

Selecting Channels - Which Ones Are Right For Your Business?

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There are many different channels and options for companies to interact with customers, but which ones are right for you, and why is a multi-channel strategy better than a multiple channel strategy?

It seems that every month there is a new channel of opportunity to communicate with your customer. With all the different options, how does a company select which one(s) are right for their business, and how do you put a strategy together to maximize the effectiveness?

First, there are way too many channels to review each one, but there is an understanding that can be applied to each that should be a part of your overall Marketing and Channel Strategy. The important factors are: what are you trying to say, how you want to be perceived, who is the customer that you are looking to reach, and when should you engage certain channels.

Before I address these questions, let us look at the difference between a multi-channel and a multiple channel strategy. Understanding the difference will be very important as you move to select different channels to promote your message, sell your products, and connect your brand with prospective consumers.

Multi-channel strategy involves selecting channels (ex. print, direct mail, television, online media, social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.)) that are based on creating awareness of your product or service, driving the customer to the procurement phase with a consistent message across channels, and most importantly using the different channels to complement each other, as well as maximizing the different channels value-added proposition to align the message and engage the customer. This form of marketing opens the doors to different formats to engage a prospective customer using a consistent message with the understanding that the strength of a multi-channel strategy is only as good as its weakest link, thus no channel should be engaged independently. The focus is on communications with the knowledge that customers jump across channels to obtain information, and that no single channel will be the panacea, but by selecting targeted channels with messages that complement each other your chance of moving that customer to the procurement phase increases exponentially.

In addition, each channel should be supported by analysis with regards to return on the investment for that channel. Though measurements will vary per channel based on its form of communications, this is a critical step as you move forward with additional communications while determining which channels offer you the best value and opportunity to connect with your customer.

Multiple Channel Strategy is typified by the term 3E's (Everything to Everybody Everywhere). This is a scattergun approach where you shoot nuggets of information across many different channels, but there is no focus on creating a targeted message that maximizes the value of the different channels. You are not utilizing what the new channels of communications bring to the table with regards to engaging customers on their terms.

It is important to remember that the customer selects the channel and format that they like to use, so it is critical to determine which channels the customers use and engage them on the customer's terms, not Everything to Everybody Everywhere.

The major difference between Multi-Channel and Multiple Channels is that with a Multi-Channel Strategy you are aligning the customer's characteristics and communications format with a brand, product, or service promise, thus you can focus what are you trying to say, how you want to be perceived, who is the customer that you are looking to reach, and when should you engage certain channels.

Let us take a look at a few of the different channels and how they complement each other within a Multi-Channel Strategy. Example: I was hired to create awareness for a very exclusive event that will be attended by many different prominent figures in a location that is not readily accessible to all prospective customers. For this example, I set up a Multi-Channel Strategy using direct mail, email blasts, select website communications (highly positioned and prominent websites only), Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The reason I selected this specific group of channels for my Multi-Channel Strategy is that I know my customer base with regards to which channels that they use, thus I am in a position to create the overall strategy to be layered onto the select channels with designated timing for each.

With a lot of lead time, I will send out direct mail to start the word-of-mouth going on the event. Next, I will engage select email blasts closer to the timing of the event knowing the dynamics of email versus direct mail. In addition, I will start the buzz going online by engaging complementary websites that hold a prominent position and high ranking within the major search engines as well as have a strong following to ensure that the pre-message reaches the right audience; this is critical when managing your investment in time and money to maximize your return by working with only progressive, prominent websites that have a powerful [Internet Presence](#). The message will be consistent, and will be channel specific in nature to create enough interest that the customer will delve into additional channels for more information. Depending on the event, there may be prior experiences I could share with people via Facebook or YouTube that could be launched simultaneously with the direct mail and/or email blasts.

Timing on this step varies by product, access to information, and the ability to manage the message to meet your needs, thus if there is not enough streaming video available to complement my message then I will wait until after the event when I will have the communications to meet my needs. If the information is not available or does not complement my overall Multi-Channel Strategy then it is better to wait on this step and not engage it just because everyone else is using streaming video. Control of what you say and when you say it is still in your hands while the medium of choice is controlled by the customer, so utilize the Multi-Channel Strategy to its maximum and control the process.

So, where does a tool like Twitter come into play, well I will use it to drum up excitement for the event as it draws near, but remember that Twitter is a dynamic communication tool that is only as good as its last Tweet. This is a powerful communications tool to use during the event to draw in customers from the controlled direct mail, email blasts, and website communications who were not able to attend. After the event, I will utilize a new round of direct mail and email blasts to complement the online streaming video postings in Facebook and YouTube as I build towards future events.

This was a simplistic example, but if you draft the overall message that you want to communicate against your customer base layered on top of the Multi-Channel Strategy you can then develop a discrete message that is aligned to your customer per channel.

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