



DECODING THE BUZZWORD 'AGILE MARKETING'

“In this new age world of customer centricity, speed and immediate ratification, the terms 'agile marketing' and 'design thinking' are complementary amongst the larger corporates, but it still remains a far-fetched buzzword for the smaller enterprises. Everyone would love to talk about it, but the question arises whether we are practicing it.”

The term 'customer centricity' is the epicentre of agile marketing. As in the case of design thinking the first step is empathy which indicates understanding the customer needs. It is all about having empathy towards the customer needs and act accordingly.

It is all about having deep understanding of the target customer. It also involves analyzing existing customer research data or conducting fresh research, surveys and analyze the data to find out what the customer actually needs. Taking customer feedback and behavioral analytics is also a part of the customer understanding process.

CUSTOMER CENTRICITY COMES NATURALLY TO AN EMPATH. BE AN EMPATH FIRST

It is extremely important that the customers find value in the products or services, so that a positive user experience is triggered. Nowadays customers do not use a product, they experience a product. Gone are the days of pushing a product. It is all about attaching a 'wow' factor at every stage of the customers experience with the product/services.

To generate a positive user experience at every stage of the product/service, it is crucial to have regular customer interaction. It can be done by regular feeding of information via different

social media handles, email marketing etc. It also involves having feedback from customers on regular intervals.

This helps in understanding the fluctuating trends in the market scenario. It helps in understanding any negative sentiments and allows the opportunity to re-generate a positive experience, so that values can be created aligning with dynamic needs of the customers. As it is stated in the very beginning, EMPATHY is not just an isolated word, it is the key ingredient of being customer centric.



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SCENARIO: IMPACT OF GUIDANCE AND PERSONALIZATION ON WEIGHT LOSS SUCCESS

Let us take an example of a Rohit who intends to lose weight, and decides to join gym for workout. Let us consider two scenarios.

Scenario 1: The counsellor Ravi at the gym assures Rohit that he would be able to lose weight in a couple of months' time. Rohit takes admission and gets a diet chart and an exercise chart. Rohit is a foodie. While he sincerely follows the exercise plan, but junk food and Rohit form a symbiotic relationship. After six months of regular gym, he is able to lose only 1 kg. Rohit becomes very upset and approaches Ravi for a solution. Ravi says, very bluntly, that along with exercise proper diet is also mandatory. Instead of losing weight, Rohit gradually loses interest and discontinues with the gym.

Scenario 2: The Counsellor Ravi at the gym says that he would be able to lose weight provided he is able to tweak his dietary habits a bit along with a structured exercise plan. Ravi goes on to ask about Rohit's eating habits and

found out that he is an emotional eater and eating is his coping mechanism. Ravi consults the gym dietician and asks for a special diet chart for Rohit, which comprises of healthy supplements for the comfort junk food. Ravi asks Rohit to notify him if he is having any difficulty to follow the customized diet chart. Rohit starts the gym routine and whenever he misses out on the diet routine, he sensitises Ravi and revisits his chart...and gradually he starts losing weight.

Let us analyse both the scenarios. In scenario 1, Ravi the counsellor gives a solution to Rohit's problem but without taking a deep dive into the root cause. There is no deeper understanding of the customer problem and neither there is customization. In the second scenario the Ravi walks that extra mile to get deeper understanding of the client's need and further goes ahead and customises the solutions. This is a classic case of customer centricity. In scenario 1, empathy was missing whereas in scenario 2 empathy was the key.

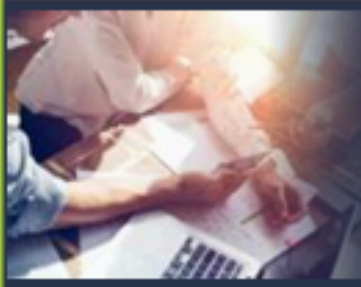
ITERATIVE WORK BREAKDOWN

Iterative work breakdown complements the customer centricity in agile marketing. It is about breaking tasks into smaller pieces or disintegrating the project into smaller activities. In other words, this is called sprints. Every sprint represents the completion of a task. This showcases gradual progress of delivery to the customer.

**SMALLER ITERATION DOESN'T QUESTION YOUR ABILITY.
THEY MAKE YOU SMART.**

Agile marketing is not about delivering a complete project at one go after a long recess. Rather it is the process of continuously delivering to the customer at regular intervals. This helps in keeping the customer engagement in the project and gives the scope of rectification in between, as required. This method also calls for continuous customer feedback. This avoids

moving back and forth in case of errors, and leads to continual improvement. This also reduces the risk associated with a project and fosters more collaborations amongst project team members and cross functional stakeholders, imparting a sense of achievement or learning after every sprint.



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EXAMPLE 1: NAKUL DAIRY

Let us look into an example. Nakul Dairy, a very successful regional player for dairy product, was losing its market share to a national player in the city of Guwahati. While deep diving into the reason for their decline in market share, they realised that their distribution team had been weakened and there was a loud alarm raised by the distributors on visibility. The top management took a decision to organize a streak of training programs for the distribution team and start an advertisement splash after that. The marketing team decided to go all out on advertising and distributors campaign for one full month and spend 80% of their advertisement budget. They went on air in every possible advertisement media starting from TV, radio, print media to hoardings. There was a lot of buzz created in this one month. Unfortunately, the campaign failed with sales dipping further. Were they following agile marketing protocols? Absolutely not. Agile marketing talks about progress in iterations. It talks about smaller

sprints. It talks about introspecting into the outcome of a smaller sprint and then make necessary changes and get in the next sprint. What should have Nakul dairy done in this situation? They should have tested with smaller campaigns or sprints and should have taken course correction after every sprint and once they were sure of the best campaign path, they should have had bigger bursts of ad campaigns. This would have mitigated the risks to a substantially large extent. In the subsequent financial year Nakul dairy management realised their mistakes and created multiple smaller sprints in their ad campaigns, with timing the bursts with festive occasions. They moved out of the radio campaigns since they realised that their ad campaigns needed visual impact. This time the ad campaign embraced the success and the sales grew by a sizeable percentage. This example of Nakul Dairy (Name of company and city masked for confidentiality) is a classic example of achieving success through iteration.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Flexibility and Adaptability are integral parts of Agile marketing. Agility by pure layman's definition is the ability to move quickly and easily. The project team needs to be adaptable to change, as well as flexible enough to make necessary changes based on the feedback provided by customers and trends in the market.

The project team uses real time data to analyse the progress and performance of the projects and swiftly do the necessary modifications to optimize the performance. This also results in

experimentation culture being driven in an agile marketing environment.

Prioritization of task is a key aspect in any project, and dynamic prioritization is synonymous with agile marketing. Priorities keep on changing based on project requirement and customer feedback. The team has to be adaptable enough to be aligned with these dynamics.

The team has to keep the mind-set open to the changes and not resistant to those. Feedback from the clients and changing market trends



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would lead to changes in the projects and priorities.

It is also about scalability of processes. This means that the processes in agile marketing environment are to be made scalable and

flexible. This leads to speed which peaking of speed of the project execution. In a nutshell, flexibility and adaptability help in continual improvement in their strategies and make changes real-time basis.

EXAMPLE 2: LIFE INSURANCE SECTOR DURING COVID PANDEMIC

Let us evaluate a real-life situation one of the sectors faced with the onset of COVID pandemic. The life insurance sector relies heavily on their agency channel for new business. Traditionally managing agents used to have a personal face to face meetup and the engagement programs were designed for this. The recruitment of managers also had an employee value proposition (EVP) of induction programs in high end hotels. With the spreading of pandemic and the subsequent long-haul lockdowns, all physical face to face meetings and engagement activities came to a grinding halt. The life insurance sector was having a big challenge of creating a new EVP for the new manager inductees. The agents' engagement levels went down drastically. Majority of the clients of Life insurance in

India DO NOT just believe in having idea about an insurance policy over phone, forget about buying without physically interacting with the seller. There was not much anticipation of this lockdown and isolation situations. This tested the flexibility and adaptability of the organizations. Some organizations acted very fast and started equipping and engaging the agents and managers digitally. They started a culture of creating video snippets on sales pitches for clients. The organizations which were flexible and high on adaptability overcame this unforeseen situation successfully, whereas the organization which were weak on adaptability de-grew. Bottom-line is that the agile organizations adapt to uncertain situations very fast in this VUCA world

**Adaptability and Flexibility are not Compromise.
They are Wisdom in this VUCA World**

CONCLUSION

Agile marketing environment encourages collaboration. Without collaboration it is impossible to acquire the desired swiftness of execution. Cross functional teams need to work in synergy towards a common goal. This propagates transparency, trust and reliability amongst internal stakeholders, and helps in quick identification and resolution of problems/issues and encourages collective and creative brainstorming and generates innovative ideas. If you look at all the examples cited above, there is an element of collaboration. To conclude, agile marketing is the way forward for all organizations in this uncertain world.