

# Left Behind?

VERTO

## 2020's Digital Marketing Predictions That Have Come Off the Rails.

We're only in May, just four months through 2020, but these four months already feel like an entire year. With the inevitable recriminations on the horizon we looked at some of the predictions made for B2B digital marketing in 2019 – to see what will keep rolling and what's coming off the rails.

As one-year transitions into the next, there is never any shortage of predictions. Moving out of 2019 to 2020 was no different. As we've become acutely aware, humans love to speculate, as long as "you don't hold us to it." We thought we'd look at some of the industry predictions in digital marketing and discuss the ones we believe will hold up (in light of the radical change in circumstances), and those who will gather even more momentum as we battle through the economics of the pandemic of 2020.

Before doing so, here's a quote from American author and journalist, Peggy Noonan's WSJ article dated April 30, 2020, which we feel is worth pondering upon.

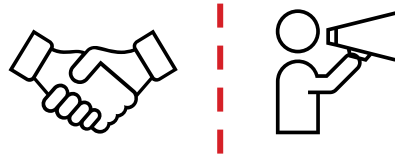
*"Thirty million have filed for unemployment. Here is a fear-based on the vibrations coming from CEOs and other captains of great entities: They'll use the 2020 crash as cover to do things they've long wanted to do, which is get rid of costly people in their corporations, especially in the middle levels. Some will speed up artificial intelligence and robotics. They'll announce they're "redefining their mission." They'll be shaking off people they've wanted to shake off."*

We think Peggy is right, and we are on record as having said it ourselves already. The shakeout from Covid-19 will be used to excuse failure in things that were already doomed. More importantly, it's a macro lens that business leaders will look through, which will clarify their route to success. They'll look to keep what they need, absorb new tools and ideas, and jettison a whole lot of people and products that bring questionable value. **So what does it mean for those annual predictions for good old Digital Marketing?**

### **The Great Divide – Sales & Marketing**

We said that this year the distinction between sales and marketing gets recognized as increasingly "pointless." What does this mean? Accepting it and doing something meaningful about are two different things. We say that our Covid-19 experience adds fuel

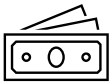
to this, and Peggy Noonan's observation that it provides cover to make radical change, will happen in B2B sales and marketing. [Scott Vaughan's article from Martech Today](#) on March 4, 2020 makes several great points, including the observations that "our reaction to try to solve the pipeline problem has created a sales and marketing arms race."



While they should all be bought together in a newly conceived "revenue" organization, "Sales need to focus on being stand out sellers, marketing needs to commit to being breakthrough marketers." Forget doing anything in digital marketing unless you are also enabling sales to convert the output of your digital marketing (i.e., "leads"). A couple of the best ways to do this is to collaborate around improving lead conversation (through sales enablement tools and coaching) and ABM (which provides a rallying point for sales and marketing). If you can't do both, don't do either as it'll prove (as it often has) to be a waste of time and money. If companies do take the chance to "redefine" their mission, they should also redefine how they behave with their customers and prospects, which means a reformulation of sales and marketing (or "smarketing").

## The Great Wall of Tech Stack

The marketing tech stack has reached nightmare proportions. At first blush, it won't look that big or expensive, but after you start to peel it back, you'll get that cold sweat and dry throat (which will be the symptoms of panic, not pandemic.) Here are a few distinct, as well as hidden effects:



### Cost

\$40 per month here and \$120 per month there (all per user) start to add up. Most of these "apps" will have signed you up for the 12-month discount when we can't even see 12 weeks down the line right now.



### Value

In some cases, we were not sure of the value of some of these apps when we first subscribed to them. You will not have to examine some of them too carefully to realize that they can't justify the investment. They move your needle so little; they don't warrant the effort and dollars required to use them. In some cases, they might be feasible, but for most companies, they'll have you "gagging on granularity."

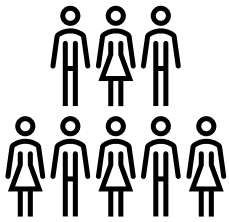


### People

Sales and Marketing tech also seems to have driven the need for more people, not less. This seems counter-intuitive as technology and automation are supposed to do just that...automate. We have all realized that the latest technology is often not as simple as it looks. Neither is integrating it with more valuable technologies. An emerging situation will add to this problem. As marketing people are cut loose (or never return), many companies won't even know which apps they're paying for, weren't getting value from, didn't miss, and now need to Deep 6 – if only they knew which ones...and where are they? As one disgruntled marketing professional (who had been unhesitatingly dumped by a "socially considerate, community-spirited, right-on tech company") said to me recently – "they'll never even know where to start looking for it all."

## Turnover – It's All Change . . . Again

Staff turnover's going to have a couple of internal and external effects, and we've already mentioned one above. As people get turned over, your tech stack "know-how" gets turned over with it. Leadership might not have time to assess what technology they really need and what skills are most. In such times our advice is to focus on the versatile players. Deep skills are excellent, and some would say we are (or maybe were) in the era of the specialist, but in times of uncertainty, breadth beats depth.



Perhaps a more significant area of change will be in the audience of your target buyer. Your target contacts are about to **change by 50%** as these companies experience turnover. This means you'll need to re-invigorate your contact sourcing and harvesting efforts. Get serious with intent data and social listening to achieve this.

## Personalization? Don't Take It Personally

B2B marketing teams will always violently agree when this subject comes up in conversation. Still, once the meeting is over, they'll admit to one another that meaningfully achieving this is difficult at best. Personalization is not new. Marketing veterans have been wrestling with this one for years (all of you under 40 can stop rolling your eyes any time, by the way). It's right up there with the 360-degree view of the customer. Meaningful personalization takes a lot of resources and coordination, and it's another excellent example of a "gap" we'd encourage you to "mind." In other words, all the good research work and analysis and discussion in marketing get utterly wasted if you cannot carry it through, so sales use the same models. They are enabled to do it effectively and consistently and with discipline.

A lot of business models today are (or were) built on the need for high utilization to be profitable. Low-cost airlines are a great example. The standard airlines need at least 70% utilization, and the economy airlines even more. Economy airlines must fly at 85% or higher, or not at all. The same principle applies to personalization. In other words, if you can't get it to 90% personalized, you'll have to stay generic or risk offending the buyer. Here's another airline example to illustrate the point. I no longer fly as often and therefore don't get special treatment anymore. When I call my hometown airline, I rarely get to talk to anyone until they call me back (which is ok). Despite recording my name as to join the digital line for a callback, when I do get the callback, the opening line from the "robocall" says its calling for ...[pause]...."valued customer". So, let me just get this straight. You know my name, I've been a customer for 30 years, you have the technology to say my name, and it's tied to my unique phone number AND just to be sure, you asked me to record my name one more time, and yet I still get the generic (not so) "valued customer" routine. **Fail.**



## Conclusion

As we've often observed recently, despite their reservations, people love to "read the tea leaves" and speculate about the future. In uncertain times, unsurprisingly, this becomes the main topic of conversation accompanied by our growing sense of unease. We picked on a few of the predictions we saw at the end of 2019 (including some of our own here), and tried to play them off two things:

1

Peggy Noonan's observation that *"...they'll use the 2020 crash as cover to do things they've long wanted to do, which is get rid of costly people in their corporations, especially in the middle levels. Some will speed up artificial intelligence and robotics. They'll announce they're redefining their mission."* We think some of those 2019 predictions will be getting a boost, and the word "transformation" will really start to mean something.

2

That we have an over-abundance in certain areas. In marketing, we have technology for technology's sake. Technology that's been adopted as people became commercial fashion victims, needing to keep up with the latest technologies more for show than anything else. An abundance of cheap investment dollars allowed them to indulge themselves and float the budget on this. **That's ending.**

Let us know what you think. We know there are many predictions to make, and B2B sales and marketing can be a broad subject. Still, perhaps that's part of what will happen here – an overdue simplification of the often unnecessarily overly complicated.