



Acquiring, Selling and Maintaining an Exceptional Customer Web Experience

A Challenge of Amazonian Proportions

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Executive Summary

The web is ubiquitous in our lives today. We shop, educate ourselves, stay in touch with friends and make new ones, entertain ourselves and more. And it clearly has business implications as well.

Most of today's successful printing companies (and in-plant printing operations) have adopted some form of web to print. Some have home-grown systems or older solutions and may be looking to change. Some may not have made the leap yet for various reasons.

However, today's buyers have come to expect an "Amazon" experience – and that includes buyers of print. That means that for most businesses, having an exceptional web-based customer experience—and understanding how to sell it and how to keep it fresh—is a critical element of the customer relationship. It does not mean, as many in the printing industry feared early on, that it eliminates face-to-face contact and deep customer relationships. In fact, a good implementation strengthens those relationships by making doing business with you as convenient as possible. Some print companies ONLY do business via the web and are doing very well at it. Just look at Vistaprint as an example. And while Vistaprint primarily serves the very small business and home office market (a market that can be quite fickle), the company reports that a substantial percentage of its customers are repeat buyers.

This web-to-print primer provides real-world advice and guidance on all things web-to-print, from selecting the right solution for your business to selling, maintaining and growing your web presence and the products and services you offer. It also includes real-world experiences that demonstrate the value of establishing and maintaining an exceptional customer web experience, and points to additional resources that will help you in making this journey.

And a journey it is. This is not like an offset press where you install it on the production floor and start manufacturing. It is an ongoing and evolutionary commitment to excellence and to anticipating and meeting emerging customer needs in order to stay current with—or even slightly ahead of—the market with a thriving, healthy business.

The objective of this primer is to provide you with basic tools, knowledge and questions to ask yourself as you prepare to select or update a web-facing customer experience. It is a starting point that we hope you will find valuable as you embark on the next phase of business development.

Introduction

There is no question that the Internet and mobile communications have changed the way consumers and businesses interact with suppliers, customers and partners. And Amazon has played a significant role in

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setting the standard for what is—and is not—an acceptable interface from the perspective of the consumer, in both B2B and B2C environments. According to an article in the September 1, 2013, issue of *Fast Company*, “More than 209 million active customers rely on Amazon for everything from flat panel TVs to dog food...Annual sales have quadrupled over [the past five years] to a whopping \$61 billion. Along the way, incidentally, Amazon also became the world’s most trusted company ... usurping the spot formerly held by Apple.”

These are achievements that are the envy of any business. But they are also a sign of change in the way people around the world prefer to research and purchase a wide variety of items across almost every industry segment. One of the key factors that has led to Amazon’s success is the ability to provide access to a wide array of products and services from a single interface with a single payment process. This leads to speed and convenience for users that is unparalleled.

Providers of print and marketing services have much to learn from Amazon. It is very likely that executives and staff members even count themselves among the more than 200 million Amazon users. But how many have spent time thinking about how this model can be applied to their own businesses?

This white paper is designed to be a primer for print and marketing services providers who are either seeking to establish a customer-facing web interface or to update one they already have in place. It provides tips, hints and guidance for selecting, implementing, maintaining and selling the class of solutions often referred to as “web-to-print,” but which in fact operate on a much broader scale than simply streamlining the procurement and management of printed materials. We will be using the term “web-to-print” throughout this paper, but readers should consider the term to have a more “Amazonian” implication in terms of the business opportunities these solutions enable.

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Making the Right Choices

The first step in selecting a web-to-print solution is to conduct an analysis of the current state of the business. This applies to those new to the world of web-to-print as well as those who already have solution(s) installed and believe that those might need to be updated, changed or augmented.

Web-to-print came into the forefront in the late 1990s during what came to be known as the dot-com boom (and then bust!), but it is only recently that rapid adoption rates are being seen across the industry. Much has changed in terms of the types of web-to-print offerings available in the marketplace. There are many new players, some with familiar names who have added these capabilities and others not so familiar or not familiar at all. In addition, there are a few (very few) players who have been participating in this market space since the beginning, who have kept pace with—or ahead of—changing market dynamics and are thus still with us.

This proliferation of offerings makes navigating the selection process confusing and time-consuming. Business owners are loathe to overlook any viable solution; but at the same time, they can't afford to spend the time required to investigate all of them. The good news is that there are resources available to help narrow the search. But this is only effective once the homework is done.

Assessing the Current State

Assessing your business's current state with respect to web-to-print is fairly straightforward, but it must be done thoroughly. The desired outcome will be a set of requirements that any new solution(s) must meet, including both "must haves" and "nice to haves." These requirements take into consideration both the retention and expansion of current business as well as potential new business that a web-to-print offering (or updated web-to-print offering) can bring your way. Recommended steps include the following. Each individual business will need to determine if all of these steps are required, or if additional steps not listed here might make sense.

- Assessment of current business. This includes:
 - Analysis of profitability and revenue levels for top 10 customers; is there work you are doing at a loss for these customers to retain them? Have revenues from your top 10 significantly increased or decreased over the past couple of years? If so, why? How has the composition of the top 10 changed over the past couple of years?
 - Recurring (programmatic) work versus transactional one-time work. Programmatic work typically carries a lower cost of goods sold over the longer term and can generate predictable recurring revenues, while transactional work can be unpredictable and price-driven. The latter is often offered to several competitors seeking the best possible combination of price, quality and service level. What percent of your business is comprised of each? How does that compare to two years ago?
- Plant efficiency/productivity.

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- How many jobs run through your plant on average per day/week/month? How has that changed over the last two years? How has the average selling price per job changed? What impact has this had on overall revenues?
- What is the average turnaround time you are able to deliver? How does this align with customer expectations and/or how has this changed over the past couple of years?
- How much does the average job cost to produce in administrative time, including sales CSRs, accounting, shipping, etc., from the time the customer first contacts you until the job is shipped and paid for? What percent of the overall job cost does that represent?
- What percent of quotes/estimates are turned into orders? Have you done a lost business analysis to determine why certain business does not come your way?
- Current web presence, if any.
 - Do you currently have a customer-facing web interface? This does not include job submission via email or FTP.
 - What percent of your work is processed through such an interface, and what happens to the jobs once they have been received via a web-to-print storefront? Is information rekeyed, transferred to paper ... etc. How could this workflow be better integrated across internal systems?
 - What percent of your customers utilize your web-to-print interface? What is preventing other customers from taking advantage of the service?
 - Are you integrated with any customer systems? Do you see a need to do so, or have you spoken to your customers about this possibility?
- Why types of products/services are you offering?
 - General commercial print
 - Digital printing
 - Specialty prepress or finishing services
 - Fulfillment/distribution
 - Mailing
 - Print on demand
 - Promotional, apparel or other non-printed items
 - Other

How does your business break down among these categories by percentages of revenues, profits? What percent of revenues in each category could be attributed to jobs received via web-to-print? Is there value in increasing that percentage?

A final and vital step to concluding your current-state analysis is to conduct customer meetings. These meetings are not sales meetings, but rather, are relationship-building sessions designed to elicit honest and frank feedback about your relationship, missed opportunities (work that is currently going to other suppliers that you might be able to produce), current pain points the customer would like to address, upcoming opportunities and any other information you can glean that would shed light on how you might better serve these customers and/or gain a greater share of customer.

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This should be a broad-ranging discussion that goes well beyond the services you offer today. It is also important to understand whether there are customer systems or databases with which you might be able to integrate to provide a more streamlined, automated workflow; lower costs; and faster turnaround times.

These meetings should include members of your “Top 10,” two to three other customers below that, and two to three lost customers and/or prospects.

Armed with the results of this analysis, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where are there opportunities to take business and production touches out of your workflow?
- How can you best reduce the amount of administrative cost associated with each job? Where is the “low hanging fruit”?
- Are there opportunities to more efficiently and profitably handle a larger number of smaller jobs through your operation?
- What customer needs are you currently not meeting? How can you incorporate those potential business opportunities into your revenue stream?
- How could you become more integrated with customer systems to ensure more traction and tighter, longer-lasting relationships?
- Do you have an opportunity to recapture lost customers? What are the top three things that would allow you to do so?
- What other types of products or services can you offer that will expand your presence in existing accounts and allow you to gain new ones?
- What role would a modern, fully-featured web-to-print solution play in allowing you to effectively address these questions?

Narrowing the Field

Following this type of assessment process will provide you with a significant amount of information that will help you determine the key features and functionality you require from a web-to-print solution—and which are not necessary.

One free tool that can help you translate this data into a smaller number of potential solutions has been created and made available by Web2PrintExperts.com. Their W2P Finder asks three basic questions that this group in their product agnostic work has found are the critical preliminary qualifiers for selection of a web-to-print solution. These are:

- Target markets (B2B, B2C, In-Plant)
- Product Workflows
- Selected Countries

Upon completion of the brief questionnaire, you are presented with a limited selection of solutions that are most likely to meet your needs, linked to basic information about each one. This tool can be very helpful in narrowing the field as you are working through the selection process. Keep in mind that new solutions are coming on the market all the time,

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and the W2P Finder is not an exhaustive listing, although we believe the team has done a good job of assembling information and keeping it current.

Hosted, Licensed and Hybrid Solutions

A final consideration is the delivery form for your new or updated web-to-print solution. These solutions come in three flavors, and many vendors offer a selection between among them, or a migration from one to the other as needs change. These are:

- **Licensed solutions:** This is software that you purchase in the manner in which you are probably most accustomed. The software is installed on your servers and maintained by your IT staff. Typically, licensed solutions require an up-front purchase payment and ongoing maintenance fees and are often a capital expense. You may also benefit from utilizing professional services from the vendor during implementation to speed up the process. The benefit of a licensed solution is that the entire solution resides within your firewall with web services that extend to the customer. It requires a one-time (usually capital) expense and a predictable ongoing maintenance fee. The downside is that you must acquire and maintain the hardware and employ the correct level of IT staff to support the solution on an ongoing basis. This includes software updates, upgrades and patches, which can be time-consuming and error-prone, and may create interruptions to customer service. Don't forget that beyond the web-to-print application, your staff will be required to perform server maintenance, keeping server software levels current and performing hardware maintenance and repair as required.
- **Hosted:** With a hosted or software-as-a-service (SaaS) implementation, the vendor hosts the application on its servers and you access your secure instance of the application via a web browser. Advantages include less need for IT staff on site (although these days, you will always need some type of IT support, whether on-site or contracted), reduced requirement for on-site servers and server maintenance, and faster updates that are delivered by the vendor, generally with less potential for interruption to services. It can often also be easier to customize your web-to-print environment to more closely meet changing needs. While some managers may feel uncomfortable with a cloud-based solution such as this, it should be noted that use of cloud computing is becoming standard operating procedure across most industries and many applications. Issues of security and control are less pressing because these hosting companies have invested significantly more than you will ever be able to in security measures, investments that are spread across multiple customers resulting in a low cost per customer that allows them to pass along the fruits of their investments affordably. It is also much simpler to spin capacity up—or down—depending on business requirements. There is no need to acquire and install new servers—or deal with obsolete servers—since the vendor handles that for you at their site. SaaS solutions are typically acquired for a reasonable up-front implementation fee and a monthly commitment that is either a fixed fee subscription, transaction based or a combination of the two.
- **Hybrid:** In a hybrid implementation, the application itself can reside either in the cloud or on your servers; large data files and customer data typically would remain within your firewall either to meet specific customer requirements or to eliminate the need to transfer large amounts of data in order to accomplish a transaction. In a hybrid model, even when the application resides on your servers, the vendor will typically perform updates,

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upgrades and patches remotely (with advance notice and your permission). This means the application stays up to date with the latest features and functions but gives you greater control over the entire process.

Vendors in this space can offer valuable advice as to which model best serves your needs. In addition, you can ask for customer references from companies like yours have implemented the various models offered by the vendor. Conversations with these peers will also help you make the right choice for your business and avoid some of the pitfalls they may have experienced.

Avoiding Shelfware

One common problem in our industry has been seen among businesses that make software acquisitions and then either don't install them or don't make full use of all of their capabilities. This could be referred to as "shelfware"; in other words, the software sits on the shelf collecting dust, or it is implicitly collecting dust because it is not being utilized anywhere near its full capacity. This could be a web-to-print solution that was put in place for one customer that is using only minimal features and has not been expanded to other customers; or it could have been a purchase that was acquired with a hope of attracting customers but has never delivered on its promise for various reasons. Or perhaps it is a solution that does not perform as billed, resulting in disillusionment.

We also hear stories about "impulse buys" at shows and other venues where it sounded like a good idea at the time, but nothing was subsequently been done with it. In an environment where margins are low and competition is high, this can be devastating to a business.

It is for this reason that we recommend a thorough review of your current state as described above before you even begin thinking about which solution might best meet your needs.

Another resource from Web2Print Experts that delves deeply and frankly into this topic is their recent book, *Make Great Software Decisions*, available from EDSf.org, with all proceeds going to EDSf to help fund scholarship programs that benefit the graphic arts industry.

Now That You Are Ready to Implement ...

It has been a great deal of work getting to this point, but in the end, you will admit that it was worth in. Now you have a solution that is tuned to your needs, fits in your budget, and better positions you to retain/expand existing customers as well as acquire new ones.

Clear Implementation Plan

First and foremost, you should develop a very specific implementation plan with your selected vendor partner—and we say "partner" because this solution will become a very critical part of your business if implemented correctly, and you will want a partner that is there for the long term to ensure that you are able to keep the solution functioning and current as well as expand its capabilities as new opportunities arise. This implementation plan is often part of the final proposal you receive from the vendor. It should clearly define roles, responsibilities, timelines and recourse. You should

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expect that the implementation plan will be somewhat fluid as the implementation proceeds, but it should be fairly close to the mark from the beginning.

Staffing

Who on your staff will be the primary owner of the web-to-print solution? While the decision to purchase and implement such a solution, with its potential ability to revolutionize your business, should lie clearly within the domain of the executive staff, the actual owner of the application is often at a lower level in the organization. This person will have the primary responsibility on your side for ensuring the implementation goes smoothly, will be the first point of contact for your vendor partner, and should have authority to deploy your organizations resources as needed to implement, maintain and drive use of the system. You might find a talented and capable individual in your prepress department, or some other department. Or you may need to seek this resource from the outside. Your vendor partner should be able to coach you on the required skill set, provide a detailed job description, and perhaps even assist you in assessing available talent, including the specification of training that might be required.

Depending upon the solution and delivery form you select, you will require some level of IT support, either on site or through a partner. We have seen both models work well. However, considering that your business will only get more IT-intensive over time, perhaps now is a good opportunity to seek that person or persons as a full-time staff member. Keep in mind that this is not someone who “knows about computers,” or “posts of Facebook,” or any other number of minor qualifications. You should be seeking a competent IT professional. Your web-to-print vendor partner may be able to assist here as well in terms of providing requisite skill sets if you don’t already have someone on staff.

Another consideration is the potential reassignment or removal of existing staff members. Implemented properly, your web-to-print solution will take touches—and thus labor, time and cost—out of business and production processes. This typically means you need less people, although many businesses prefer to retain loyal staff and position themselves to grow without additional hiring. Either approach works, depending upon your specific situation and the skills of your current staff. You can also plan staff restructuring around natural attrition.

Marketing and Selling Web-to-Print

Gaining customer buy-in for your new web-to-print solution should begin early in the process. In fact, the customer meetings we recommended above may yield customers who have an interest in coming on board. Alternatively, if you already have a web-to-print solution in place, existing customers may be migrated to the new platform.

If you are already well-established in web-to-print but need an updated or refreshed solution, then you probably already understand how to sell and market it, and will be able to convert customers to using the new capabilities fairly easily. However, if this is your first real venture into the world of web-to-print, you will need to do some serious thinking about how to engage customers.

Your Best First Customer

A robust web-to-print offering will include many capabilities that you may not be offering at the present time. This includes a catalog of items that can be reordered, template-based materials that can be edited within guidelines for

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printing and/or distribution, and cross-media marketing functionality. These are all capabilities that can benefit almost any business—including yours. So make yourself the first customer! That way, you and your employees can become intimately familiar with the system, and any issues that arise will not affect a customer's business and will act as a learning and development opportunity for your team. It provides a good risk-free opportunity to “kick the tires,” and work out any kinks.

Organizing your own documents and promotional materials within your web-to-print catalog offers your employees—and especially your sales people—a more efficient way of working, just as you would be offering to your customers. That is a great first step.

Building templates that can be personalized or customized by your sales force is also a great idea, as is using any cross-media capabilities to do a multichannel marketing campaign that promotes your own services. When customers and prospects start seeing these personalized and customized communications coming from you, it will catch their attention and make it easier for your sales force to do their job. Not only will you be delivering better qualified leads to your sales force, but by “walking the talk,” you give customers a real-world example that will get them thinking about how you can affect their businesses.

If you are not a member of [PODi](#) or have never attended the PODi App Forum (usually held during the first half of the year), you may want to consider doing so. PODi has a library of hundreds of examples of how web-to-print is being effectively used on behalf of customers and for self-promotion. As a member, you have access to these case studies, and they are sure to spark some great ideas.

Educating Customers

Many businesses making this transition have had good success with customer educational sessions. You can invite customers to educational events and Lunch'n'Learns that feature a speaker, perhaps an existing customer or someone recommended by your vendor partner. These sessions should be short on selling and long on education. The real selling begins as a follow-up with attendees—which you can do by using your web-to-print solution to conduct a cross-media marketing campaign!

Remember also that we are talking about the web here. These sessions can also be conducted online to reduce costs and increase customer convenience. They can also be recorded for future use by sales personnel or to be accessed online by customers who were not able to attend in real-time. If you are investing in a knowledgeable speaker for on-premise events, be sure to capture that talk on video (with the speaker's consent, of course), and use that as a sales and education tool as well.

Selling the Value

A key staffing assessment that we have not yet addressed is the skill level of your sales force. As you become increasingly involved in the world of marketing services, you will become more intimately involved with your customers' businesses. Sales cycles will likely become longer and more complicated, but the returns can be worth the extra effort, especially as you begin to convert transactional work into programmatic work, increasing predictable annuity revenue and further locking customers in to the convenience of these new services.

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This is another area where your vendor/partner can be helpful. Vendors will often provide some level of sales training and can help you form appropriate job descriptions. Most vendors are also knowledgeable about the sales and sales management process, using these solution selling techniques in their own businesses. They want you to succeed. If you succeed, then they succeed.

This is a relationship sell that requires deep knowledge of the customer organization and industry. In some companies making this transition, existing print sales professionals (who already have customer relationships) may be able to do a good job selling web-to-print with some education and training. At a minimum, they should be able to uncover opportunities and hand those opportunities off to sales or technical specialists who can conclude the transaction. While the sales professional with the relationship should stay involved on some level (and be compensated accordingly), this structure should free them to pursue additional opportunities in a hunter/farmer sales model.

Over time, as the web-to-print and/or programmatic component of your business grows, you will likely begin to hire or cultivate an entirely different type of sales force than you have had in the past who will be selling an entirely different customer value proposition. This is the transformation we have seen in the most successful transitions from print service provider to marketing services provider. It encompasses a broader range of diverse services that meet a wider array of customer needs as they work to improve their own customer communications and sales and marketing process.

Case in Point

Many companies have achieved dramatic success by beginning with the guidelines we have included in this report. Of the many success cases available in the marketplace, we have selected two that highlight what can be achieved with a good web-to-print implementation.

CP Graphics Turns Theory into Profit

Headquartered in Tucson, Arizona, CP Graphics is a provider of design, print, and marketing services. In operation for more than 30 years, the company today specializes in delivering integrated marketing solutions, including graphic design, web to print, web design and development, print on demand, commercial printing, marketing asset management, and direct mail.

CP Graphics took two important steps to begin its transformation: The company acquired digital printing resources and implemented web-to-print. Interestingly, it was not overwhelming customer demand that drove these decisions. According to company President Jake Walker, “We had a theory that people needed robust online asset management and ordering.” And the theory proved out in actual fact.

After due diligence, Walker chose PTI Marketing Technologies’ MarcomCentral and FusionPro as part of the strategy for taking the company to the next level. “We liked the SaaS model,” he says. “Having a license for MarcomCentral got us out of the hardware upkeep business and all of the security headaches.” CP Graphics assigned an internal team, consisting of prepress, designers and developers, to work with PTI in bringing MarComCentral on line. “We now understand this product inside and out,” he adds. “We have even developed our own apps for MarcomCentral that have been supported and embraced by PTI.”

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Just as PTI licenses the SaaS solution, CP Graphics in turn licenses a branded SaaS solution for its customers, parlaying the many updates and improvements it receives from PTI into new features for customers that boost its marketing asset management capabilities and adds new value and billable services for clients.

As a result, customers treat CP Graphics as a service, not a printer or job submission provider. Walker says, “We offer services such as upfront design, data management and custom storefronts. These are value-added services that clients are happy to pay for and we don’t give them away.”

Walker estimates that its MarcomCentral implementation has driven several million dollars in incremental business and recurring revenues for the company.

Rebranding Graphic Village

In December 2012, Bramkamp rebranded itself to Graphic Village. The name change provided an opportunity for owner Larry Kuhlman to develop a new brand for his Cincinnati-based company and change customer perception from printer to marketing support services. A significant element of the transformation was upgrading the company’s customer-facing web presence. Kuhlman explains, “We had had a web-to-print implementation for about 10 years, but the platform was not well-supported and had grown stale. We only had about 10 customers using it and knew we needed to build a fresh presence.” Kuhlman and his team spent a year researching alternatives and ultimately selected MarcomCentral from PTI.

The new solution did the trick and Graphic Village was able to not only ramp up quickly but was adding a new storefront about once a month. “After only a short time,” Kuhlman adds, “we already have more than 30 active customers using MarcomCentral.” He estimates that more than a half million dollars in new, sustainable revenue is directly attributable to upgrading the company’s web presence.

Customers are not only using MarcomCentral to order printing. They also appreciate the ability to order and immediately acquire corporate branded apparel and other non-printed items. They also appreciate the robust reporting capabilities offered by MarcomCentral that allows even medium and large companies to accurately track activity in real time.

Kuhlman also insists on holding quarterly reviews with every MarcomCentral customer, using these sessions to evaluate recent performance and to show customers how they might expand their use of the application. “We have customers using MarcomCentral for everything from 401k forms to job applications and other internal forms, almost as an online filing cabinet. This is an especially valuable resource for franchises,” he says.

Another advantage of the web-to-print-assisted rebranding, according to Kuhlman, is the virtual elimination of cold calling. “We are seen as a leader in managing inventory and budgets for almost every type of marketing asset,” he explains. “And our ability to diversify our services is a major advantage for us, helping us to expand our reach outside of the local area, even abroad.”

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Maintaining the Balance

One thing about software solutions: They are typically not a one-shot deal, but rather, an ongoing evolution of capabilities. This is certainly true of web-to-print and the role it will play in the evolution of your business and customer relationships.

With that in mind, you should consider your implementation phase as just the first step in a long (and hopefully, profitable) journey into the new world of marketing services. The evolution will take two different paths: Your vendor partner will continue to improve its offerings, and you should keep abreast of those changes, taking advantage of new capabilities when it makes sense. And you will also find many new uses for your updated (or new) web-to-print solution, both for your business and for those of your customers.

Keep your ear to the ground on both counts.

You will want to make sure that you listen to both your employees and your customers. It is always surprising what kinds of new opportunities will emerge from those on the front line. To the extent you can offer a training continuum for your employees, both you and they will benefit, as will your customers.

Above all, make sure to keep your instance of web-to-print up to date. If you are using a SaaS or hybrid solution, this may be easier, more natural and more affordable than some of the licensed software approaches. Either way, continual evaluation of where you are in terms of taking full advantage of all capabilities is a must. Not every business will use everything, but you should not discount anything without a thorough analysis. As they say, "Wash, rinse and repeat."

Just as you would like your customers to take advantage of the educational opportunities you make available, you and your team should also take advantage of educational opportunities made available to you, by your vendor partner, by industry associations and conferences, and from other sources.

One final word of advice: As a provider of marketing services, you will begin to develop an entirely new and different relationship with customers as demonstrated by our case studies. You typically will engage more deeply with their organizations and expand the range of contacts you speak to on a regular basis. Find out what events and conferences they attend and join them there. This adds credibility to your offering as well as provides you with access to new prospects, with whom you can replicate your successes.

This report was sponsored by PTI Marketing Technologies. For more information about PTI's MarcomCentral, FusionPro and other products and services, visit www.PTI.com.