Martech leadership: The symbiotic development of technology and talent

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Abstract   As analytics technology evolves faster than organisational structures, companies find themselves struggling to keep up with consumer expectations. Across myriad devices, channels and networks, consumers are generating hundreds of touch points with the expectation that brands are not only able to understand their immediate need, but also ready to deliver a solution. Organisations must act quickly to align on their strategic vision, make smarter analytics investments, and develop the people and process critical for success in an artificial intelligence driven world.

KEYWORDS: marketing technology, martech, AI

INTRODUCTION

The rapid–fire pace of marketing technology innovation has left the analytics ecosystem space highly fragmented — and marketers' heads spinning. Overlapping solutions that do not necessarily play well together, inadequate resources and a pronounced lack of skilled workers all contribute to the confusion.

For evidence of the impact of martech's gold rush One need look no further than Scott Brinker's 'Marketing Technology Landscape Supergraphic' which now boasts over 7,000 solutions.[1] Venture capitalists have sunk billions into thousands of martech startups, most of which cannot possibly deliver the results that investors are betting on. As Brinker wrote recently in an article questioning whether martech is headed for its own dotcom moment: 'The market

can sustain thousands of successful martech specialists. But it cannot sustain thousands of billion-dollar generalists'.[2]

Few people in the martech space have analysed the available solutions to the same extent as Brinker. For this reason, in addition to reviewing his published works, I spoke with him on 22nd January, 2020, to get his perspective and forward-looking advice for marketers staring into the martech mêlée. Unless otherwise cited, the quotes in this paper attributed to him are from that discussion.

Researchers estimate that the combined US and UK spend on marketing technology will hit US$121.5bn in 2020,[3] and according to Kleiner Perkins, brands have an average of 91 martech tools in their stack.[4] While marketers are struggling on multiple fronts (not least of which is the fact that just one

in four is confident they can quantify return on investment (ROI)[5]), most of their woes fit within the framework of Harold Leavitt's 'Golden Triangle' of organisational change, namely: people, process and technology.[6]

According to Gartner's Marketing Technology Survey results for 2019, respondent marketers felt they were utilising only 58 per cent of their stack's capabilities and potential.[7] Despite the clear and present dangers of too many technological solutions in the market, people, and the processes within which they operate, are the real key to unlocking the value of marketing technology. In the aforementioned research report, Gartner found that 29 per cent of marketing leaders indicate that training and upskilling existing martech talent is a major impediment to their martech stack effectiveness. For 27 per cent, it is identifying and recruiting martech talent.

Marketers need to focus on increasingly agility and realising the potential of their technologies via training and systems integration. Seventy per cent of chief marketing officers (CMOs) expect to invest more in marketing analytics and attribution over the next year. As this paper will argue, a sizable portion of that investment should be allocated to finding and developing the people who will successfully drive the organisation's marketing processes and technology in the future.

This paper will explore the methods by which organisations are successfully supporting their analytics investments and in turn, how those analytics are supporting the people and processes that use them.

ALIGNING STRATEGIC VISION

Inside digital organisations today, there is arguably no relationship more significant than that between marketing and IT. Not long ago, communication between the two was rare and on an as-needed basis; more likely, marketing and IT were in direct competition for budget. Today, the evaluation, selection and purchasing of martech solutions is informed by guidance from IT 43 per cent of the time.[8]

Leadership in marketing is finding it easier to get buy-in for tech solutions, as the high cost of inefficiency (typically 20–30 per cent of an organisation's revenue[9]) has become clear. Marketing analytics in particular has been proving its utility across the organisation and in so doing has helped CMOs justify a greater share of the budget. In fact, businesses that use marketing insights in corporate decision-making tend to invest up to 70 per cent more in marketing as a whole.[10]

This alignment on a shared vision across the organisation — and between marketing and IT, in particular — makes martech advocates and evangelists of leadership across the brand. In making the case for martech, it makes sense for marketing to focus on the business case and IT to execute the rollout. With the early investment and ongoing involvement of C-level stakeholders, a common vernacular is developed and martech's wins are understood across the board. According to an Adestra survey, three-quarters of marketers identify time savings as the biggest benefit to their martech, while 68 per cent credit it with increased customer engagement.[11] More timely communications and increased upselling opportunities are also among the martech benefits touted. These are the types of universal results that leadership in every area of the business can appreciate.

When considering new tools and evaluating the overall marketing stack (which should be done on a somewhat regular basis), decide who needs a seat at the table. How will the organisation use technology at various points in the customer journey? What value does each tool deliver to marketing — and what value does it offer the company as a whole? How well does each play and integrate with others?

Get the marketing stack down on paper. Draw inspiration from previous entries to

Figure 1: Cisco's tech stacks — 2017 vs 2018
Brinker, S. (2018) 'Cisco 2017 and 2018 Stackies Awards entries' in '54 marketing stacks from The Stackies 2018: Marketing Tech Stack Awards', available at: https://chiefmartec.com/2018/04/54-marketing-stacks-stackies-2018-marketing-tech-stack-awards/

The Stackies Awards, an annual contest where marketing stacks are illustrated in a single presentation slide. Figure 1 shows two years' worth of Stackies from Cisco, as an example.

When evaluating the stack, prioritise the must–haves as those tools that will solve those challenges that customers are experiencing right now. Next, look to the 6, 12 and 18-month horizons. How will the company keep pace with evolving customer expectations? Which technologies will move marketing objectives forward?

Make sure the marketing team is aligned on ROI, as well. Far more than a simple financial metric, return on investment can also be measured in terms of customer satisfaction, engagement, conversion across channels, and more. Determine how to assign value to each of the ROI indicators that being tracked. Use this in the evaluation of the feasibility and cost of each martech solution.

Look for redundancies and gaps that may be filled. Identify not just missing data but also which tool is best suited to address this gap. When considering whether a 'best-of-breed' or integrated suite approach to martech best suits the company's needs, be sure to consider existing vendor relationships and resource availability.

Decide who will own martech and what resources can be allocated to them. Whose support will be needed? The best time to ask for that support is when all the stakeholders are at the table. Which teams and specific people need data and analysed insights from the stack, and how will they access such data?

Figure 2 provides a closer look at Cisco's stack. Cisco is not just paying lip–service to customer centricity; Cisco's customer is
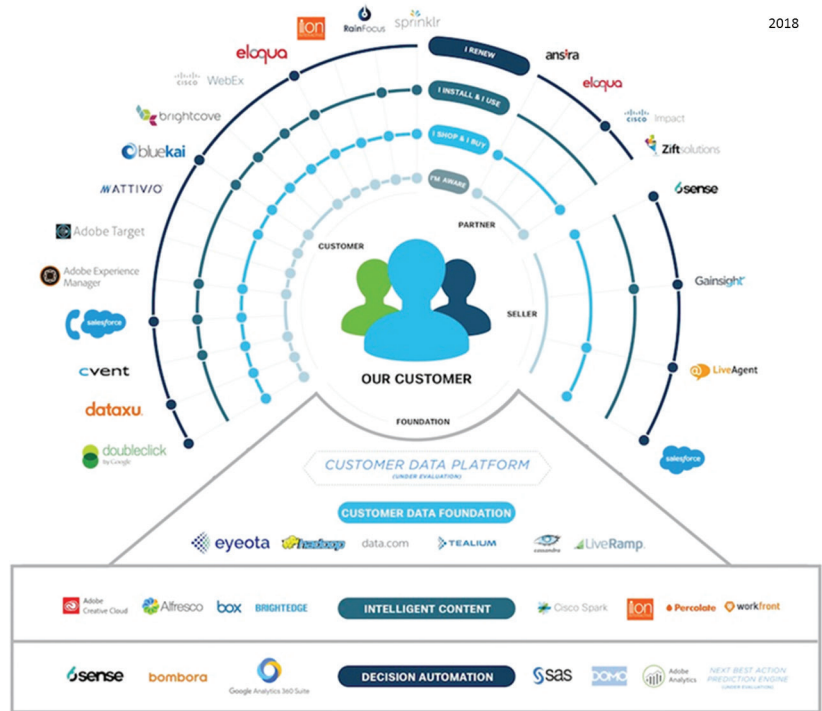
Digital Engagement Tech Stack

Figure 2: Cisco's digital engagement tech stack, 2018
Source: Brinker, S. (2018) 'Digital Engagement Tech Stack' in '54 marketing stacks from The Stackies 2018: Marketing Tech Stack Awards', available at: https://chiefmartec.com/2018/04/54-marketing-stacks-stackies-2018-marketing-tech-stack-awards/

literally the epicentre that bonds together and simplifies what has the potential to be an incredibly complicated stack.

Solutions such as Salesforce[12] and Adobe have great power on their own, but it is through their integration and the ability of employees to maximise the utility of each one (more on that soon) that drives real value for the organisation.

When considering the value of each tool, one inevitable factor will be the contribution that artificial intelligence (AI) is making (and will continue to make) to the marketing programme. Across e-mail marketing, advertising, social and content campaigns and more, AI is a powerful informer of the personalisations that deliver the exceptional experience that consumers crave.

According to Jim Yu, CEO at BrightEdge[13] for personalisation to succeed marketers need to build trust with consumers on data fidelity and data integrity. In order to truly scale personalisation efforts marketers, need to embrace technology that helps them deliver dynamic and personalised experiences that perform across all their digital channels.

AI can not only interpret historic transactional data and use its findings to personalise content, but can help marketers predict exactly which pieces of content they need to create, in order to resonate best with a particular consumer. This smart automation — automated process with a layer of AI to analyse and even take action — is enabling marketing to activate far larger datasets than previously possible. AI-powered tools can help determine the most successful distribution of content and even execute on the most impactful optimisations and placements, informed by real-time interactions. This

real-time personalisation is proving critical in an age where fully 96 per cent of Americans 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they are 'more likely to do business with a company that interacts with me in a personalised way'.[14]

Freed of these time-consuming repetitive tasks, marketing professionals are in turn empowered to focus their creative efforts where they can be of greatest impact. Of course, determining exactly where that is requires marketers to keep a finger firmly on the pulse of campaign performance and consumer behaviour.

ANALYTICS INVESTMENTS

The traditional linear marketing funnel is well and truly a thing of the past. Today, the only thing typical about a customer's journey is that each one is different. Across devices, networks, and potentially hundreds of interactions, consumers expect omnipresence and near-instant responsiveness from the companies with whom they choose to do business.

Martech and smart automations are enabling brands to massively expand their digital footprint — to be present when and wherever consumers are searching for relevant solutions. Technology is empowering brands to meet consumers in their moments of need with tailored solutions. Even so, tracking and measuring outcomes remains a near-universal challenge.

This is not because of a shortage of attribution models. It is now possible to develop more advanced modelling processes than ever before, yet it remains difficult to connect those insights to business outcomes in a way that is replicable. Moreover, marketers must then be able to communicate complex outcomes to decision makers and other stakeholders in ways that are compelling, understandable and ultimately relatable.

Marketing can benefit greatly from the evolution to multi-touch attribution, even if it is a slow process to achieve it. It is important that budget can be allocated appropriately to owned touch points and that the tools being used have the ability to expand and extend as analytics processes mature. Multi-touch attribution tools must be able to leverage touch points across the entire customer journey, not only in paid media.

More mature marketing organisations may be looking to prescriptive analytics as a method of activating data from traditionally inbound metrics such as engagement, closed business and site traffic. Inbound marketing by its nature creates an unmanageable volume of data from clicks and views to purchases, enquiries across channels, and conversions to varying actions completed. Where predictive analytics helps marketing understand the potential impact of an optimisation or placement based on historic performance, prescriptive analytics can suggest actions that will help the marketer improve performance.

Again, these are examples of AI in action and it is as critical in analytics as anywhere else in the martech stack. Using months–old data to plan for the next quarter is no longer sufficient. Organisations need to be tracking customer satisfaction throughout the customer journey, and also be in a position to activate said data and take action. Deep learning gives marketers the power to derive insight from massive and even unstructured datasets. Trigger-based campaigns can tailor content and promotions to individuals using increasingly personal and complex behavioural triggers, enabling brands to get ever more granular in the experiences offered.

One of the greatest challenges in moving to this more data-driven culture is not actually the technology, or even the way it is implemented and integrates with other tools — it is inertia.

According to Murli Buluswar, Chief Science Officer at AIG:

'The power of fear is quite tremendous in evolving oneself to think and act differently today, and to ask questions today that we weren't asking about our roles before … And it's that mind-set change — from an expert-based mind-set to one that is much more dynamic and much more learning oriented, as opposed to a fixed mind-set — that I think is fundamental to the sustainable health of any company, large, small, or medium'.[15]

This brings us right back to that top-ranking impediment to the success of the modern marketing stack: the people who use it.

PEOPLE AND PROCESS

While most marketing leaders he speaks with identify technology integration as their top martech challenge, Brinker believes the human dimension is the underrated and underlying cause of much marketing woe. Having found the right technology for your stack, the next step is to find the right people and process to execute.

'There's such an incredible amount of change happening in marketing disciplines, and most marketing organisations are falling behind in their ability to scale their talent and workforce', Brinker says.

'There aren't that many people to hire who already know what you need, as it's all so new. Sure, you can hire someone who is an experienced user of a specific martech product — but if you're trading off someone with intimate knowledge of your market and business that's not a trade you want to make. This is what we'll struggle with over the next decade', he predicts.

Marketers must learn not simply to use but to command the AI-powered technology at their disposal. The shift towards a platform ecosystem should bring sanity to the marketing stack, but the success of that stack still depends entirely on how it is used.

Brinker predicts that in this coming 'second Golden Age' of martech there will be a consolidation of technologies accompanied by an increase in service providers packaging their secret sauce — their martech knowledge and prowess — into highly specialised services. You might hire out analysis and recommendations from one channel, or using a particular tool.

However, across the marketing landscape there is currently a dearth of people with both the creativity and analytical skills to drive strategy in AI-powered stacks. In an appearance for the Economic Club of New York in 2017, IBM CEO Ginni Rometty sounded the alarm on the skills gap. While 10 per cent of jobs will be replaced by AI-powered machines, 100 per cent of jobs will be changed, she said.[16] What is more, the education system is not preparing the workforce for this massive transition.

'If you look at it just some pure numbers, the United States: half a million open tech jobs, five to six million open jobs in general. Our high schools only teach 25 per cent of computer science. This great country only produced 400,000 computer science people. Hard to believe such small numbers', Rommety told the crowd.

Back in 2013, Paul Roetzer introduced the concept of the hybrid marketer; one 'able to perform strategically across multiple disciplines — data analysis, content marketing, social media, e-mail marketing, mobile, development and programming, etc'.[17] By his definition, this person displays strong competencies in business, IT and human behaviour. In a recent ChiefMartec/Third Door Media survey of over 600 marketers, 71.5 per cent had done computer programming at some point in their lives.[18] However, the evolving role of a hybrid marketer demands more than the acquisition of a new skill or two; it requires a shift in mindset and in the way the business of marketing is conducted.

Jason Miller, Global Content Marketing Leader at LinkedIn, further attributes these traits to the hybrid marketer, who:[19]

Figure 3: The marketing technologist quadrant
Source: Brinker, S. (2020) 'The many splendid varieties of marketing technologists in 2020: martech roles and archetypes', 5th January, available at: https://chiefmartec.com/2020/01/marketing-technologists-martech-roles-archetypes/

- sees it as part of their role to learn any new, emerging skill that might have relevance to achieving their objectives;
- does not leave executional knowledge to others — but is wired to seek continually to acquire it; and
- does not stick to one speciality but seeks to acquire a working knowledge of any that might be relevant.

At ChiefMartec, Brinker developed a set of marketing archetypes that, over the past decade, he has refined into four specific types of marketing technologists organisations will need in 2020 and beyond: the marketer, the maestro, the modeller and the maker (Figure 3).

Brinker explains, 'While all marketing technologists share a common comfort with mastering martech in their work, they're far from homogeneous. They apply martech in different ways. They specialise in different martech tools. They exhibit different skills and talents. And they

certainly have a wide range of titles and responsibilities'.[20]

Marketing technologists may be required to collaborate and interface with other key internal stakeholders; the brand/demand builder with sales and customer success, or the operations orchestrator with legal and finance teams. Interpersonal and communication skills are every bit as important as analytical ones.

This does not mean the each organisation needs to run out and hire these four people. It is quite possible that one person may possess skills from multiple quadrants, or that a single position may demand expertise in two areas. What matters most is that decision makers are aware of the broad scope of these roles and the specific skills necessary to perform them. In addition to technologists, organisations need a manager (typically a vice president or director of marketing) whose martech mindset and deep understanding of each of these roles enables them to set the course in

accordance with the CMO's strategy, direct marketing operations, and manage both the technologists and the martech in a way that enables each to perform to the best of their ability.

THE MODERN MARKETING STACK = TECHNOLOGY + PEOPLE

As yet, there are no post-secondary degree programmes to spit out these people at the end of a four-year college career. Teaching the skills and mindset and nurturing the traits of an AI-prepared workforce has fallen to employers. According to Brinker, organisations must now be prepared to invest in learning and development as a critical piece of the marketing stack. 'Invest in marketing enablement. Give people more freedom to experiment with new ideas. That's how to unlock the real potential of your martech stack', he says.

Consumer expectations are evolving from 'answer me now' to 'give me the self-serve options I need to complete this instantly and autonomously'. Embracing AI and intelligent automation is a necessary first step on this path to delivering on those expectations. Selecting the right technology, ensuring one's analytics tools and processes provide a 360° view of your customers' journey, and integrating all tech across one's stack are all critical.

But to realise the value of these investments, organisations need to see the people of marketing as an integral piece of the marketing stack. Moving forward, smart marketing strategy is not a matter of people vs technology; it is only together that the true potential of each can be realised.

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