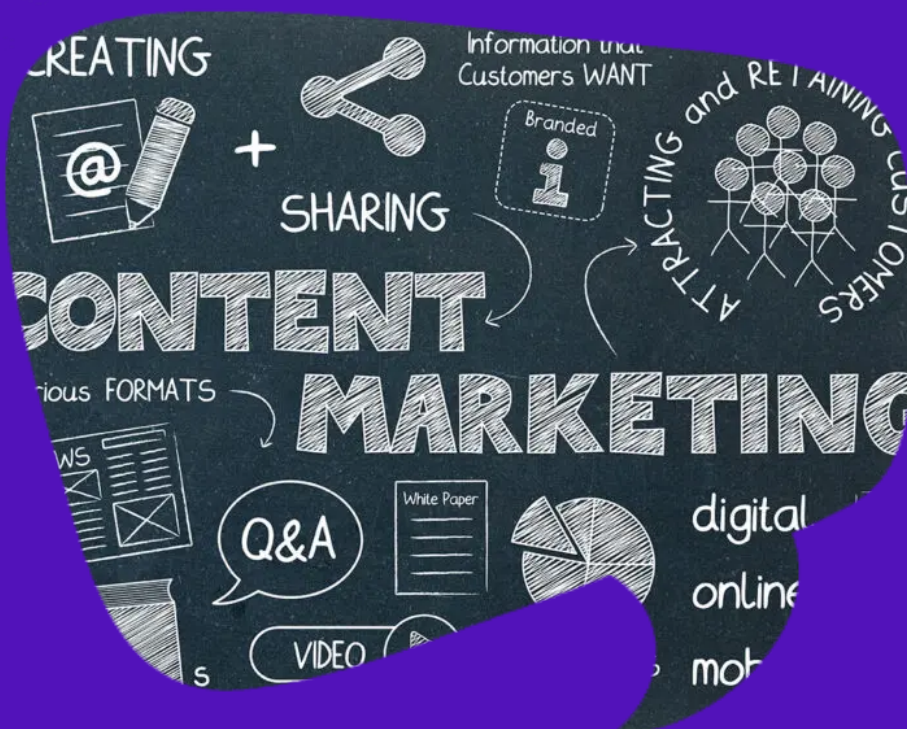


How Marketing Since Web 2.0 Changed Everything, *And Made Content King*

At some point between 2008 and 2010, marketing changed. The advent of smart phones, user-generated content, and dynamic social media feeds prompted a revolution in communication speed and volume. It also passed the microphone from vendors and companies, to The People. Those clinging to the old ways are seeing ever-diminishing returns. The days of 'target, interrupt, and harass', and reduce churn from these unwanted practices, are over.



We see up to 10,000 ads a day and we ignore almost all of them – even when they are brilliantly targeted by behavioral analytics, search history, keywords, and AI.

Traditional, ‘push’, or interruption, marketing in the digital space only *kind of* works; it can offer leads when executed at scale, with millions of impressions, but there’s a better way.

Something interesting happened around 2010, or once Web 2.0 got into *full swing* (10 years after Google supplanted Yahoo!’s *formerly-directory-based* starting point for the Internet). As luminaries like Seth Godin, Joe Pulizzi, Jon Weubben, and eventually Gary Vaynerchuk, Mark W. Schaefer, Marcus Sheridan, have written in books: Web 2.0 changed the rules of marketing.

Those rules were first changed c. 1998 by a thing called a *search engine* (for which Google was first in, best dressed), which replaced the directory, and which essentially told advertisers what a customer’s pain-point was.

And those rules were later changed by the explosion in user-generated content, dynamic social media, and smart phones, which enabled a) greater content volume, b) content virality, and c) more compelling and easily-gathered content. Indeed the birth of the *content creator* could be attributed to these changes in the web landscape.

In other articles, we explore the *mechanics* of *how* buyer empowerment changed buying habits. This article is pointed at sharing the brutal truth about how marketing actually *works* (when it does work) in the Web 2.0 world, when buyers have the power, information, and options.

The Buyer Journey is marked by *search*. A person has a pain point, and, 95% of the time, whether B2B or B2C, for a purchase over \$100, they hit the Internet to search for solutions.

During that search, people don’t want to see ads.

Why? Because they aren’t searching for *just any solution*, they’re searching for the *best solution to their problem, as judged by them*. We often say: the fact that you offer a solution to a pain-point a given buyer may have only *seems* like aligning interest. You want to sell, to *anyone*, but they want to buy the *right, specific* thing. These are very different motivations and needs.

So, what do we know?

1. The bulk of Buyer Journey (Awareness and Consideration) is marked by search;
2. During that Buyer Journey, people don’t want to see your ads. They don’t want to read your brochures. They don’t want to go to your seller-centric website and hear you talk about yourself. They don’t want a sales call. And we know this from abysmally low click-through rates. We know this from how *you* (reading this), yourself, buy. You ignore ads. We all do.

3. Buyers don't want to see your ads, and they *don't have to*. They can ignore them on Facebook and Google Search and GDN. They can forego clicking on them. They can close out your modals and popups. They can click on a different tab. They can close your tab. They can leave your site. And they do.
4. They want objective-value, buyer-centric, helpful, content.

So, rather than pushing ads on potential leads, why not *pull traffic and leads with the content they're searching for*? It's a simple question, but sadly, most marketers aren't able to answer it. They're still marketing in ways they don't like done to them. They're still acting like it's 1950, and some simple-minded farmer wandered onto a Ford Truck dealership parking lot. Marketers and vendors don't understand **they have no power**.

And the absurd complexity of marketing stacks and integrations are a prescription for this misapprehension. Marketing is being done incorrectly, but rather than address that core problem, and create gains, we're using marketing technology to mitigate losses.

A BETTER APPROACH

The best approach to this reality – that people are doing *their thing* during the Buyer Journey, and don't care about you, your product, or your company – is to get out of the way, and **help them** – to create buyer-centric content.

What kind of content do you produce that helps people? Well, as experts in your area, you share that expertise, for not just pain-points in your demographic, but lateral to your demographic.

This drives traffic, makes you thought leaders, and everybody is happy. Some content can be gated (requiring an email address), and some can be free. Some can be articles on the site, and some can be downloadable eBooks. The point is you *judo* the reality that people use search and ignore ads.

That's it. That's the big secret.

In this post, we'll offer something like Mark W. Schaefer's *Manifesto For Human-Centric Marketing*: a top-level, 20,000 ft. view of how to best conduct yourself in what Gary Vaynerchuk calls the *Thank You Economy* and what we call the *Selective Consumption Economy*.

1. Recognize that the Buyer Journey is entirely buyer-driven, which means buyer-centric. This explains why buyers don't want to see or hear you talk about yourself (ads). Seller-centric content (ads, brochures, self-referential web copy, flattering graphical comparisons, etc.) have almost no value to a buyer deciding on what to buy.
2. Recognize that the **bulk of the Buyer Journey** is a winding path of search (research) conducted at the buyer's prerogative, discretion and convenience. The 'awareness' and 'consideration' stages – about 90% of the Buyer Journey – are marked by the *private*

investigation of options, entirely on the buyer's terms. Respect that process and don't interrupt it; instead *help them* with information that helps them, whether they purchase from you, or not.

3. **Stop interrupting people to talk about yourself, with the hope of taking money from them, later; have better manners than that.** You could argue that 'interruption marketing' is immoral or unethical; it's definitely hypocritical. At the very least, if you're addicted to giving money to Google and Facebook, you could pay to place your interruptive ad, but offer objective-value content.
4. **Recognize that marketing today runs on choice**, though consent, and that vendors, companies, and marketing outfits have virtually no power over any single consumer, and embarrassingly little impact on the public *at large*.
5. **The expansion of competition and the ease with which ads can be presented, has further diminished the value of paid ads.** If we didn't see so many (interruptive) ads, they might be more effective. But we do, so they aren't effective.
6. **Recognize that you must give to receive.** Today, you are selected by buyers. You are sought; you don't have the power to pursue. You receive; you do not take. And to receive, you must first give. You must earn attention and popularity. You must deserve social credit. You must actually be awesome; you can't fake it. You must actually be generous and useful and informative; you can't fake it. These realities can't be avoided.
7. **Recognize that smart marketers 'judo' the reality that people hate ads by creating the content they seek when they are searching for a solution to their pain point.** Produce the objective, helpful, content buyers seek as they research – and offer it for free. That's it: be helpful. Look at things from a buyer's perspective and consider how you shop.
8. **Respect buyers.** Consider for a moment the objectifying practices, labels, and metaphors marketers use to describe customers – the lifeblood of any business: 'funnels', 'targeting', 'lead capture', 'drip campaigns'. These don't convey respect for buyers.
9. **For most marketers, it's selling a product, not addressing *customer needs*, or helping them.** Customers need answers to come to a decision about a purchase. So, the best approach is to provide that information. Marketers should invert their entire orientation to be buyer-centric: go through the looking glass and consider the buying experience from the point of view of the buyer. This won't just make the average marketer better, it will highlight how self-interest is often dressed up as helping customers.
10. **Recognize that buyers see you *as you are*, and that you can't manipulate this perception. You must change as a company, or your product or service, if you want to be seen differently.** The days of spin are over. You are seen as you are, in the final analysis. If you aren't getting traffic, it's because you're objectively not awesome. Own that, and make changes.
11. **Recognize that buyers outnumber you.** You are **one** agent, one voice, and one platform; speaking from a biased, self-interested, perspective. The public outnumbers you. They trust each other more than they trust you. You will not succeed without their

embrace or confidence; you will not sell to them until and unless *they decide* your offering has worth.

12. **Recognize that buyers don't believe your sales copy, and can spot it a mile away, even when it's dressed up as native content.** Buyers believe objective-value content that helps them without an 'ask': reviews, articles – ideally from objective, third-party publishers. Though you are not a third party, they can also spot helpful content that's *attempting to be objective* – and this builds authority, credibility and trust.
13. **Accept that your online reputation is deserved.** Don't take our word for it: it's well-known that Google only loves you after other people do (your SERP rank reflects traffic and engagements you've already won). And The People love you when you're amazing. You can't circumvent this reality; you will not outsmart the 15,000 Ph.D's at Google.
14. **Recognize that your ads have never had less value than they do now.** Collapsing click-through rates demonstrate this: push marketing is dying. Your own buying habits validate this. We all hate ads. We all hate sales calls. We all ignore brochures – until the end of the Buyer's Journey, when we don't. At that point, we're basically ready to buy, and the sale is any given vendor's to lose.
15. **Stop pretending almost universal avoidance of your ads (a .2% – .35% display click-through rate; 1.91% – 2% for search) means anything but that people don't want to see them.** Don't be a slow learner. Don't count on your VC money. *Recognize.* Stop using the few clicks you get *at scale* (thousands or millions of impressions) to rationalize this unwelcome practice.
16. **Market as you buy – don't be a hypocrite.** It's breaking the Golden Rule to ignore ads and delete emails, then go to work as a marketer or business owner to do what you, yourself, don't like.
17. **Don't assume that a prospect's search for a product is a) a search for your product or b) an invitation to interrupt them.** Again, it's all about *their Buyer Journey*, on *their* terms. Even if your product or solution could help them, you don't *sell*, they *choose to buy*. These are worlds apart. *How antisocial is it to force yourself on a person – in any way – on the premise that what you want will be something they will to enjoy, also?* Stop marketing this way. It is a sickness and has to end.
18. **Recognize that buyers don't see you the way you see yourself.**
19. **Recognize that nobody cares about your ad or brochure until they care about it, and at that point, they'll seek it** (after they've ingested and processed lots of objective-value, buyer-centric, content).
20. **Recognize that the win distribution has never been more tilted toward the *best* and that those who make 'the tallest skyscraper' will attract all the tourists, as the saying goes.** The Internet permits wildly unequal win distributions. To the victor go *all the spoils*. The best website can accommodate all the traffic, unlike a brick and mortar bakery, which can only service so many people in a given timeframe. So, write the *best* article. Build the *best* website. Design the *best* product. Everybody has the tools to conduct research and produce *the best content for their niche and demographic*. Everybody. You just have to bother. Be *the best*.

21. **Recognize that salesy websites, brochures and ads are *seller-centric* (you talking about yourself), and that nobody cares.** People care about their problem, their needs – including their initial need for *information*.
22. **Understand that buyers are skeptical, harried, information-overloaded, distrustful, busy, and disinterested – and proceed accordingly.** Have an extremely good reason for interrupting them.
23. **Recognize that you have to function like a small business in a small town, as Gary Vaynerchuk says, or ‘Be The Most Human Company’, as Mark W. Schaefer says.** I never understood how marketing monitoring and analytics ‘stacks’ basically reduce traffic and leads to monthly MQLs and SQLs – effectively dehumanizing and anonymizing customers – while vendors continue to sincerely believe that they are invested in helping customers. Small businesses in small towns aren’t focused on this. They’re focused on the micro, not the macro. They’re focused on each engagement, each interaction. They’re not using analytics dashboards, or boilerplate, one-size-fits-all, approaches.
24. **Stop believing that success requires complexity.** Stop obsessing about your marketing technology when there are wins to be had in other areas (better product, messaging, copy, web design, content offers, customer service).
25. **Stop pretending that monitoring (using analytics for a high-resolution, lagging edge, look at behaviors) gives you control over buyers.** You have no direct control over what buyers do, including whether they visit your website or buy from you. You can improve outcomes only by appealing to them and recognizing their agency and choice.
26. **Stop building funnels and trying to shepherd customers.** You’ll never be able to predict human behaviors at scale. Obsessing on this will come at the opportunity cost of creating best-in-class content, and helping the people you’re lucky enough to have come to your website.
27. **Keep your tech stack, but simplify it, and apply a buyer-centric mentality.** Optimize your marketing stack/funnel/op to be *helpful*, not *to sell*. Stop marrying high technology with an antiquated (pre-Web 2.0) understanding of marketing; stop weaponizing marketing with technology.
28. **Fix your product.** Don’t expect to be able to cover up anything mediocre.
29. **Make your website amazing.** Everything passes through or actually converges on the Internet. You simply cannot have a mediocre web presence and not expect everybody to go around it to the *best*.
30. **Don’t make ‘fake offers’ (discounts). These have relative (but not absolute) value, are still seller-centric.** Seller-centric thinking has a way of posing as altruistic, as *buyer-centric*. Cleanse yourself of those demons and genuinely put *others first*. A discount only helps others after and if it helps you, first. They have to want to buy from you. Instead, give with no expectation of receiving. Watch what happens to your credibility when you advise people *not* to go with your product (in certain circumstances); see what happens when you provide information that helps them *solve their problem*, rather than asking them for money.

To wit: buyers have all the power, all the options, all the information. You have to appeal to them, on their terms.

So, make an amazing and differentiated product. Build an amazing, clear, and useful website. Take care with your copy. Provide best-in-class content – pointed at simply informing and helping customers – and provide it for free, upfront, with no strings attached..

See what these practices do for word-of-mouth and social shares. See what these practices do for your credibility and thought leadership.



*Pursuing people with all the money and brochures and technology in the world cannot match the effect of people *wanting* to come to you. You are *one* agent, and you are biased about your product; the public outnumbers you, and they believe *themselves* more than they believe you. You will get rolled if you try to control, rather than cooperate with, these realities.*

MARK W. SCHAEFER'S MANIFESTO FOR MARKETING