Why Creatives Really Should Know About Marketing Automation

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Date : November 17, 2015

In the final season of AMC's Mad Men, during "The Monolith" episode, **Harry Crane**, the agency's media buyer, demands that the firm purchase him a computer. The computer of which he speaks could be considered one of the earliest examples of ad tech.

A 1969 **Harvard Business Review** article described the computer as being capable of performing data analysis that would "enable businesspeople to make informed decisions about whether to hold inventory; expand plant production; rent, buy, or borrow; increase production; and examine the effects of anomalies on demand or the effects of constraints."

As the computer is being assembled—in the process taking up an enormous amount of space within the agency's offices—we come to understand its thematic significance: it symbolizes the coming change in the role of creatives, the **Don Drapers** of the world. These creatives up until then made decisions based on gut feelings and instinct, not needing to create space for new tech-savvy math men and their machines. "The **IBM 360** can count more stars in a day than we can in a lifetime," exclaims the technician installing the computer.

"But what man lay on his back counting stars and thought about a number?" **Draper** retorts.

Many creatives lack an understanding of analytics

I thought of this scene as I wandered through the booths at this year's **Marketing** Nation Summit, a **marketing** automation conference put on by **Marketo**. Though I was amazed by the technical and analytical prowess displayed by many attendees, there was a noticeable dearth of conference goers who worked on the creative side of **marketing**—the graphic designers, videographers, and writers who actually *produce* the content.

My observation highlights a pervasive problem within my industry: Many creative content producers lack even a basic understanding of the analytics side of their work, and, because of this, they are unable to make informed decisions about the kind of content that drives client and customer acquisition.

You may be the world's greatest designer with a masterful command of UX and UI, but if you

don't understand all the downstream effects of how consumers touch your product, your skillset is too isolated.

Here's what creatives should know

Now, I'm not arguing that a creative should understand every facet of every **marketing** automation tool, especially as there are so many out there. (At one point, we realized we had a dozen SaaS automation programs touching my company's **marketing**, most of which we tried once and then discarded.)

I do think, however, it's incumbent upon everyone within the industry to understand the basic underlying principles and framework of **marketing** tech. Even if you don't understand SEO to a technical degree, a journalist or copywriter should at least know basic keyword and headline practices, so they can optimize their articles for widespread consumption.

A creative might respond to this argument by claiming that you can't automate great content, that in regards to high-level **branding** and capturing consumer mindshare, you can't simply push a button on **HubSpot** and out pops a brilliant piece of copy.

To a certain extent, he'd be correct; a really great piece of content will take care of itself, and then the analytics and tracking is just telling you how awesome it is as opposed to whether it worked. The home runs are still home runs, and whether it's a 430-foot home run or a 475-foot home run doesn't really matter.

The value in **marketing** automation can be found in the day-to-day content, which makes up the bulk of the content created for a company. Not all articles are going to be read by 50,000 people, and so when you write something for an audience of a few hundred or even a few thousand consumers, analytics-based, automated tweaks can lead to a doubling of ROI.

A creative who can only hit a home run once every six months is less valuable than one who can consistently, on a day-to-day frequency, hit singles and doubles. This is why pitting creatives against math men is a false dichotomy. One is meant to enhance the efficacy of the other.

After all, the best **marketing** automation in the world is completely useless without the very creative content worth automating.

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