Take Command of Your MarCom Operation

Four proven technology solutions that keep efficiency and effectiveness in sight
The Need for Marcom Management Technology

Marketing and communications professionals today must face down myriad choices brought on by seemingly endless channels, data sources, and technologies. The volume and variety of assets pushed through channels has multiplied, as has the number of customer interactions and touchpoints. Big Data offers great opportunities – but presents major challenges as well. Simply put, marcom has become significantly more complex.

Succumbing to such complexity often has real business consequences. Lack of control over assets pushed out into the marketplace undermines brand integrity. According to “The Impact of Brand Consistency Benchmark Report,” published by Demand Metric Research Corporation, “The average revenue increase attributed to always presenting the brand consistently, estimated by organizations with brand consistency issues, is 23 percent.”

Amidst the chaos is also tremendous pressure to execute. In its report “2017 Predictions: Dynamics That Will Shape the Future In the Age of the Customer,” Forrester Research predicts that 3 in 10 CMOs will be sent packing because they can’t adapt to modern business demands quickly enough.

The customer touchpoints mentioned above play a critical role too. Forrester describes modern customers as “adventurous, experimental, and downright fickle.” They now routinely demand instant gratification and fawning treatment. Businesses must be able to respond quickly to customer expectations, and always deliver exceptional personalized experiences. Minus that, they risk falling behind faster than the latest fad.

Internal stakeholders make equally powerful demands. They want and need rapid execution, auditable processes, and unlimited flexibility. Front-line professionals who know customers best must have the tools at their disposal to focus on growth and foster those relationships, while leadership requires more accountability and proof of marketing’s contribution to the bottom line.

Against such significant headwinds and pressure to perform, an effective, comprehensive communications strategy requires much more than just a winning SEO tactic or Snapchat presence. It demands fundamental command and centralized control of every marketing and communications output that bears your name. It requires internal synchronicity and expedience, combined with external relevance and positive interactions in the market.
Why Fundamentals Are Critical

Improved processes are key to the effectiveness of the entire marcom operation

Too many organizations entrust fundamental responsibilities – like marketing asset management and customer communications – to outdated, costly legacy systems. Focusing only on the hottest new contact channel while disregarding the underpinnings of effective marcom is like letting a house’s foundation go bad while investing in new window treatments. Everyone in the value chain needs to trust that modern, flexible, and easy-to-use technology support marcom’s needs.

“Whether your marcom processes are strictly push, strictly pull, or a hybrid, there is a strategic imperative to be able to master the data, the processes, and the assets at every step,” acknowledges Jeff Sammak, president and founder, Strata Company. “Breaking down silos and mastering those fundamentals is essential to improving the efficiency – and thus effectiveness – of the entire marcom operation.”

Today’s marketing and communications automation technologies can help businesses automate and reach customers with greater efficiency and effectiveness while keeping pace with changing, evolving contact channels. “Most businesses don’t realize there are solutions that address and automate the numerous manual, clunky processes that get in the way of effective outreach,” Sammak notes. “With all that is available today, chaos has no place in your marcom operation.”

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Overcoming Marcom's Many Complexities

Technology enables businesses to take control of the data, assets, and processes that drive effective marketing and communications.

More channels and formats mean more assets, and without proper organization the marcom team can spend valuable hours just grappling with files and resources. Without basic asset management, marketing professionals can spend over one-third of their work time just digging around for the right logos, brochures, and text blurbs. When professionals can’t cleanly and reliably locate the latest approved asset for a project, it creates more backlogs and more ripples of chaos. This chaos has real costs: as much as 25% of the content marketing budget at larger firms can be lost to inefficient processes, according to Gleanster Research.

Marcom also needs to take charge of all the data that represents its prospects and customers. There’s vital data that may apply to a different segment and very specific yet highly varied information for each and every customer, product, and prospect. Marcom must be able to seamlessly create content to account for offers, incentives, and media formats each audience responds to best. Botched messages that fail to account for those key pieces of data are just as important, if not more so, than combing through endless streams of click through data and Web tracking. While there is a treasure trove of information available from both internal and external sources, success lies in properly capturing and implementing it in your marketing and communications.

Marcom projects executed at local, individual, or one-off levels are fundamentally flawed, costly, and inefficient. When dozens or even hundreds of independent stakeholders are left adrift to generate creative, assemble assets, and send out messaging, there is an inevitable drift away from the core marcom mission. Organizations waste valuable dollars and hours re-creating resources which should be shared, while processes that should be coordinated and automated are instead conducted in messy, ad hoc fashion. Marcom process management systems change all this by seamlessly connecting the dots between the start and end points of a project.

Streamlining and automating marcom processes is critical to staying competitive. Technology is the enabler – allowing businesses to crawl out of chaos that can threaten to consume them. On the following pages we explore four such examples, where technology and improved processes have aligned to eradicate inefficiency and increase effectiveness.
Strata Company helps leading businesses revolutionize their marketing and communications through improved processes and smart technologies.

Contact Mark Frisina at mfrisina@gostrata.com or call 610-941-6100 for more information.
Four Solutions That Streamline Marketing and Communications Processes

1. **Simplify and expedite marketing fulfillment**

   Resource Real Estate (RRE), an asset management company that specializes in real estate and credit investments, endured several communications and fulfillment challenges in providing advisors with materials. Delivering the right material to the right prospect matters, as there are many competitors in the industry. “In order to differentiate Resource, we needed to be able to customize material orders based on that particular advisor and company – easily and efficiently,” says Marianne McGuire, the firm’s CMO.

   All of the materials are subject to considerable compliance and regulatory reviews, sometimes requiring quarterly updates to stay compliant. The firm needed a way to cleanly and reliably distribute materials and ensure the right financial intermediaries received the right collateral. “Version control and ensuring the correct materials are sent to the appropriate advisors is not a nice-to-have for us – it is a must-have due to the regulatory environment. We needed to feel confident an automated system would ensure no room for error,” she says.

   Previously, the sales team would order kits with no visibility; if they did not know what was included in a standard kit there was nowhere in the system they could check and get details. By partnering with a full-service technology partner, RRE and its users (wholesalers/sales) now have full visibility and an easy-to-use interface to send and build custom kits. Digital proofs can be viewed and users have the ability to organize the materials to their specifications. Fulfillment is completely transparent and customizable.

   This organization’s experience and struggles are quite common and transcend the industry. For all the technology innovation of the digital era, operational automation systems can be hard to come by. Advanced marketing leaders recognize the critical role process improvement plays in remaining competitive.

   RRE is an example of an organization that understands the wide-scale brand and business impact of optimized marketing operations. It is harnessing technology to strike the right balance between control and agility in order to respond quickly.
to market needs, protect their business, and enable long-term business success.

2 Implement corporate marketing standards at a local level

When brand partners, affiliates, resellers, and other stakeholders share responsibility for marcom operations, it can be difficult to police how brand assets are used until after the fact. Local operators may attempt to create their own initiatives, which fall out of alignment with central strategies and standards, and create inefficiencies and over-spend. Partners may also have slow and irregular marketing cycle times, and varying degrees of ability to execute on strategy.

“Centralizing core components of marketing execution while enabling stakeholders at a local level improves timeliness, relevance, and brand compliance,” says Mark Frisina, vice president, Strata Company. “It also reduces waste and inefficient spending, such as on printing and personnel.”

Forrester’s “2017 Predictions: Dynamics That Will Shape The Future In The Age Of The Customer” reports that this shared responsibility model is a growing trend, with 33% of consumer-facing brands expected to start making that shift. According to Forrester, “These companies will move from functional-siloed organizations that prioritize efficiency and control to customer-driven matrix structures that also leverage shared functions to protect margin.”

“One major grocery store chain scored a huge victory for marcom effectiveness and spending. They brought the right balance of centralized control and local autonomy to their 19 banner brands, which consist of more than 3,000 stores in 18 regions,” explains Frisina. “In the
past, each division conducted its own loyalty marketing with local vendors. The parent company had limited ability to coordinate programs or understand the successes and other key metrics affecting thousands of campaigns operated across the divisions. Denied economies of scale and the ability to apply best practices across the country, marketing leadership demanded a new way to execute marketing strategy.”

The chain partnered with a marketing resource management solutions provider who understood that a custom solution tailored to the unique demands of the business was needed. The solution was a self-service portal, empowering regional marketing managers to quickly and efficiently customize highly variable mailers from centrally established templates. This arrangement put central marketing in charge of formats, offers, and brand guidelines, while giving local brands a way to showcase their unique identity and best connect with their customers.

The centrally managed campaigns defined the type and format of common messages, such as the grand opening of a regional store or the introduction of a pharmacy, and ensured consistent branding in each region. Local marketing managers could streamline and expedite campaign execution with push-button simplicity to order and start the fulfillment process.

The solution was a tremendous success. Implementing corporate-wide standards that offer centrally managed resources with local design, while streamlining the marcom process, enabled the organization to cut regional project management staff from five to just one professional per region. At the same time, the organization was able to execute on four times as many programs per year while dramatically reducing production costs.

Self-service portals can also be used to guide local brand users to design, print, and fulfill using lower-cost methods that still meet objectives. Other organizations of comparable size and complexity have realized a 50% savings by automatically guiding users to lower-cost opportunities, such as more efficient postage rates that still reach the desired audience at the right time.

3 Manage complex communications and ensure compliance

Highly complex communications challenges can easily grow to overwhelming proportions, as one financial firm with a large retirement plan division discovered. The company was on a tight deadline to send 401k program fee disclosures to corporate customers. With no centralized interface to manage the creation of correspondence, there were hundreds of resources to comb through and, therefore, hundreds of different production groupings with no automation. The time-consuming, manual processes to manage data and send out the correct customer communications had the potential to be susceptible to error.

After working with a technology partner who could revamp their pro-
cess, build a system, and provide related support services, the firm now has an automated interface to manage and distribute fee disclosures. It automatically generates ready-to-distribute communications from hundreds of documents and countless permutations. Tight version control ensures that the correct document for each customer is always available and easily identified.

Marcom efficiency is about much more than just producing communications accurately and quickly. Technology allows companies to seamlessly and flawlessly produce data-driven content in a controlled environment, ensuring the right message is sent to the right customer at the right time.

Today, data management and the production of highly variable communications is easier than ever for the firm. The new solution virtually eliminated disclosure-related errors and reduced the size of the disclosure preparation team by more than 50%. The work required to reimagine and streamline these complex workflows was colossal, which is why partnering was so vital to success.

The inherent complexities of this arrangement cannot be overstated. Each of the 400 hospitals has numerous brand-specific assets, all of which must be correctly represented on each communication.

With no integrated communications system, agents were forced to comb through five different spreadsheets and countless templates in order to send the correct message. This process was burdensome and error-prone, with a team of five working on template and communications upkeep. It was also complex, costly, and time-consuming to maintain. Changes or additions took several days to complete.

Working with a dedicated partner on a complete marketing communications automation solution changed everything. Today, the integrated solution automatically captures caller data and converts it to a form for immediate content creation.

Instead of searching through endless templates, today agents benefit from technology that populates the correct correspondence, hospital details, and associated attachments for each communication based on the institution selected and according to each individual patient transaction. The service company can now send fully customized communications through the same interface, regardless of which hospital client the communication is based on. Changes in core content can be made instantaneously and will automatically update every subsequent communication. And the powerful solution reduces the time and effort involved in template maintenance so significantly that the document maintenance team dropped from five FTEs to just one.

4 Transform data into highly personalized customer communications on demand

One healthcare patient experience service company in Texas sends over half a million print and email communications annually on behalf of more than 400 hospitals. Patients schedule provider visits and sign up for events with agents on behalf of those hospitals and receive confirmation communications. Each confirmation requires accuracy on multiple levels—in branding, recipient’s information, and requested information.
Harnessing the Technology That Drives Effectiveness

A successful solution is flexible enough to solve current marketing and communication needs while adapting to meet new ones.

How do you know if a martech solution will drive long-term effectiveness and customer delight?

“Successful marketing and communications technology solves present needs and adapts to meet new ones,” notes Strata’s Sammak. “It must grow as new marketing systems are added to the organization. It must scale as a business grows and evolves over time. It should be geared not just at pulling information from one system to another, but toward streamlining and improving every marcom-related touchpoint in a business.”

It should be focused on costs. Top-notch marcom workflow automation solutions can save organizations 30% or more of their annual digital and print communications budgets.

The solution should be able to draw clear connections between the choices made by a specific local operator and the resulting costs and ROI of that project. It should help marcom organizations focus time and energy on efficiently producing great campaigns.

A martech solution should streamline execution of every outreach, every time, and in every iteration. It should enforce business rules while encouraging customization, with access and customization tied to securely defined user roles. It should make brand compliance before the fact easier, ensuring innovative but properly branded communications for every customer segment.

Whether it takes the form of an off-the-shelf product or a fully custom solution, the technology must fit the unique requirements and particular needs of a business. Ultimately, the martech solution should optimize execution to drive excellence and build more profitable customer relationships.

CHECKLIST: Are You A Marketing Communications Management Candidate?

- Do you want only the most current materials, of your choice, made available to stakeholders?
- Do you want to improve cycle time, reduce costs and increase productivity?
- Do you want greater control and confidence in data to produce highly accurate, relevant, and timelier outputs?
- Do you want to streamline the design, approval, and fulfillment of your content and programs?
- Do you want more control over marketing efforts at the local level?

If this is the direction you are looking to move toward, you’re ready for a marketing communications management solution. Working with a partner who understands every step of the process, from data to development and back, ensures that every stakeholder in the marcom process gets what they need to be more effective. For over 20 years, Strata Company has delivered technology solutions that make marketing and communications easier, faster, and smarter.

To learn more, contact us.

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