ONE TOUGH QUESTION:
CHANNEL CONFLICT
10 WAYS TO RESOLVE CHANNEL CONFLICT

Misaligned goals, siloed strategies, inaccurate attribution—the reasons for channel conflict are many. Fortunately, so are the solutions to it.
ONE TOUGH QUESTION: CHANNEL CONFLICT

In many businesses today, marketing organizations are comprised of teams that each focus on a specific channel; in some cases their goals are at odds instead of aligned. This can lead to conflict instead of collaboration. Inaccurate channel attribution and siloed strategies can exacerbate the problem.

Meeting the exacting demands of today’s customers, however, necessitates that marketing teams come together to create a seamless customer experience. Marketing leaders need to identify the source of the channel conflict in their organization and then create a plan to eliminate it.

Fortunately, there are as many ways to resolve channel conflict as there are causes for it. Here, 10 marketing experts lend their advice by answering the question: What’s a leading cause of channel conflict in marketing today and what’s one way marketers can resolve that particular issue?

-GINGER CONLON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Nancy Shaver Principal Consultant, Cross-Channel Marketing, Experian Marketing Services

5 Katrina Conn VP of Marketing Services, StrongView
  Janelle Johnson Director, Demand Gen, Act-On Software

6 John Sisson President, Wilde Agency

7 Elizabeth Jackson CMO and EVP of Corporate Strategy, HookLogic
  Lauren Smith VP of Business Solutions, ClickFox

8 Scott Draeger VP, GMC Software Technology
  Doug Cox Chief Strategy Officer, Elixir Technologies

9 Melissa Dougherty Director of Channels, Avention
  John Joseph VP of Marketing, Scribe Software
Like the answer to many questions, resolving channel conflict is about following the money. The first step marketing leaders need to take is to accurately measure the dollar contribution of each and every channel to the bottom line. Response attribution isn’t simple—but CMOs who don’t embrace it to make the most effective use of marketing budget dollars can expect to be job hunting instead.

The truth is that most mature marketing organizations today have optimized single channel performance from a response perspective, but continue to argue over which channel gets credit for a sale. Whether sales are double counted, or allocated based on business rules (like first click or last click), there really isn’t much confidence in the outcome. By analyzing data from all marketing efforts, the CMO is armed with accurate information about where the budget dollars are best spent.

With that information, marketing leaders can make the right decisions about channel investment; they can determine compensation and bonus targets for staff with confidence. The budget battles and turf wars cease (or at least are diminished). Marketers can aim their efforts at what benefits the organization and the bottom line—and the barriers to having an authentic (and profitable) dialogue with the customer fall away.

Channel conflict can’t be resolved overnight, but marketing attribution provides a critical foundation from which to start. There is still the work of ensuring that marketing performance data and customer insights are available and timely, that strategy and planning are aligned, and that the “push/pull” dialogue with the customer is fluid across channels. These are not trivial tasks, but without the foundation that response attribution provides it’s pretty hard to succeed.
JANELLE JOHNSON  
Director, Demand Gen, Act-On Software  
@janelle_johnson @actonsoftware

The first thing a marketing leader needs to do is to think like the customer. See the process and the company from the customer’s perspective. How they buy and which channels they use are often irrelevant to the customer. As marketers, we need to ensure a smooth process for our customers, no matter what channel they come in through. That means aligning our databases and communication strategies across direct and indirect channels so that customer needs come first.

KATRINA CONN  
VP of Marketing Services, StrongView  
@katrinaconn @strongview

The process of eliminating channel conflict should begin by marketers transitioning to a customer experience-focused approach that considers all touchpoints, inbound and outbound. This type of customer experience focus requires a shift from individual channel-specific communication strategies to an overarching customer contact strategy that incorporates all channels and campaigns that share contact governance and history.

This shift also requires an enterprise-level customer journey map that incorporates all entries, touchpoints, and potential exits of a consumer across all channels. The challenge and opportunity for marketers is to identify where there are overlapping efforts or gaps in communications across channels, make adjustments, and then develop an integrated cross-channel communication strategy.

There are four factors to consider when building a more robust customer journey map and the appropriate customer communications to support a cohesive and integrated contextual customer experience:

Prospect or customer – Is he a prospect or customer who should be treated differently?
Stage of lifecycle – Is he a new, repeat, or lapsed customer?
Channel-specific campaigns or promotions – What campaigns or promotions does he qualify for via which channels?
Customer behavior – What is he doing, on what device, and from where?

Mapping an enterprise-level customer journey will help identify the opportunities to consolidate communications, optimize data and customer identification, and provide a single view of customer activity across channels and campaigns to create that cohesive customer experience.
As a marketing leader, you know that if sales, marketing, technology, and service all work together, clear, concise, and consistent messages will be delivered to the market and drive growth. You just know it. Yet, in your organization, big or small, each of these groups seems to be singing from a different hymnal. The first step to resolving channel conflict is asking that most important of marketing questions: Why?

If you were developing an external campaign, you would naturally want to understand the audience before you launched your message into the market. When it comes to channel conflict, the other departments (dare I say silos) are your audience. To understand your audience, as individuals and as departments, is to begin the process of developing your “campaign” for change.

You’ll want to know things like: who are they, what motivates them, what are their challenges, how do they view themselves, and where do they fit in compared to the others in the audience. If you know this about your constituents, you can form a “marketing strategy” to reduce or eliminate channel conflict.

Your strategy will lead to tactics for engendering collaboration and communication. You’ll develop goals that generate success for everyone in the organization. In the end, if you understand your audience you can find a way to align an individual’s and a department’s goals—and maybe even their incentives—so that everyone pursues a common good for your organization. Channel conflict be gone!
To resolve channel conflict is to reorient the discussion around the shopper, not channel. Historically, organizations, budgets, and compensation were oriented around channels (e.g. direct, key accounts, specialty retailers). In the old brick-and-mortar world that approach worked because consumers had a favorite store and were unlikely to go to another to buy their desired product. However, the Internet has changed the game. Today’s digital shopper is different. She is empowered, full of information from consumer reviews, and she shops her “own” store created in her browser window—hopping between multiple retailers’ website. In my last role as CMO of a durable goods company, we used to look at our sales by retailer, with ‘dot.com’ included within each. But looking at the data a different way—all the dot.coms together—we realized that e-commerce sales were our second largest and fastest growing customer. So we changed our organization, budgets, and compensation to focus around the shopper, not the retailer channels, to ensure that we all were aligned to driving value of our brand.

Brand value will be created by 1) influencing the shopper to buy your product over the million other options she now has online—converting browser to buyer measured as consideration and conversion to sales; and 2) delighting her with the product experience, so she buys your products more in the future (lifetime value). Nothing in these two goals mentions anything about channel. They are all focused around the shopper, and that is the future.

The ways in which customers, prospective and existing, can interface with companies today is broad and multifaceted. Acquiring new business without undermining existing channel relationships is essential in today’s complex and highly competitive business environment. Having misaligned and conflicting marketing efforts across channels drives customer confusion, frustration, and increased cost to convert. Where marketing channel conflicts occur, the customer is not the center of the approach. Every company needs to gain a perspective of the customers’ lens toward its channel marketing.

Gaining visibility into how customers interact with a company’s products and services—not just within a channel, but across all channels—provides the necessary insights for strategic and tactical marketing. Many organizations realize customer behavior within a single channel, but very few understand how customers use different channels to reach their goals. For instance, customer confusion prevails when retail sites are unable to match, or even understand, digital sales strategies. Full awareness of the customer and the customer’s multichannel journeys with the company’s product, services, and employees allows marketing leaders to develop a synergistic, integrated strategy for holistic marketing.

Leveraging detailed journey data and insights enhances channel marketing strategies, and the customer is at the center. Armed with comprehensive customer journey data, it’s possible to align overall strategy and tactically identify key approaches to positively impact the company’s ability to effectively acquire new business.
The possibilities of what marketers can present across any channel are intrinsically tied to the content behind it. There are ways to liberate content to its full potential and the first step is to find out where every piece of content or data exists within the company, and then decide if you want to use it, regardless of its final form. The decision to use a specific channel should be tied to a marketing strategy, not based on technical limitations.

Today, content is often maintained in separate systems throughout a company. Data used to generate a targeted email campaign, managed in one system; content that drives the customer’s Web experience in another; and the data to generate printed documents in yet another. Content silos emerge, and along with it a reliance on one channel simply because it provides access to more data. This can result in a skewed view of channel performance. Reliance on one channel over another can also result in the need to duplicate data. This compromises content integrity, leading to inconsistent communications across channels and more conflict. Ideally, content should be reusable and channel agnostic so it can be formatted into something useful at the time it’s needed.

Marketers that shift focus away from correspondence in its final form—email, print, online—to the individual components that allow it to take a shape that’s relevant to the recipient will get the most value from current channels and have the most flexibility as new channels emerge.

---

**SCOTT DRAEGER**

**VP, GMC Software Technology**

@scottdraeger @gmc_net

The first thing to remember is that your target customers don’t care about your infrastructure challenges, organizational boundaries, or technology limitations. They care about receiving information that’s relevant through any or all of the channels they use. It’s entirely possible to remove most of the conflict from the channels by coordinating the campaigns before channel decisions are made. Create a cohesive campaign, and design its manifestations for optimal delivery in each channel. Then, determine what can happen when a customer decides to switch channels. This approach will allow you to deploy a campaign that is cohesive.

Once you have a channel-optimized campaign, work within the organization to push for coordinated releases. While working with the technology and design teams, it’s important to discuss timely coordination. If your organization has trouble with coordinating departments, vendors, or other stakeholders, you might consider finding a software solution that can centrally design, manage, and deploy multichannel and omnichannel campaigns.

With technology today there’s no excuse for delivering uncoordinated campaigns with channel gaps. Customers’ expectations are set by their best experiences in their favorite channels. To deliver successful campaigns, think of your own experiences. How would you use different channels? If you saw an offer in person, would you scan a QR code? Would you research more from your tablet during a commercial? Would you go to the desktop? How would other people respond differently? In 2015 you simply must have the capability to let users select and switch channels at will.

---

**DOUG COX**

**Chief Strategy Officer, Elixir Technologies**

@elixirbuzz

The possibilities of what marketers can present across any channel are intrinsically tied to the content behind it. There are ways to liberate content to its full potential and the first step is to find out where every piece of content or data exists within the company, and then decide if you want to use it, regardless of its final form. The decision to use a specific channel should be tied to a marketing strategy, not based on technical limitations.

Today, content is often maintained in separate systems throughout a company. Data used to generate a targeted email campaign, managed in one system; content that drives the customer’s Web experience in another; and the data to generate printed documents in yet another. Content silos emerge, and along with it a reliance on one channel simply because it provides access to more data. This can result in a skewed view of channel performance. Reliance on one channel over another can also result in the need to duplicate data. This compromises content integrity, leading to inconsistent communications across channels and more conflict. Ideally, content should be reusable and channel agnostic so it can be formatted into something useful at the time it’s needed.

Marketers that shift focus away from correspondence in its final form—email, print, online—to the individual components that allow it to take a shape that’s relevant to the recipient will get the most value from current channels and have the most flexibility as new channels emerge.
Channel conflict is typically caused by a misalignment within a business’s go-to-market strategy. This can take place when decisions regarding marketing programs are made in silos, without considering how they can impact other channels that reside within the business. For instance, running incentive programs for direct purchases has the potential to create conflict for your indirect channels. In doing so, marketers essentially undercut their channel partners by allowing customers to buy directly at a lower price.

Marketing can help eliminate these conflicts by ensuring that program development is fair and equitable among all routes to market. To do so, each marketing group must have a clear understanding of the different routes to market for each business practice. This helps to further create channel harmony so that no single line of business is challenged. This doesn’t require a one-size-fits-all program, but the programs must be similar to meet the needs of the channel.

Before taking specific steps to reduce channel conflict in terms of a partner channel, organizations need to agree on a certain level of “channel commitment.” If the organization values the channel, its sales and marketing leaders need to accept that they should steer clear of the temptation to take on opportunities that aren’t in their declared sweet spot. The first step, therefore, is for an organization’s sales and marketing leadership to clearly define their own zone of operation and, through that definition, the zone that they’ll leave to their channel. Marketing can then also help remove the temptation for sales to stretch the boundaries by establishing a realistic direct sales and lead gen plan that doesn’t create starving reps who eye the opportunities on the other (channel) side of the fence.