

# connect



ENGAGING MARKETING MINDS

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

## CONFIDENCE BOOST

HOW  
BRANDS  
CAN  
REINVIGORATE  
TRUST

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# CREATING DEPTH

**G**artner's Corporate Executive Board has long done research on the correlation between the number of interactions with customers and the depth of relationship with clients. Time and time again, their studies have shown that there is no linear correlation between the two. In other words, it is simply not true that the more interactions and data that we have on clients leads to deeper connections

with the market.

Without realizing it, marketers are bombarding consumers with messaging that has become overwhelming and, in turn, reduces trust. And as we all know, relationships are tenuous at best so marketers are waking up to the idea that it is not the product or service that customers covet. It is the experience that they have that creates depth to the engagement.

Content marketing has been the buzzword for the past few years. If the content, however, is about you and your organization, it is simply noise. The challenge before us is how to transform marketing from a subservient department that creates content only to describe the value of a product or service, into one that knows how to create, manage, and lead the development of valuable experiences over the next decade.

It is long overdue that marketing reclaims the ability to create value. But that can only occur if marketing's goal is to create value that moves customers from a simple patron or consumer to a loyalist or evangelist. The ability to deliver content-driven experiences consistently will be the single most important key to marketing's evolution along this trajectory. Real marketing is rooted in listening well and then delivering the kind of content that enriches the customer experience. Our hope is that this issue delivers an experience beyond our core service. The cover article, "Confidence Boost," delves into how brands can build confidence. And in our second feature, "The Rise of Conversation," we are reminded of the power of discussion. As the best marketers know, conversation is the cornerstone to everything that brands do today and how they can improve upon them.

Enjoy the issue and all the best,



Gina M. Danner, CEO



**The Way Forward**  
05



**Listen. Serve. Repeat.**  
09

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### Publisher

Gina M. Danner

### Graphic Designer

Thomas Bouchard

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866.938.3607 or visit [goNextPage.com](http://goNextPage.com).



“BRANDS CAN NO LONGER LURE CONSUMERS BY REMIXING MARKETING PLATITUDES. THEY ARE NOW EXPECTED TO INFORM AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM.”

— EMMANUEL PROBST, CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGIST AND CONSUMER MARKET RESEARCH PROFESSOR, UCLA

# CONFIDENCE BOOST

HOW BRANDS CAN  
REINVIGORATE  
TRUST

The devastating news came at a time when Peloton was riding an incredible wave of market demand and consumer love. Powered by the amazing success of its exercise bike, the brand released the Peloton Tread and Peloton Tread+ earlier this year. The \$4,300 treadmills were ranked No. 1 by Consumer Reports when compared to 41 other brands. But in March, after a child suffered a brain injury while using the Tread+, the Peloton brand fell under public scrutiny, even seeing its shares drop 6.2% in premarket trading directly after the incident.

To help reinforce its commitment to

consumer safety, Peloton notified the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) the day after the incident. It also sent an urgent reminder to its Tread+ members, reminding them about the importance of following critical warnings and safety instructions. To note, the child is expected to make a full recovery.

Despite the incident and media wave that followed, Peloton remains a brand driven by fierce customer loyalty. Today, with more than 1.67 million connected fitness subscribers and counting, it boasts an annual retention rate of more than 92%. Peloton instructors on Instagram alone have a combined follower count of 6.62-plus million. And during the pandemic, in a time when gyms were shut down, the brand gained further market traction.

This is kind of definition of customer loyalty and confidence that Anders McGillis says all brands should strive for. McGillis, Strategy Principal at leading customer engagement reinvention firm Jackman, says that while Peloton and its community primarily exists digitally with little to no in-person interactions, it has built a circle

of fiercely loyal users who feel deeply connected to the brand and its instructors. Peloton enables consumers to engage with each other directly on their machines—a place where users can send high-fives, ride/run with friends or start classes at the same time as other strangers so they experience it together.

“The brand has humanized itself through its instructors, how it engages with consumers on its social channels, and how it enables consumers to connect with, high five, or exercise with each other,” McGillis says. “Its retention rate numbers indicate a successful community can lead to stickiness and loyalty.”

These days, brand loyalty seems to be a street many consumers are trying to sidestep. According to Deloitte’s “2021 Global Marketing Trends Study,” C-suite executives have seen more than a 35% drop in customer confidence in the pandemic and the early beginnings of the post-pandemic timeframe.

While the reasonings vary from market to market, the overriding consensus may be that there is a broader trend of declining consumer trust in brands and advertising, resulting in a true loss of authentic brand connection. As the Deloitte study shows, part of the problem may rest in the fact that purpose-driven brands inherently understand why they exist and who they are best built to serve regardless of what they sell today—and the other brands don’t.

“While people increasingly believe that organizations need to be held accountable for their decisions, they are also increasingly wary that they will follow through on their social commitments,” McGillis says. “Unfortunately, brands are giving consumers reason to be skeptical.”

In his book, “Brand Hacks: How to Build Brands by Fulfilling the Consumer Quest for Meaning,” Emmanuel Probst reveals why most advertising campaigns fail by examining the personal, social and cultural meanings that successful brands bring to consumers’ everyday lives.

Probst, a Consumer Psychologist and Consumer Market Research Professor at UCLA, believes that C-suite executives must put their “same-old” tactics to rest. “Marketers tend to focus on short-term tactics that will appeal to their audience in the moment, rather than dedicating resources and efforts to long-term brand building. Brands can no longer lure consumers by remixing marketing platitudes. They are now expected to inform and educate the public and make a positive contribution to the world around them.” ■

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— ANDERS MCGILLIS, STRATEGY PRINCIPAL, JACKMAN



# THE WAY FORWARD

**I**n the broad stroke of the brush painting the landscape of which brands play on today, the changes are many—almost too many to count. Too many marketers are bubbled, whereby they live in big cities, read more, listen to more podcasts and are more educated than the consumers they target.

To make things even more interesting, too many brands shout their messages at their audiences, forcing their products down their consumers' throats. But even so, Probst says the solutions to build back consumer confidence and trust in the looming post-pandemic world are doable. "It is time to take a step back and listen to consumers in order to understand what feels meaningful and purposeful to them. From there, marketers can build brands and products that will help consumers fulfill their quest for meaning."

Probst says the pandemic has accelerated consumers' digital transformation, whereby even late adopters and older age groups increasingly rely on technology to communicate with brands and purchase products. "Our relationship with brands now spans across all channels. The customer experience must be seamless and consistent, whether he chooses to engage on social media, over the phone or in-store."

McGillis believes that marketers can rely on mediums such as print to build confidence. By offering a more personal connection, print enables brands to better engage with their audiences, allowing them to offer key pieces about your brand. "Print can be used for awareness messaging or to drive credibility through influencer content or brand recommendations, or to simply feature your products in articles (in ways that feel natural and authentic). The key

is that the message must be relevant to the context of the print piece. You should be clear on the goal and intent of the piece, as this will help dictate its placement and the creative direction. For example, anything you do with newspapers should be geared toward providing information."

It also is important for the printed pieces to feel like content and not just another advertisement. McGillis says that adding value beyond just pushing your product messaging is key to confidence building. "Regardless of the medium in which you try to reach consumers, authenticity is key. Humans are inherently social creatures. In our research, 43% of respondents cited various elements of deep connection as the core benefit they seek when engaging with other people, and honesty and trust emerged as consumers' top priorities—outranked only by health and safety."

To better prove the point, you only have to refer back to the aforementioned Peloton example. In the end, people trust other people more than they trust your brand, which is why establishing a human connection between your brand and consumers is so important. "Don't underestimate the power of your employees to help achieve these connections," McGillis says. "They are your brand and giving them the tools they need to express that is key. If a brand is able to humanize itself, whether through brand advocates, ambassadors, or employees, in a way that's authentic to its DNA, then it's going to be that much easier to form authentic connections with consumers."

It is the kind of confidence that builds sustainability.









# RISE OF CONVERSATION

DIALOG IS THE CORNERSTONE OF EVERYTHING



**F**ifteen years ago, Chris Hubble's business partner conducted a series of stakeholder interviews to initiate qualitative and quantitative positioning research their company, Bastion db5, was conducting for Audi USA. Included in the conversations was the full spectrum of senior C-Suite management, including representatives from product, engineering, marketing, finance, etc.

Upon returning to the office, the first thing his partner said was, "Damn, this is going to be great because there was almost uncanny focus and consistency across all interviews with regards to what they all felt Audi was to its customers, as well as where they all thought Audi should be heading." His partner was right: Since 2005, the automaker had been on a tear, averaging between 5,000 to 7,000 new car sales a month in the US. Today, Audi is averaging 15,000 to 20,000 new vehicle sales each month.

**“CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IS EXPLICITLY ABOUT DRAWING CUSTOMERS IN, AND EVEN A PRECURSOR TO MARRIAGE, THE MOST INTIMATE OF ALL CONNECTIONS.”**

— CHRIS HUBBLE, FOUNDER & CEO, BASTION DB5

The secret is that marketing will not work in isolation. Hubble, founder and CEO of Bastion db5, says that the cohesion of product, marketing and post-sale service, along with a focus on customer needs is extremely powerful. It all starts with engagement—particularly those conversations a brand has with its community. “There are many reasons brands need to be able to effectively communicate with their communities. First, it’s paramount and unavoidable, because whether intentional or not, brands communicate every day with their customers. That communication can come in a variety of ways, including social media posts, interacting with a company employee, how the brand is displayed on shelf, and how the brand treats its employees.”

The bottom line, from where Hubble sits, is that communication—regardless of the channels—is about strengthening the brand relationship with your customers. It is an area in which db5 thrives. A consumer insights and strategy consultancy, db5 specializes in qualitative and quantitative research, brand strategy, innovation and communications dedicated to helping global businesses and disruptive startups empathize with their targets so they grow. Working throughout North and South America, APAC, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Hubble and his team help discover new paths to transform and grow, honing in on which data and insights are key.

“Although marketing jargon is overused and in time tends to lose its meaning or become cliché, if we look at the terms commonly used, it’s clear that communication is about connection,” Hubble says. “Customer engagement is explicitly about drawing customers in, and even a precursor to marriage, the most intimate of all connections. After customer relationship management is no different than any other relationship—friends, family, co-workers—in that if you neglect it, it will in time result in the person or community being drawn to someone else or some other brand.”

So, as the art of conversation rises, the plans of attack center on being engaging, interesting, amusing, empathetic and



helpful. Things to avoid include being overly pushy, bullying, talking over people, insincerity and laziness. If you want to slide this back into marketing speak—in terms of communities—communication touchpoints are more than just transactional moments; they are critical interactions within the customer journey that help define key moments in the process.

“Those moments are inflection points at which communities and customers decide who they buy, use, subscribe to, promote, and who they are loyal to,” Hubble says. “Communications made in bad taste, at others expense, that use outdated stereotypes that result in cancel culture are no different than taking someone off your Christmas card list because you don’t want them in your community anymore.”

The list of brands littering the battlefield of communications gone wrong include some pretty prominent

names: Borders (we do what we’ve always done), Theranos (secretive and disingenuous), Blockbuster (didn’t keep up with technology), and New Coke (we know better than you) all highlight what happens when communications are a one way street and don’t build empathy or understanding of the market.

“Customers have high expectations of the companies they choose to patronize,” Hubble says. “And even one instance of missed expectations can make customers change providers for what they perceive to be a better opportunity. Naturally, it is therefore extremely important to actively listen to customers and analyze their feedback. But just like all conversations, listening isn’t just hearing about their problems. Listening is about connecting with them. It involves paying close attention to their needs and understanding how you can help them achieve their goals.” ■

# E

arlier this year, full-service design firm MMI Agency partnered with skin care brand Olay on the #FaceTheSTEMGap initiative, which was designed to inspire girls to pursue future careers in STEM. On February 11, the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, hundreds of teachers across the country received a science kit from Olay

that included educational lesson plans, equipment and inspiration from female scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians. Also included in Olay's conversation to raise awareness to a larger segment of its target audiences were stories from teachers on "Good Morning America."

MMI Agency CEO Maggie Malek says the philosophy at the heart of the campaign was pretty straightforward: to listen to the community you want to serve. The entire platform was constructed after conversations Olay had with its target audience—teachers and moms. At a time when the country

desperately needed help with the concept of remote schooling, MMI conducted surveys that uncovered a huge void in student access to hands-on materials, labs and worksheets.

"The initiative led to so much love from teachers and parents online and a huge increase in 'Women in STEM' search," Malek says. "Olay also had the opportunity to tell authentic science stories. Today, more than ever, people want to know that the brands they're investing in share similar values and viewpoints as their own. This is a big change from, say, 10 years ago when mass advertising was still very effective. Technology has made for savvier consumers who don't trust mass advertising as much; they're looking for a deeper connection."

Malek says it is not just about seeing brands advocate for certain causes anymore, although that still can be effective if it's genuine, but instead, it is about consumers hearing brands say: "First of all, we care about you. And we also care about the things that you care about."

The first key is devising a playbook—creating an engagement strategy based on the channels your customers are interacting on. Brands do not have to be active on every single channel, just the ones that target their audiences. "I believe that consumers are going to continue to demand transparency from brands," Malek says. "As they develop their communications plans for the months and years ahead, they must consider how and what they will share on an ongoing basis."

If you let them be your guide, your customers will tell you what they want. For brands wanting to stay engaged in today's highly interactive landscape, conversation should be the most critical tool in your tool kit.

## 5 WAYS TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

### 1. LET THE CUSTOMER SPEAK

You can't listen to another person if you're talking. Customers cannot speak with you unless you provide them the platforms to do so.

### 2. EMPATHIZE

Use consumer speak, not jargon. Hold your customer's hand. Every question is significant, so value each one equally.

### 3. ENGAGE WITH CUSTOMERS ON THEIR PREFERRED CHANNELS

The goal is to make people comfortable with your brand or business, so start by making them comfortable with where they chat.

### 4. FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER

There is the problem and your brand's solution. Nobody likes to hear, "I told you so," especially your customers.

### 5. BE RESPONSIVE

Ensure your consumer knows they are being heard.

SOURCE: MMI AGENCY & BASTION DB5





# TACTICS

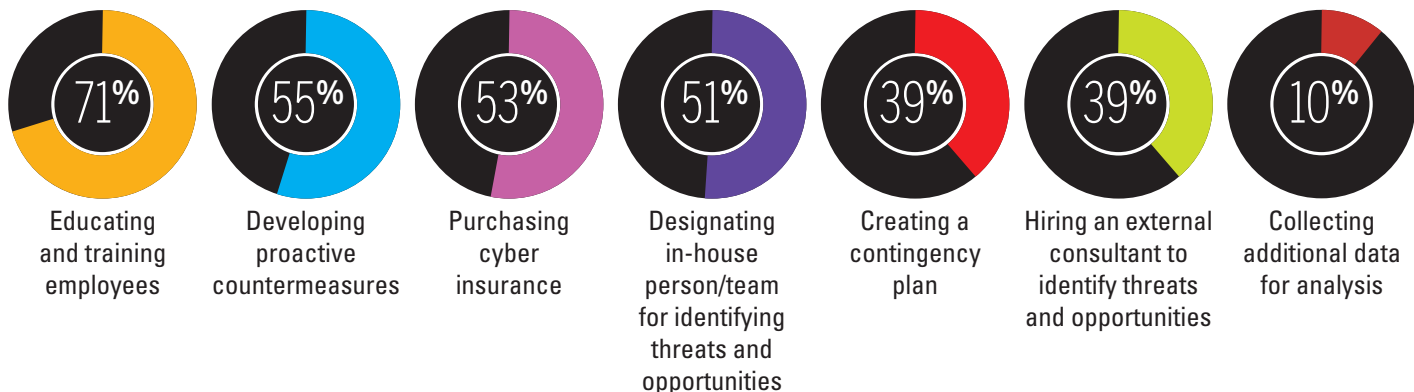


## ARMOR UP

### HOW BUSINESS ARE PROTECTING THEMSELVES AGAINST CYBERSECURITY THREATS

Last year as the pandemic raged, businesses fought back by amping up their digital and online efforts. Unfortunately, as more and more people used digital options, cybersecurity threats increased as well. Staying safe from phishing and

malware will be top priority moving forward, says the “2021 Business Leaders Outlook” survey conducted by JPMorgan Chase & Co. Here are the ways in which business leaders are arming their businesses against cyberattacks:





## NEW MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGIES FOR THE POST-COVID LANDSCAPE

What will the “new normal” look like? While we don’t know for certain, B2B marketers will need to be at the top of their game. SageFrog recently published their “2021 B2B Marketing Mix Report,” and showed what strategies marketers planned to use going forward:

- 46%** Account-Based Marketing
- 41%** Video Marketing
- 38%** Influencer Marketing
- 38%** Artificial Intelligence
- 33%** Retargeting
- 32%** Personalization
- 29%** Inbound Marketing
- 27%** Podcast and Livestreaming
- 24%** Conversational Marketing
- 22%** Mobile-First Strategy
- 11%** Programmatic Advertising
- 11%** Voice Optimization



## 9 TIPS TO MAKE YOUR DIRECT MAIL SHINE

You have your customer’s name, demographic information and mailing address, but do you have their attention? Now is the time to make your direct marketing shine. Check out these nine ways to make your direct mail the best that it can be, according to More Vang’s blog:

- 01 DETERMINE YOUR GOALS AND AUDIENCE**
- 02 BE AWARE OF MAILING RESTRICTIONS**
- 03 HIGHLIGHT THE CALL-TO-ACTION**
- 04 USE HIGH-QUALITY IMAGERY**
- 05 STAY ON BRAND**
- 06 CHOOSE THE RIGHT PAPER**
- 07 FOCUS YOUR MESSAGE**
- 08 LIMIT THE NUMBER OF FONTS**
- 09 CHOOSE COLORS THOUGHTFULLY**



**As a CMO and customer experience expert, what challenges are right in front of you?**

As any business student knows, strategy is core to success, but knowing and living it are two different things. When I was leading a marketing services agency from 1996-2016, I thought the successful strategy we were talking about was my own company's, not our customers'. We were fixated on compiling the best arsenal of marketing weapons, choosing the right ones for each client, and executing flawlessly. While not necessarily wrong, there was room for improvement. Leaders of marketing services companies should prioritize understanding their customers' strategies over their own. This is their business.

If possible, try to serve companies with significant business differentiators, and pass on the rest. Yes, easier said than done, but the sooner you realize your business is their business, the better you and your organization will perform. If you don't understand your customers' strategic strengths and weaknesses, and believe in their competitive advantages, you may earn a few bucks here and there, but you won't make a long-lasting difference. You'll be just selling a job, not a relationship.

**Marketers seem to carry more of the burden today than pre-pandemic. Why do you think this the case?**

The pandemic has packed a decade worth of change into 15 months. Over the past half-century, the B2B sales process has slowly evolved from the

**CO-FOUNDER & VP OF CUSTOMER SUCCESS, VIVIO HEALTH**

**T.J. TEDESCO**

MARKETING-MINDED ENTREPRENEUR ON ENGAGING WITH TODAY'S CLIENTS



**T**.J. Tedesco started a marketing services agency in 1996 and ran it until 2016. After focusing exclusively on the graphic arts industry, they diversified and became the agency of record for a Silicon Valley healthcare software company. After great success, Tedesco and the leadership team started an "accelerator" focused on helping early-stage healthcare companies position themselves for similar market success. Through the accelerator, he partnered with a visionary drug management leader and became cofounders of a healthcare data company that now has over 500 customers and is successfully solving one of America's prickliest healthcare challenges—specialty drugs. We sat down with the marketing-minded entrepreneur to get his ideas on engaging the clients today.

three-martini lunch to a value-add consultative approach. However, the recent lack of face-to-face access has accelerated the blurring of the line between marketing and sales. Figuring out what's important to the decision maker used to be one of the main roles of the salesperson, but today, a buyer's electronic fingerprints paint the clearest roadmap of what's important to them and their organization. This, coupled with the fact that marketing inherently scales better than sales, marketing will "carry more the of burden" going forward, especially in a future where business travel may be reduced.

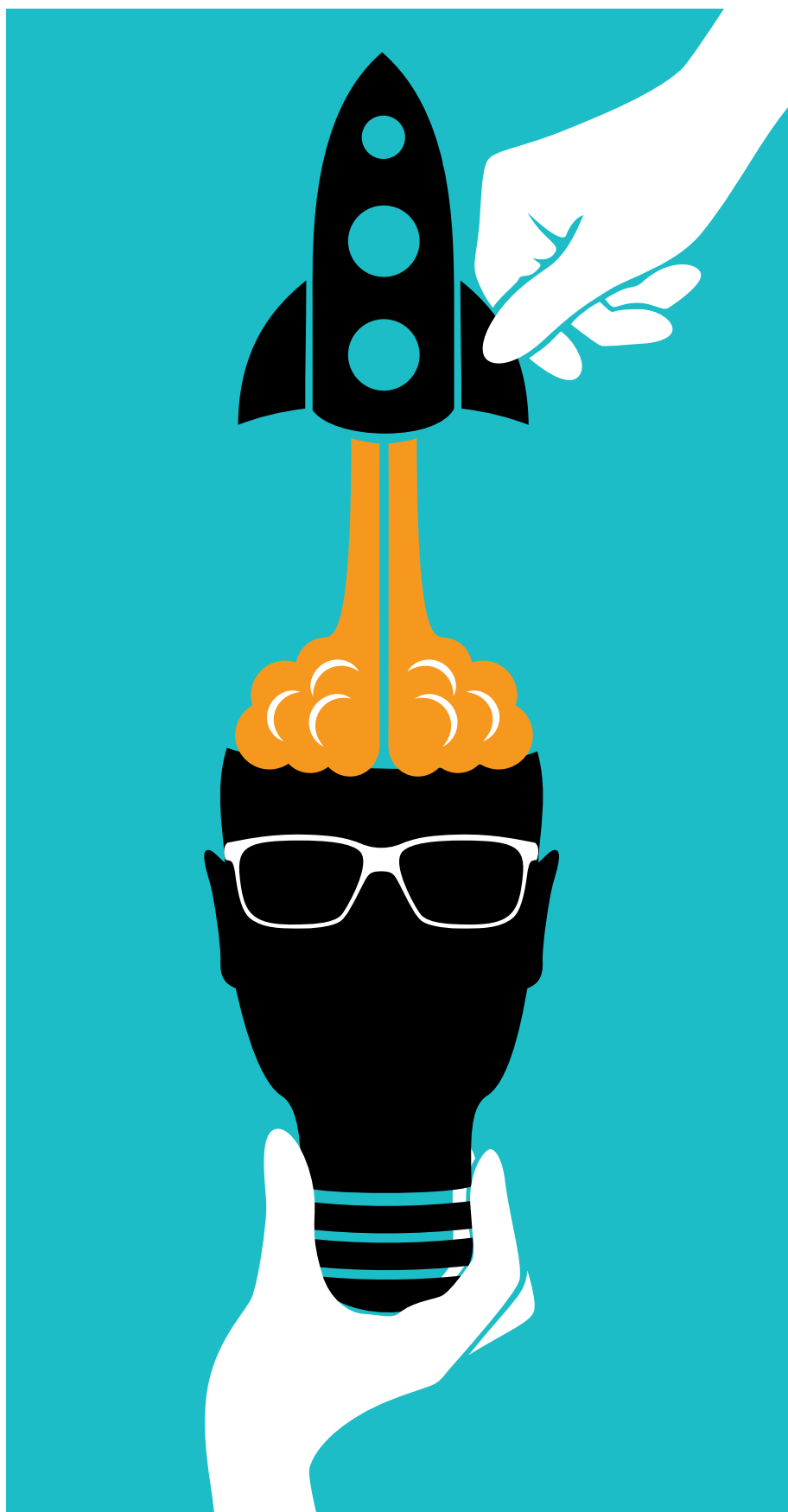
**How are brands supposed to develop relationships at a distance?**

Focusing on solving customer strategic challenges naturally transforms a company from order taker to strategic partner. Brand representatives (i.e., salespeople) who can sell strategically will feel more empowered in their day-to-day business lives than before. Less available face-to-face time means

companies need to quickly change their sales focus to strategic value and data. Salespeople who rely on bagels, donuts and lunches have been feeling the pressure for years, but during the pandemic they were forced to change, literally overnight. As things open up, it's important for companies to remember the best way to compete is through data and ideas, and to use face-to-face meetings to reinforce this point, not visa-versa.

**Due to the pandemic, how has the skill set of a marketing department changed?**

The pandemic has accelerated the timetable for push marketing's demise. Being housebound for so long has lowered many people's tolerance for invasive advertising, and the junk button is being used more now than before. Spammers have noticed. In June 2020, the average daily spam volume across the globe was 316 billion. Six short months later, the volume dropped to 61% to 122 billion. Advertising still makes up 36% of all spam content, but smart money says it will go down from there. As the



French say, “les jeux sont faits” (the game is up). Going forward, marketing departments need to focus less on process-driven push marketing tools and more on content-creating pull marketing. The line between marketing and PR is blurring too. Bottom line, the ability to create compelling content will be a skill very much in demand. English majors rejoice!

Source: Dataprot.net

### **What is content's role in marketing going forward?**

Simply put, content is king. This is different than a decade ago. Search engines are so good, and today's buyers are so well trained to do their own research, that marketing's #1 goal is now to create and execute a winning content creation and management strategy. If you properly research, write and place it, they will find it.

### **Finally, do you have any advice for marketers?**

If content is #1, what's #2? That's easy—automation. Today's content marketing automation tools are fabulous, easy to use and getting better all the time. With so many publishing and social media platforms available, these tools help you properly distribute your content at the right frequency. Data should drive your daily decision-making; it's not possible for you, as a marketer, to do your job well without automation.

### **SUCCESS STORY**

T.J. Tedesco is Co-founder and VP of Customer Success for VIVIO Health. For two decades prior, he started and ran a Washington DC area marketing services company. In 2011, he cofounded a Silicon Valley accelerator for emerging healthcare companies. Tedesco will soon be returning to his consulting roots. He can be reached at [tj@growsales.com](mailto:tj@growsales.com).

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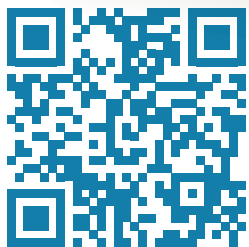
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