

Ordering Pizza. Getting Pasta, & Eating It Anyway...



The Confusing Case of Aligning To New Age Customer Expectations: A Communications View

Most communication programmes begin with the customer. Often depth interactions, panel discussion, social listening amongst others is used to understand what the customer wants. What are their fears? Their expectations? How is the product helping them to overcome their challenges?

These insights are usually the start of a mapping strategy, defining key messages and underlining an execution path to help our customers understand we are the right fit for them. As a part of the agency business for more than a decade, we take pride in creating differentiated strategies, understanding the consumer pulse and creating great case studies, but as a transformation leader at one of our biggest clients once at the timeequivocally opined, 'Eat Your Own Dog Food!'

So, that's what we did. We decided to speak to business leaders, communication & marketing teams and global agency heads to understand what does the current communication customer need. We analyzed all of our past clients, ones we have retained and ones we have lost. We wanted to truly 'eat our own dog food' and figure

out if we have been giving 'pizza' when our clients wanted 'pasta'! Maybe, just because they ate it, so we assumed they liked it. Maybe, they wanted something else. Maybe, we didn't ask the right questions.

The world is changing. The demands and expectations from communication are moving past just campaigns and breaking down boardroom doors. We are at a cusp of the biggest opportunity the communications industry has seen since Bernays put a cigarette in the hands of the Statue of Liberty. If as an industry, we can understand the needs of the new age communication customer, we can drive together to redefine what we mean to a business, and move from an excel sheet of campaign metrics to impacting the last line on our customers balance sheets.

Aniruddha Atul Bhagwat
Chief Executive Officer

Businesses, today, are in more volatile and uncertain times than ever before. They are facing challenges from all directions. They are faced with mounting competitive challenges locally and globally, compliance and regulation pressures, shrinking margins pressures as well as adapting to new technologies to stay relevant. Established market players are under enormous pressure from the challenges of start-ups, which are making impact in many sectors.

The bigger players need to match the creativity, energy and innovation storming out of start-ups. This coupled with an open two-way communication with all stakeholders, watchdogs and whistleblowers all around and the proliferations of mobile communication technology has put communications at the center of any business. While all may not see communication as a powerful tool in building strong businesses, everyone would agree that lack of efficient communications could definitely lead to the downfall of the largest enterprises.

Communications can be the compass to navigate through business complexities. The practice of communications has moved steadily, yet surely from the periphery of a support for core marketing to support for core business. Proliferation of technology, globalization and the rise of the consumer voice have made communications increasingly important to any enterprise. The role and impact communications teams have on the business have moved from the periphery to the core.

Data silos within organizations are being broken, and all decisions from people to communication to processes are directed towards specific business outcomes. This whitepaper will look to uncover the new age expectations of businesses from communication, the attitudes and communication-based skills required to address future business complexities and how insight-led communication strategies can further focus on delivering a business impact, extending from the brand & communication metrics being traditionally followed.

To truly decode what this means to the communication industry and what we need to do as we evolve into new business models, team structures and embrace new processes, we need to focus upon the current business complexities and dynamic

environment, the new expectations from our customers, the ability of communication to navigate business challenges, and refocusing our lens as we look at our business and industry.

Evolution of Communication: Buying In To Our Own Narratives

Communication has always been an innate, intrinsic need for communities, especially if we consider human evolution as an example. In fact, it's not wrong to say that it's been quite a stepping-stone in the entire process! We started with smoke signals, and look at us now - cued into our screens for most, if not all of our day, because there's always someone else on the other side.

When it comes to brands establishing a connect with consumers, there's a lot to consider. The way businesses interact with consumers can make or break these relationships, and once broken, they are almost impossible to mend. In more ways than one, these interactions are the first step to creating that memorable customer experience we talked about before, since in depth understanding can only be driven by their preferences, behavior and opinions.

Over the last two decades or so, the model of business communication has changed and the shift can be perceived quite evidently. We are well beyond the time when the major communication objectives included disseminating information to the masses. The secret sauce behind every successful relationship stems from being able to listen to the other party and understanding their point of view, before putting out a reaction. It's the little things that matter, and this holds true for brands as well. Persuading the customer is no longer enough to hold their attention, let alone ensure brand recall. Conversing with them to build collaborations that exceed expectations is the need of the hour.

Today, technology is a key enabler for this evolution. In fact, it has brought about possibly the greatest shift in this landscape. Ever since the social media boom in the 2000's, life has changed. Digital communication has become the torch holder for successful brand-consumer relationships, for it helps brands humanize themselves.

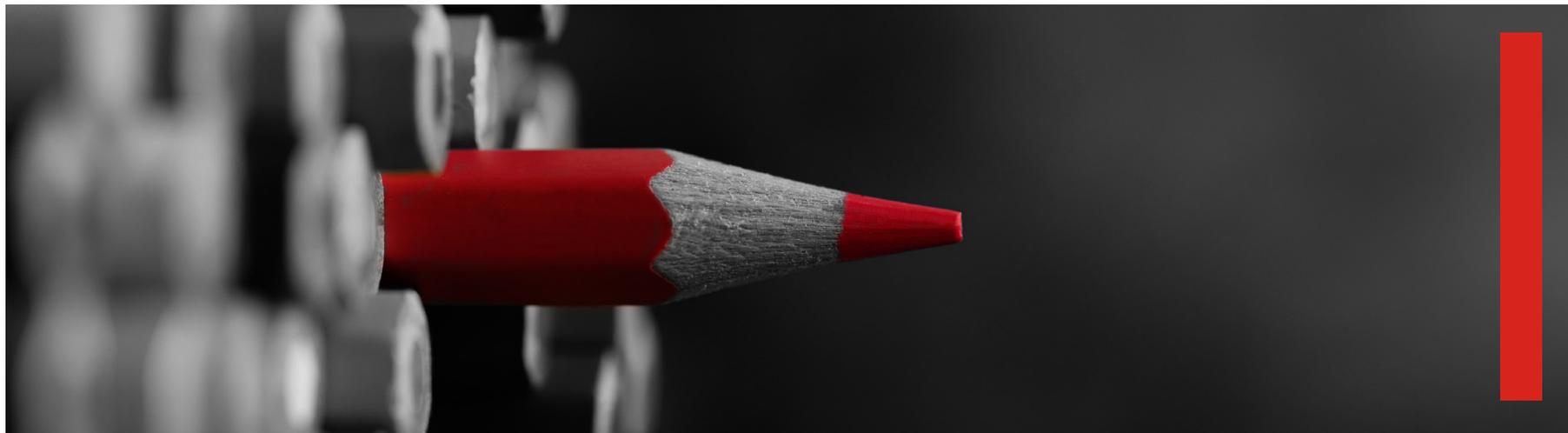
We've been very fortunate to see this come alive and witness the digital communication practice take entire industries by storm. Slowly and steadily, it has become the consumers' most preferred channel of communication, for it allows real time engagement, quick response rates and easy accessibility - everything that makes for customized, personalized interactions. And while traditional mediums have taken a backseat, they are far from becoming redundant, especially for the older generation. What matters most, is finding the fine balance between the two, to ensure that the consumer settles in comfortably and is not left at the tipping point.

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When one of your team members can define your brand better than you, that's ownership!

Girish Balachandran,
Managing Partner, On Purpose

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Identifying The Change in Our Playing Field: Have The Rules Changed?

The world is evolving at an alarmingly fast rate today, and trends don't seem to stay trending for too long. We're living in interesting times indeed. With Covid 19 quite literally making the rounds across the globe, the pandemic has completely changed the meaning of the phrase 'business as usual.' For the first time in the history we remember, we are witnessing a complete shift in the way corporate culture functions, in all aspects possible.

Coupled with process changes and tech enablement, this makes the marketer's challenge to engage with consumers efficiently harder to tackle. Moreover, today's consumers are much more evolved than those of the yesteryears, and we don't have to go too far. Five years ago is a good enough estimate to consider. In the age of the fourth industrial revolution that is fueled by digital transformation, consumer behaviour is largely guided by tech interventions, and focused on mainly one factor: convenience.

Easy accessibility, quicker turnaround times and seamless omnichannel interactions matter the most now. The customer journey begins with a search that ends with 'near me.' With social media available with a few taps on the phone, consumers are also more cued into the way brands and businesses interact with them.

While the current pandemic we are all going through is unprecedented and has definitely changed the rules of the game. Lets look a little further back to understand how communication expectations have transformed over the 10-15 years. This change will give us the right starting point to truly uncovering what our new age customers of today really want!

Then and Now!

The shift in the communication landscape



Campaign Patience

Brand to consumer communication achieved through long term relationships built



Brand Outcomes

Awareness, visibility and brand recall considered as success metrics



Few Vendors

Tight knit connections, and shorter circles of trust across agencies and communication networks



Long Narratives

Brand stories curated through traditional PR that were business/product centric and content heavy



Lost Outcomes

No fixed criteria for measurability as processes were more effort oriented



Instant Outcomes

With digital and social on the rise, consumers prefer brands that interact with them spontaneously



Business Outcomes

Anything that does not derive quantifiable business value is not equivalent to successful



Partner Ecosystems

Mix and match of different skillsets that work collaboratively to achieve common business goals



Short Stories

Digital led, consumer focused, humane, bite sized chunks of information that are convenient to consume



Real Time Measurability

The focus is on measurable business outcomes through performance oriented processes

The major changes can be seen in the level of patience to see outcomes reducing, the need to focus on solving business challenges and not only brand outcomes, a drastic shift in the length of our narratives, a need for element to be measures, and a realization that collaboration is here to stay and we need to partner to deliver great business outcomes. As that's what our customer were ordering, business! And we are giving the brand. Sometimes they aligned, but many times they left the table unsatisfied.

Digging Deeper: Let's Sit To Eat Our Own Dog Food

Keeping business complexities in mind, we undertook a research to gauge where we truly stand in today's business landscape. Over the course of this study, we analyzed more than 150 customers who we had partnered with to enhance their internal and external communication efforts. We went back to more than 150 customer journeys, brand roadmaps, communication objectives, and the greatest wins that came out of these partnerships. We also analyzed existing business reports and thought leadership articles on the role that communication plays when meeting business goals, and the impact it has on the company's top and bottom line.

Understanding business uncertainties is a multi-layered process, not something that can be achieved overnight. Especially if you consider a business as dynamic as communication, it becomes imperative to break the process down one step at a time, because there's so much information that communication professionals handle on a day-to-day basis.

In addition, we could not ignore some of the biggest crises businesses have faced in the past and how communication has helped them make a comeback. While we'd all like to believe that we can manage pressure and rise to our feet, it's a tad bit difficult to believe the same when brands are involved. Rebuilding that trust within consumers is hard, but not impossible.

It's what Zomato did by including the code 'OUTRAGE' when people responded negatively to their hoardings. It's what Coke did by running campaigns for rural India when the whole country believed the product held pesticide. It's what Maggi did when the Food and Drug Administration accused them of toxic lead intake. They responded to each and every tweet that disgruntled customers put out, to ensure sentiment could be managed in real time, and a few months later, came up with campaigns that struck the emotional chord yet again. Four years later, it's still our go to two-minute snack.

The common denominator? Communication. The good old philosophy of talking it out in case of a conflict. Not easy conversations to have, all stakes considered, but definitely needed!

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Communication professionals should strive to build clear, transparent relationships with their clients & partners. And always follow the golden rule: under promise, and over deliver!

Mitin Chakraborty,
Head of Marketing, Babyshop – Landmark Group

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We also reached out to industry influencers and communication leaders to understand their take on how brand communication and identities have evolved, the kind of business complexities they struggle with and their recommendations to align with new age needs while keeping changing customer expectations at the fore. Mapping these objectives to business outcomes, expectations of attitude from communication professionals and building sustainable solutions to outlast the future were also discussed.

Most of them focused on the need for quick, agile solutions, communication models that could be customized according to business needs, and outcomes that could be easily tracked. They also elaborated upon the lack of depth that communication teams work with, a constant need for subject matter expertise and design thinking led approaches for better messaging strategies. That really put things into perspective for us, and led us to think about how we could strive to do better, to be better.

Continuous Product Marketing Loop

- 1 Primary & secondary business, stakeholder, and internal insights attributed to the identified business challenges
- 2 Using insight to solution a product communication/marketing framework including methods of measurement for product adoption penetration and advocacy
- 3 Creating design language & templatization as well as modular content assets to accelerate planning, creation and release of content
- 4 Execute the communication framework through internal and partner terms including real time measurements at every level



This product communication loop will move at an infinite level solving existing challenges better, addressing new challenges or anticipating challenges of the future

Outcome-based communication needs to address a specific business challenge. The articulation of the business challenge is an important ingredient in ensuring an impactful product communication framework. Business challenges are dynamic, and as you address one, another one will always peak

out. Being able to have flexible frameworks and agile systems following a specific cycle for each challenge will allow for a measurable product communication loop, which can absorb a new business challenge seamlessly.

At The End of the Day, It's Just Business.

To create effective communication solutions, deriving core insights is what communication experts and agencies need to focus on. And in order to do that, a proper identification roadmap for problems needs to be laid out.

It is not surprising that insights mining is thus the most time consuming, and the most important step towards the entire brand-consumer relationship building process. Ultimately, it is these relationships that translate into business impact. However, this is a very macro level picture. We dug deeper into these through our interactions with industry experts and understood their pain points and areas of attention. From among tens of others, the ones that stood out include the following:

Inability to use the brand lens to filter ideas: More often than not, marketers end up affixing their own personalities on to the business, which ends confusing customers further. A proper communication roadmap can help eradicate this confusion and make communication strategies that ensure years worth of loyalty!

Lack of medium understanding: Sure, tech is great to explore and the market is seeing new mediums of communication come up every day, but that doesn't mean each one will be well suited for every business. The real test lies in assessing that one would fit perfectly, and crafting communication strategies that work best with the maximum users of that medium. 'Easy to achieve' doesn't cut it anymore.

Little or nil customer understanding: We often make do with a surface level understanding of consumer preferences and behavior, and that leads to incomplete or even incorrect insights at times. Spending more time with consumers, engaging with them and keeping track of their likes, dislikes,

personas and schedules is what drives clear communication goals, and that's an important point to remember. The more specific you get, the better!

Agility in process: Comfort and agility rarely go hand in hand, which is why most agencies and communication professionals shy away from agile implementations. Traditional, rigid ways of functioning may help achieve short term goals, but that doesn't drive long term success. Speed drives success.

Anticipation: The thumb rule for crafting effective communication strategies has its roots laid in anticipation. Driven by core consumer understanding and supported by constant insight analysis, marketers need to understand how to stay a step ahead of consumers. Only then can we aim at being in it for the long haul.

Delivering Business Outcomes: Telling a brand story is not simple by any measure, and finding the right team to tell this story is absolutely essential. Not only can this make or break the brand's usage within the audience set, it also forms the basis of how consumers perceive them in the long run.

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There is a difference between digital marketing and digital communications. The difference lies in the art of storytelling... to build trust.

Gayatri Rath

Former India Communications Lead at Microsoft, GE Capital & Oracle

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Brands need teams that can empathize with users, understand them and go the extra mile to weave memorable narratives. Crafting the correct message, identifying the correct media and having deep subject matter expertise is what makes all the difference. Brands that narrate stories are well on their way to success!

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There are two type of talent: one having the ability to sell a pitch, and the other to, be able to write a compelling story based on that pitch.

Ashok Kumar,
Co - Founder, Scripbox

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Our Business Models: Inside Out, and Insights Led

STAGE
01

Framing a narrative for a new category, one step at a time.

The Brief

STAGE
02

Identifying market size and opportunity for the product, with stakeholder personas & behaviours

The Research

STAGE
03

Value propositions and product differentiators defined

The Analysis

STAGE
04

Positioning and narrative outlined

The Story

Use Case: Driving Innovation and Product Design Through Communication



One of the largest Indian toothbrush manufacturers, Jewel Consumer Care faced tremendous pressure from global competitors on product innovation.



Design thinking led insights study done

Prototype artifact designed for global customers; also used for message delivery & showcasing innovation



1 million unit orders for innovation from Unilever

Entire marketing innovation kit created

Attitude is everything, and means a lot to New Age Enterprises.

Our research revealed many key pain points for business leaders, and there are two stand out: a lack of competency and resources within the existing agency framework, and a gap in comprehension and translation of consumer centric messaging strategies. Look at this closely and you will see how the two are interlinked.

The current business scenario that we are in warrants rapid transformations, culture changes and exemplary delivery rates, and the industry is already moving in that direction. Agile is the new normal, and agencies need to be in a constant test-learn-reinvent mode. While legacy mediums still continue to exist, there's little value-add there.

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The talent capability gap that exists between the client and the agency means that magical output often happens by chance or coincidence rather than by design.

Ashwin Uppal,
Global FMCG Marketing & Innovation Expert

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Traditional PR has almost become an afterthought and many industry experts are of the opinion that it is close to extinction in the near future, for its outcomes are not as critiqued as they were in the recent past. Brands are more open to adding in spends and budgets for promotion, but what those budgets are actually put into matter most.

There's been an explosion of new age mediums that marketers can explore today. With technology as the key enabler of this revolution, most of us find ourselves migrating towards digital first, tech led solutions, but what most of us don't realize is that this cannot be the starting point of the change we need to drive. When aligning to new age customer expectations, it is attitude that matters most, and a shift in attitude is what people struggle with most. The industry needs people who can evolve at the speed of thought!

Sure, we need more resources who are better equipped to take forward the digital push and those who really understand the difference tech integrations can make, but more than that, we need people who are hungry to learn. We need people who are in it for the long haul, people who take each day as a new challenge and people who are resilient enough to follow through marketing directives. Agencies need resources who can multitask seamlessly, people who can ensure the servicing-content-sales funnel does not run dry and people who do few things, but do them well. Unless and until we are able to ensure this attitudinal shift, no amount of tech integration will help drive business-based outcomes.

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Today's comms teams need to think afresh and bring an inside out perspective to drive business objectives. But most of them are not there yet, they still restrict themselves to campaigns.

Mohit Gundecha,
Co-Founder, Jombay

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Looking Into the Future

Aligning to the needs of new age customers and leading this charge through communication and messaging strategies is not an easy objective to achieve, but therein lies all the fun. Today, communication agencies face a unique challenge where we are moving from telling not just the story of the brand, but each individual product.

Everything is a product today, whether it is a person, service, tangible commodity or an idea. We thus need to look at the picture portrayed by the marketing lens a little differently, to ensure sophisticated, crisp product communication. Drawing insights from product life cycles, product maturity matrices, consumer journeys, trust levers, and message testing will help them ensure every message a brand communicates clearly echoes a differentiated benefit to the consumer.

It will also be important for communication agencies to understand the value of co-created partner ecosystems, for being a jack of all trades is equivalent to being a master of none, and that's not something that today's consumer will stand for. They will need to identify the areas/departments they can add most value towards, and move on from there. Not all storytellers can tell each product story well, so finding the right team to tell your story is extremely critical.

Communication architecture can fall flat, if the right communication disciplines, tools, & storytellers are not aligned. Building a team to bring in different perspectives, having agility to toggle between communication tools, and the ability to continuously innovate in the delivery and execution of the communication framework is integral to the success of any campaign. It's not about PR, digital, events, BTL, ATL, but about objective, consumer, intent & purpose. The success is not hidden in the tool, but the ability to know when to use it and how.

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There is a real art to writing a great brief. But sometimes you have to dig even deeper to get to an organisation's true goals.

Debbie Zaman,
CEO and Founder, With; Global President, With Global Alliance

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Business challenges are dynamic, and as you address one, another one will always peak out. Being able to have flexible frameworks and agile systems following a specific cycle for each challenge will allow for a measurable product communication loop, which can absorb a new business challenge seamlessly.

New age communication agencies will need to balance traditional messaging frameworks with tech, and ensure automated solutions that make for strategy layered approaches for clients, that outlast the short term objectives and reach the overarching ones, in order to drive measurable business outcomes.

We are a very lucky generation indeed, to have the Internet at our constant disposal and a plethora of tools to learn from. Tools like Sprout Social, Meltwater, Hubspot, Jira and Confluence are only a few out of the lot that can truly showcase a difference in functioning styles and make teams more adept at dealing with challenges. The more skill sets you build, the more you will be able to achieve!

What We Can Take Away!

Consultancies

- ◆ Outcome-Based Performance Led Pricing
- ◆ Focus on Skilling & Soft Training
- ◆ Need For Strong KMS Systems
- ◆ Collaborate with Partners to Build Delivery Strengths
- ◆ Integrate Technology Tools & Automate for Efficiencies
- ◆ Build Proprietary Models to use
- ◆ Communication To Solve Business Challenges

Customers

- ◆ Deliver Business Challenge Briefs
- ◆ Define Key Brand & Business Metrics Upfront
- ◆ Insist on Technology Platforms Involving Customer
- ◆ Give Time For Industry Depth & Domain Skilling
- ◆ Hire on Attitudes, Not Only Competencies
- ◆ Judge Business Acumen & Look At Agencies Like Consultancies
- ◆ Be Crystal Clear on 'outcome' expectations

Today, communication needs to help businesses navigate through the uncharted, complex and ambiguous waters they often traverse within. Enterprises have already started to see the effect of intelligent communication on their balance sheet in form of trust, reputation and brand goodwill/value, but soon, enterprises will want to see more. They will want to see direct business outcomes.

With communications, we can help scale business, attract investors, ensure a right-fit culture and team build strategy, create legacies and identify & mitigate business risks. These, in turn, directly affect the profitability, sustainability and health of any enterprise. As communicators, we just need to listen, not only to our customer's customers, but also to our customers themselves. There exists a need to read between the lines and understand the business challenge that needs be addressed. Whether their palate demands pizza or pasta, but if we listen closely, we can figure it out, together.