

Get the push vs pull marketing balance right

In Hugh Lofting's *Doctor Doolittle* books, the Pushmi-pullyu is a rare animal from Africa with two heads, half gazelle and half unicorn. When it tries to move, it gets pulled in two different directions. It wouldn't be surprising if many marketers feel like this at the moment, trying to navigate the rapidly changing digital marketing world, and getting the balance right between push and pull marketing.

 By [Vanessa Clark](#) 16 Feb 2012

Digital marketing is touted as the great conversation between a brand and its customers, but someone has to initiate the right conversations at the right time for your brand. Happy days indeed if your customers are spontaneously saying the right things about you, but most successful viral campaigns need to be seeded.

We all know it's not a case of if you build it, they will come. Consider a real-life situation: you wouldn't turn up at a networking event and stand in the corner, expecting people to flock to you to find out how interesting you are, would you?

Neither would you march up to people, interrupt their conversations and start shouting about how marvelous you are and that they really should be talking to you.

Somewhere between these two extremes is the right balance, for your company, that will allow you to engage with your customers in a meaningful, relevant, authentic and sustained way.

Content is king

According to [Pieter Streicher](#), MD of mobile messaging company BulkSMS.com, "We know there is a rapid shift happening in how brands interact with consumers: from one-way, top-down communication, to an ongoing conversation between the consumer and the brand. Instead of broadcasting messages, brands need to focus on listening to consumers. By giving consumers a voice, brands have the ability to adapt the messages and products to give their customers what they really want."

[Jo Duxbury \(@JoDuxbury\)](#), founder of outsourced marketing agency [Peppermint Source](#), maintains that content is key to ramping up your pull-marketing activities.

"Great content underpins all pull marketing. If you make your content great, people will sign up from it. Make your content so fabulous that people clamour for more of it. Make them WANT to hear from you. And make sure you sustain this quality - that way you'll build a long-term relationship and loyalty," she says.

"Assess what your customers need, and then make sure you answer their questions in an accessible, entertaining (if on social media) and valuable way. This is an art - get a content specialist to help you with it if you don't know where to start."

Saying the right thing in the right way

Hand-in-hand with content creation is deciding which channels are the best to not only reach your prospects and customers, but also to spark a conversation. Duxbury warns against choosing a digital marketing chan

simply because it's the one receiving a lot of hype at the moment.

"Each online channel has its pros and cons and may not be suitable for every brand," she says. "Success will come from choosing a medium that can be used to deliver relevant, useful and interesting content to the right audience, in a way they want it. Content is king, and context is vital too."

When choosing which platforms to use, consider what the company offers and how tech-savvy your customers are. "If your audience is online a lot, Twitter is potentially a great channel. Facebook can also be really useful, for a wider online audience," she said.

In addition to looking to new, bright and shiny digital channels, marketers should be making sure they are getting most bang for their buck by running multichannel campaigns, incorporating both old and new media as appropriate.

Bridge the gap

BulkSMS.com advises clients to use SMS to bridge the gap between static traditional media and more interactive and engaging digital media. It says SMS is a particularly appropriate way to achieve this, thanks to its reach, pervasiveness and acceptance by consumers across all demographics.

For instance, in a retail context, an SMS shortcode campaign can transform a static channel such as a point-of-sale promotion, in-store posters or on-pack special offers into the start of an immediate conversation with the customer. "The brand can grab the customer on the spot when they literally have the product in their hand and allow them to enter a competition, access a discount on the product, give their feedback or sign up for future communications," says Streicher.

Streicher also advises that marketers consider all the channels they will be using, both push and pull, at the outset of a campaign, rather than tacking them on at the end, with very little thought given to how to continue engaging with them.

Duxbury agrees, saying, "Repurpose your conversation materials; don't simply broadcast them across multiple platforms. For example, your tone on Twitter is likely to be different from that on your blog. Make it relevant to both the platform and the audience.

Get the balance right

"But do make sure that your customers can converse with you across a wide range of platforms and devices - if they can't find you on one, chances are they may switch to your competitors [rather] than try to find you on a secondary platform."

Get the balance right for your brand and you will start meaningful conversations that take your brand forward rather than being pulled in all directions at once.

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ABOUT VANESSA CLARK

Hi! I'm a freelance journalist, copywriter and editor based in Cape Town, South Africa. I write as a journalist and for corporates and agencies. My specialties are business-to-business technology writing. I like unpacking complex ideas so they are more easily understood - especially when it involves innovation taking place in South Africa, and the rest of Africa. View my profile and articles...

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