw that straight line directly between customer challenges and the company’s differentiated solutions to those challenges.

Smart buyers have researched all of the content available online, and they will have already gathered the feature/function comparisons themselves. What is critical to address in every customer venue and channel is the bridge between business needs (identified or latent) and the value of the solutions that your company delivers. Savvy marketers will need to make the shift from the “what” of their products and solutions to the “why.”

The Digital Core The shift to value-based messaging will be at the heart of key campaigns and each core **marketing** deliverable. Because value is contextual, these deliverables will, by necessity, no longer be analog. **Digital marketing** will play a significant role in delivering this value message to every channel—online and offline.

The **digital** thread will be found in the applications that marketers use for ongoing communication externally and internally. The consumers of these **marketing** deliverables include prospects and customers, of course, but also sales teams, channel partners, and **marketing** teams.

While offline channels remain critical to both B2B and B2C marketers, the use of **digital** platforms even in these offline venues will become the norm, rather than the exceptions. When engaging with prospects or customers at an offline event, **digital** solutions allow for an interaction that ensures relevance, so that each “user” has a unique dialogue tailored to his specific needs—focusing on the value of the company's solutions to that person's (or group's) challenges and requirements. Without a **digital** platform, the deliverable provides an undifferentiated experience for every user, missing the opportunity to explain and convey the appropriate tailormade value story.

The Story In 2016 and beyond, marketers will be building a model of the problem-solving journey, and this is best understood as a narrative. For each constituent in the customer's ecosystem, there is a story—a story both of the individual and of the organization. Thinking about the customer's world as a tapestry of narratives provides marketers with a critical understanding of how each of these characters in the story derives value from the solution. As the buyer's journey becomes better defined, the value can be conveyed in the form of this story—for each participant a nuanced chronicle of the processes and the outcomes (i.e., the “why”) that resonate with each customer.

Leading companies are already shifting their strategies in this direction. Competitive forces drive the demand for **marketing innovation**—beyond product **innovation**, building an engaging experiential relationship with prospects that fuels revenue growth.

A prominent global life sciences company (and Kaon Interactive client) recently deployed an interactive **marketing** application based on customer vignettes—stories of real-world challenges facing companies in their market. Sales and **marketing** teams use this **digital** application to explain to laboratory managers how their complex scientific instruments deliver superior results (through better science) and optimize expenses (through high-efficiency workflows.) Customers explore these solutions at sales meetings, trade shows, and online, resulting in a clearer understanding of the value to each member of the customer's lab teams, from the financial managers to the lab directors, and including the scientists and technicians who perform the testing.

Another example involves client Nimble Storage, one of the fastest-growing flash storage companies in the world, which wanted to develop a customer-centric **digital** interactive solutions storytelling approach to showcase its unique value proposition. Rather than confining the conversation around feature/function differences, the company's sales and **marketing** team members engaged in discussions about **innovations** that would help their prospects achieve their strategic technical and business objectives. These storytelling scenarios resonated with both technical and business-line customers, allowing for a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of their products. The effect of this **marketing innovation** (**digital** interactive value stories) has been extremely effective in engaging more interactive conversations with customers and prospects.

Engaging the right audience in a timely, relevant, and impactful value experience will be the key focus of **marketing** in 2016.

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