

The marketing department saved your business. Now it's time to save the marketing department

In the last 18 months, more people than ever before have been on social media. From the safety of our homes we 'met' and connected with one another on Twitter, Facebook and Zoom. We talked online about work, life, and everything in between, we ordered from our favourite stores and our favourite food outlets, and we supported our local boutiques and delis. As the physical world ground to a halt, the digital world came into its own, and behind every brand's Instagram account or Facebook page, there is a marketer working hard behind the scenes.

Temps de lecture : minute

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During the past year, many marketers have kept the companies they work for in business. In *Sprout Social's new research on marketer activity and consumer behaviour*, we found that 76% of consumers increased their social media usage in the past year, with 63% saying they had made a purchase on a social platform. Whether their business is local or global, it is marketers who have reacted to increased demand, interaction and appetite for content, administration of direct social purchases, and an increase in online queries, returns and complaints.

Alongside everyday work like creating campaigns and strategising distribution, marketers have mastered new social technologies and stretched the boundaries of their roles to keep up with rising consumer usage.

But how aligned have marketers been with consumer expectations?

In a recent study, we asked what being 'best-in-class social' meant to them, marketers selected 'delivering innovative social content' and 'being culturally relevant' as the top two responses. Conversely, when we asked consumers the same question, the majority said, 'putting the customer first'.

On a similar topic, we asked marketers what their main social goal was, to which 65% said 'brand awareness'. Most consumers, meanwhile, when asked what businesses could do on social media to keep them as customers, again said 'provide customer service and support'.

A perfect storm for marketers

Clearly, marketers have been under a huge amount of pressure to be all things to all people during a time when COVID-19 already added significant strain. Whilst using social media to grow the businesses they work for, marketers' roles were stretched to account for the change in consumer behaviour on social.

Social media is now overwhelmingly used for the entirety of the customer journey; from discovery right through to customer service. Indeed, customer service is an integral part of how and why consumers use social.

Millennials, for example, told us that they want to use social media more than email for customer service and feedback, with 87% agreeing that social is the fastest way to connect with a business. Meanwhile, 71% of marketers report that cross team internal collaboration on social only happens occasionally or is non-existent. While consumers see social media as a main communication channel for every step of their engagement with a business, companies still overwhelmingly operate them entirely from the marketing department. It's a lot for marketers to shoulder, when in reality, there are a few simple solutions.

The importance of social has become abundantly clear. As we move out of the pandemic there's an untapped opportunity for marketers to carry on the successes they have already achieved. Our data shows that simple solutions like more cross-team communication and collaboration are likely to be easy and quick ways to help marketers succeed.

Focus, data and alignment with consumer needs

When we asked marketers what the top resources needed to achieve their goals were, the top two selections were market research (35%) and audience research (33%). In fact, five out of the top eleven answers pertained to data.

Crowdsourcing data is a simple and easy win for marketers to employ. By taking time now to refocus on data, marketers can demystify social success and release some of the pressure. There's a great opportunity for marketers to pick the metrics that matter most, move past vanity metrics and realign social with business goals.

Aligning your social media strategy with customer needs is essential to reaching your audience in a relevant and impactful way. When marketers foster a collaborative approach and share social insights across departments, they can both give customers more of what they want and release the pressure they may be feeling.

By refocusing on consumer's needs, sharing social data across teams - and cutting our marketing teams some slack in the process - businesses can help protect their marketers' wellbeing. This will not only enable your marketing department to become more successful and effective, but will also accelerate more thoughtful audience engagement with your consumers.

Reflecting on the past year, many marketers should feel proud that their dedication and efforts saved their business. Now it's time for the business

to acknowledge that and give support where it's needed to protect overworked marketing teams.

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