



How to keep your **competitive advantage** as a marketer

Competitive advantage today is not a sure thing. Blink and it's gone. Your own unique selling point can be threatened in an instant. Take Dollar Shave Club, a start-up selling cut-price, no frills razors. It enlisted 12,000 customers in two days when its YouTube video went viral. Recently it sold to Unilever for an estimated \$1 billion. Dollar Shave took on grooming goliath Gillette and was able to carve out nearly 10% market share. This would not have been possible twenty years ago. Change is the only constant in business but change is happening faster than ever. At the heart of this change is marketing.

So how can you ensure that you have competitive advantage in a career that is constantly changing?

THE 3 WAVES OF MARKETING

I've been in marketing for 20 years and I've seen three major waves during that time. The first wave was traditional marketing – relationship marketing, brand positioning and strategic pricing. This is still an integral part of good marketing and something that is often overlooked by new businesses hoping to make a mark. The second wave that is still crashing is digital. This has completely transformed what it means to be a marketer.

Traditional print and TV advertising is quickly becoming less lucrative and being replaced by viral YouTube hits and Snapchat campaigns. With TV and radio it often takes various iterations and focus groups to get it right – and even then it might fall flat. With online campaigns you can judge audience engagements and optimise in real time to make the biggest impact with the most relevant people.

Going hand in hand with the digital revolution is data analytics, a third transformative arm of marketing. It's the biggest gap in online marketing with many marketing departments crying out for talent with data analytical skill. Having all this data is one thing, but we need people to be able to do something with it.

BIG DATA IS CHANGING HOW WE MARKET

Initially, in the first decade of digital marketing it was supply-led. Marketers were using digital tools to extend their marketing efforts – websites, search and display ads primarily. We're now in a more advanced stage where digital is driving marketing. Customer experience optimisation and capturing the customer's journey in real-time with relevant marketing messages is the scoop-du-jour!

Understanding, anticipating and keeping pace with consumer needs has never been more important. It's not enough to understand your customers and assume they will still be available tomorrow. Data helps us keep pace with customers and break through a now much cluttered environment. We continue to accrue personal data at an astronomical

scale. This will guide content that excites, entertains and elevates your brand to the next level through highly targeted and relevant content and ads. OneTribe (Cpl's global marketing campaign) has been able to use data from the Irish abroad unit in Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as social media data, to find out where people of varied disciplines and professions emigrated to. This is invaluable information to use when targeting talent online and offline, and to help bring them home.

Big data presents both challenges and opportunities. Accessing and analysing data well is a skillset that is in short supply.

THE RISE OF THE T-SHAPED MARKETER

The changes in technology and marketing itself are putting pressure on marketers to always be learning. It's not good enough to be a specialist in one area – be it SEO or content. You now need to be experienced and knowledgeable across all domains. You still need to be creative but now you'll have to know how to code as well. Having technical and analytical skill is now essential. SEO, PPC, CRO and inbound are all requirements on any digital marketing job spec. Ideally, you should have some background in product design and testing which will also entail an understanding of behavioural psychology. The list goes on, and it will continue to evolve as marketing does. This is the T-shaped marketer.

Advantages don't last long in the business world. The most successful entrepreneurs are powered by stamina, skill, innovation and sheer grit. It's the same in marketing. To keep your competitive edge you will not only have to command these traits but also be a multi-faceted marketer in the new waves and old. The founding mission of Dollar Shave Club was 'total domination of the global subscription razor market'. They worked towards that by leveraging the power of digital with the relationship branding of traditional marketing – knowing their customer, and knowing them well. That will always be central to powerful marketing, no matter how fast the changes.



Avril McHugh is the Director for Group Marketing at Cpl. She has 20 years' international marketing experience across a wide variety of industries.

Understanding the innovation it takes to gain competitive advantage to find the best talent, she launched a global marketing initiative called OneTribe. Irish, attracting the global Irish diaspora home to work.

Avril collaborated with a number of public private agencies including the Department of Foreign Affairs and the IDA, bringing the campaign offline to New York, London and Melbourne earlier this year.

She is on course to complete her Big Data & Analytics education at Harvard Business School in Spring 2017.