

4 Changes You Need to Embrace to Navigate Today's Market

I often get asked some iteration of “What’s new in marketing?” or “What do you think will be different next year?” and “What trends can we anticipate?” I find these questions to be misguided.

The word “trend” suggests that something is popular for a short amount of time – a fad that may generate a quick return, but will just as quickly be replaced. Seeing them as having limited value, business professionals often view trends as unworthy of the time and energy required to be adopted.

The fact is that, while new tools come out all the time, marketing doesn’t change. Sure, technology might be different, but the strategy remains the same. The end goal will always be to promote and sell our services and products, using whatever resources we have available, whether that be the latest software or tried-and-true email.

That said, several emergent marketing philosophies are worth considering. They aren’t so much trends as shifts in paradigms. And while they might not be revolutionary new ideas, they do buck long-standing practices and will likely leave a lasting impact.

Find Brand Influencers

The technology revolution has extended our reach, amplified our messages and connected us to our audiences in ways we had never experienced before. In doing so, it also gave more influence to clients, enabling them to have an impact on our marketing strategies, reputations and culture – oh, and did I say reputations? No longer can we simply tell the marketplace what we think they should know; we have to follow, listen, change, adapt and stay relevant by their standards. If they like you, they will respond positively, telling others and boosting your brand’s reputation.

Welcome to the “**Human Era.**” Technology is the tool, but on the other side of that tool is a person; one who either likes, dislikes or is indifferent to your services. Each of these people has the tools to tell others – as well as your own business – the positives and negatives related to the relationship and services provided. What does this mean? It means we need to prioritize not the technology but rather the human aspect of what we do. We need to connect with our audiences, not via mass advertising, but by using targeted, hyper-focused resources, stories and messaging.

So change number one: Build relationships that create an army of brand advocates. To do that, you have to know who they are and where they are, and then be there, too. Among these persuasive advocates might be the head of an industry association or a prominent CEO whom others in the industry look up to. The point is they are influential to your target



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audience and you should most certainly listen to them to learn what they want and need.

That said, though, get away from transactional thinking and build relationships based on [empathy and emotion](#). Your connection must be genuine. When you create such a bond and loyalty is in place, these influencers will become your best marketers.

Stand Out from the Crowd

Today's marketing "noise" is at a very high decibel level. To be heard, seen, remembered and talked about, you have to give creativity and innovation a seat at the table. The status quo is so last week, and mimicking what other similar businesses are doing is a waste of time and resources. Creative and clever strategies, messages and problem-solving will cultivate brand awareness much faster than what is typical, safe or – worse – overdone.

Differentiating your marketing philosophy from the norm is a key success factor. Clever messages can go viral and creative tactics can be employed to publicly defuse conflicts. In fact, some [companies are using innovative ways](#) to communicate with their audiences to protect their brands with [funny and unique cease-and-desist tweets, emails and even a town crier](#).

Unfortunately, many professional services firms that claim to be innovative fail to reflect this in their marketing and communications strategies. This becomes a contradiction between what the business proclaims and what it does. If you state that you are innovative, be innovative in everything you do – and that includes your content, sales process, client relations, marketing activities and client solutions.

So change number two: Use creative thinking and tactics to stand out, be recognized and be remembered. Develop marketing campaigns that integrate multiple communications tactics, and find creative ways to distribute your messages. And consider incorporating a little humor into some of those strategies.

Pay Attention to the Next Generation

America is going through major social and culture changes. Businesses have to adapt quickly, because many of these changes are being initiated by our younger generations. We spent way too much time analyzing millennials instead of listening, learning and adapting to what inspires them to succeed. The global workplace will be filled with more millennials than any other generation by 2025, and they won't just be working for you – they'll be debating about hiring you.

Not only do we need to make changes that support millennials in business, but now Gen Z is entering the workforce. This next generation has adapted many of the [traits of millennials](#), but they have even shorter attention spans and expect even more from their employers. Gen Z also is a much-bigger generation, and they too are estimated to comprise a large percent of the global workforce by 2025.

These new generations are looking for businesses that are people-oriented, not revenue-based. They want to change processes to be more efficient, and they know technology will play a huge part in that. They also are both extremely socially conscientious.

Marketing to and communicating with these generations will have to change. We need to better understand how they communicate and what they best respond to. I suspect the answers will be very different from what worked for Boomers and Gen X.

To adapt and attract the younger generations, consider focusing on the following:

- Current and relevant technology for communication, workflow, collaboration and efficiency
- Real-time feedback and outlined growth programs that include mentoring, timelines and ongoing performance discussions
- Corporate culture – diverse work environments, inclusion and a community focus
- A workplace environment that allows for two-way discussions; listening is key, as is respecting their ideas

That brings us to change number three: Do not overlook the younger generations. We have to start applying tactical marketing methods that reach and resonate with these audiences, whether for branding, recruiting or client prospecting. This starts with listening to them and then implementing change internally that reflects what we hear so our external messaging resonates more effectively with an increasingly diverse audience.

Be Socially Responsible

Why should your company be socially responsible? Because it is the right thing to do. The Human Era forces us to be more empathetic and socially conscious. Empathy and social consciousness in turn are cultural and brand traits that businesses of today – and presumably the future – want to partner with. Being globally aware of the effects of your business on society, the environment, politics and culture are attractive characteristics and underscore a company's values. Plus, not only are you doing good, but you also will be recognized for it, which will increase relationship opportunities.

It is much easier to market when you can share positive attributes like corporate social responsibility programs. It's a win-win for the firm's brand and for society as a whole, and people – prospective clients and employees – like that.

So change number four: If you want to attract the best talent and the right business clients, align with companies that make the world a better place (and be one of them). Trends eventually die, but these philosophical marketing changes we are seeing are likely to influence our professional lives for years to come.

Early adopters will get the upper hand, while those who continue to concentrate on strategies best suited for the aging workforce will fall behind.

If you have any questions regarding your marketing philosophy, reach out to me, Terry M. Isner, at tisner@jaffepr.com.