



The blurred lines

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS. WHY BEING ON STAGE IS AS
IMPORTANT AS HAVING GOOD BACKSTAGE?

Maksymilian Pawłowski | Marketing&Communications | April 2019

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I remember well when during management studies by late 90s we were taught about marketing and public relations. I was very much fascinated by the first, structured along 4Ps – product, price, promotion and place. The second was in the shadow - being just a small part of mainstream marketing activities, supportive to advertisement, endorsement or sponsoring. It was all about reaching end customer with the message, which generally worked based on interruption. The interruption understood, as that a customer had to stop his or her attention on the piece of information and to register it, at least in part e.g. brand, product name or call to action tagline. This principle hasn't changed much since then, but

the new element has emerged in marketing landscape but not only – Internet. When I started to work in marketing with this new tool at the time (2000s – see the photo and please notice a laptop which was almost space technology by the time and deeper you will find main marketing tool in B2B – fixed phone), it was similar to newspaper or magazines. The content was interactive, to the same extent as pages in paper books – you could switch from



one side to another (notice that switching the book pages by the time was definitely quicker than internet ones), close the book and take another one. Oh yes, the images were in color, but downloading was nightmare for home users when using 33600 b/s modem (you know, the little black box connected to telephone landline. I do remember complains of my family when the phone was permanently busy and no one could call us). Nevertheless, it was possible to get in touch with the brand on distance by typing the website address in e.g. Netscape browser. After few years, web technology visibly took off and websites evolved from plain text into something well known from the past – simple catalogues of products, from which you could learn more about and go/mail/call to shop to complete to purchase (the pioneer of analogue version of mail catalogue was probably Hammacher-Schlemmer by the end of XIX century with DIY products). Over a course of time the level of interactions between brand and customer has leveraged, mainly due to WEB 2.0 phenomenon – I'd say effectively in second half of 2000s. The web has become truly interactive and the content has started to be created not only by professionals or organizations but by regular users. As you surely notice, this is historical moment when the voice is not associated only with one side of a dialog but both. The widespread visibility of multisource content has implications on marketing and...communications, which before was associated with public relations, marketing subdiscipline. As when the mutual exchange of information is performed, both sides need to be attentive – the sender and receiver (maybe better is now to use term a follower). So, using simplified model, when company/organization releases some information, it hopes that it will reach desired target group and trigger some actions – e.g.

press coverage, purchase of product, fundraise of some money or just improvement of brand perception. The same is true for users, but goals to be achieved are different – e.g. we want to share our emotions or thoughts, get support for some initiatives, be noticed by others or solve a problem etc.

After describing in short, some technological evolution in marketing and communications environment it's time for some conclusions and implications. A dialog between organizations and users/people is now a must, taking into consideration a full rollout of social media, its wide usage and impactful nature, not only on business, but politics, social trends etc. In order to be part of this landscape, traditional marketing techniques and strategies alone are not fully relevant or are losing its impactfulness. They need to be additionally equipped with ears and voice – have some persona, be human – have communications ingredient into it. Maybe it's better at first to listen to customers/stakeholders and then to talk to them using adequate language and covering interesting topics for them, and not only taking organization's perspective?

When I'm looking how the marketing job has evolved for almost 20 years, I see some patterns - some are old some are new. We keep distance to our customers or constituencies when we publish advertisement (on-line or off-line), prepare a banner or billboard as these are the actions where we don't have to touch the customer or meet him/her face-to-face. We use intermediaries, which provide us, marketing people, a safe shelter, sometimes a disguise. Now, I tend to think we are somehow anonymous no matter our artwork is loved or hated. And when the anonym is on one side, it's just one-way communication, of which now I'm not a strong believer. When I've moved more toward communications, that was different story – each day we had to directly interact with customers, people, users. That was especially true for B2B where the main brand strategy was to use traditional marketing combined with sophisticated, by the time, communications techniques. But now it's true also for B2C, where the most effective way of attracting customers/people to the brand is combination of marketing, supported by social media and public relations (understand as relations with surrounding public). To use some analogy, it was like moving from backstage or director's room, where you control things like decoration or light remotely, to the central point of the scene, where people could see you and interact with you (and please do not imagine tomatoes flying over this place, maybe better flowers, to not scary young communicators). And this is the moment we are now, regarding marketing and communications. While the backstage is still needed to amaze spectators with images and “decoration”, the people's expectations are to have someone on the stage – personification of a brand. Someone they can talk to, share their views, problems, achievements. Of course, definition of “the stage” has evolved over the time. It used to be conferences, investor meetings, press briefings, client's breakfasts, town hall meetings etc. And while keeping the old parts of definition, today "the stage" or place of interaction is much more extended and located (mainly?) in social networks, forums, enterprise social networks (ESN's), whatsapp etc. This is the place where dialog could be carried on, internally or externally, and additional context given to traditional marketing actions.

My view is that the division line between marketing and communications has blurred as both disciplines overlap and need to act together to generate value for organization. In the same time, due to social and technological changes, they need to be at the forefront of organization to make it open and involved into the dialog with internal or external

stakeholders. This are the new rules of “the show”, however actors need to be more open to improvisation in order to be prepared to execute real time marketing&communications actions.