

A close-up photograph of a teal bowl filled with cereal. The cereal consists of many small, light-brown, ring-shaped pieces. Interspersed among them are several colorful marshmallows: one is a rainbow shape, another is a bear shape with orange and white stripes, and others are in various colors like yellow, pink, and blue. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of brown and red.

MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

This new collection of guest articles explores the stresses and strains of modern marketing.

Each article offers a new angle, and a potential solution for marketing teams looking for a way to improve the ROI on marketing without the risk.

The Martin Hill Collection

Step up your growth strategy with this series of articles from Epicor's former VP of international marketing, Martin Hill

With the pressure of hitting targets, marketers often settle for known techniques. But is this the behaviour of a successful marketer? Shouldn't we be striving to get the best ROI for our campaigns? Learning, and improving this every time?

If your campaign strategy combines the same elements every cycle, updating the messaging but sticking with known tactics and techniques, it could be time for a change.

The problem is that whilst sticking with the known knowns appears to be less risky than taking a punt on new tools and techniques, there's a very real danger of missing out.

At the end of 2017, Martin Hill – once a BH&P client and now an associate – created a series of guest articles reflecting on the stresses of modern marketing, and highlighting how marketers can bake in experimentation to their marketing programmes, creating a new world of continual improvement, with minimum stress.

We've pulled all the articles together into this collection so you can browse them at your leisure, stop guessing, and start making your own luck.

CONTENTS

CHANGE YOUR LUCK.....	4
Article 1 Watching the world go by.....	5
Article 2 Surfing the next wave.....	8
Article 3 The happy accident.....	12
Article 4 Can you fix the odds?.....	16
Article 5 If only we were superheroes	20
THE BH&P SOLUTION	24
Stop guessing, and make your own luck.....	27



CHANGE YOUR LUCK

GUEST AUTHOR: MARTIN HILL, FORMER INTERNATIONAL VP OF
MARKETING, EPICOR



Article 1 | Watching the world go by

This year I decided to take a break from work and bring a bit more life into my work-life balance. I'm getting the time to relax and rediscover my natural curiosity and creativity, and to take a much more objective view of the pressures and practices of marketing that governed my career.

I've worked through a period of massive change since leaving university in the early 80's. Watching from the outside magnifies how much the pressure, pace and pervasiveness of work has changed.

Even though I've disconnected from my previous job (surprisingly quickly!) I'm left with a ghost of myself in many social channels that continues to attract news, commentary and content relating to my interests in business, technology, communications and marketing.

The luxury of time.

Now I have the time to watch this world go by clear of the goals, targets, deadlines and pressures of a full-time job, I have the luxury of time to consider the opinions, propositions, technologies and techniques being described by vendors, consultants, observers, practitioners and experts alike.



Time is the key. I now have it, where I didn't necessarily have it before. Time was (and is) such a valuable commodity the question is always how to invest it most wisely. Hidden in the tsunami of news and opinion, research and promotional content are the gems that every marketer seeks.

Marketing techniques, tactics and technologies are developing so fast, the lifecycle of an effective programme is becoming shorter and shorter.

What works today might not work tomorrow.

Experienced marketers know they should be constantly looking to improve, enhance and even re-invent their programs and tactics to maintain and improve performance, but what, how and when? How do you choose experimentation over execution when time and budget are so constrained? It's hard enough getting things done, let alone experimenting with improvements once they are up and running.

For a small enterprise, having a marketing programme that is working and delivering results is often an achievement in itself, attention and resources will then naturally move to other areas of the business that need attention.

For larger enterprises, having programmes in some markets or channels that work allows attention to shift to those where it doesn't. Add more complexity with the dimensions of the buying cycle, changing buyer behaviour, the proliferation of communication channels, multiple products, markets and geographies, the varied expertise and experience of those who are responsible for the programmes, the shortening life cycle of the tactics deployed, the variety of specialised skills required to master marketing technologies, competitor behaviour, time and resource constraints, the need to improve return on investment...

It's no wonder that most marketers need more time.

There's no organisation that can afford to apply and evaluate every new technique, tactic or technology. You either don't have the knowledge, the skills, the tools, or most importantly the time. If you have (or make) the time, how do

you decide what to change, what to test, what to improve? Which programme, which campaign, which tactic?

Wouldn't it be great if there was a way of slowing time and speeding up action; identifying opportunities prioritised according to their predicted improvement on ROI; and then acting on them quickly and effectively. A marketing time machine if you like. Something that allows us to build a plan that evolves dynamically, that we can pivot at will, and that guides organisations to better performance.

Stay with me on this ... if the improvement plan is built based on emerging best practice, uses the knowledge of experienced practitioners, is specific and action oriented but can remain agile, it would eliminate hesitation and procrastination. It could (and should) direct the actions of an individual or team, and maximise the way they use their time.

I'm watching the world go by. I'm watching other marketers watching the world go by. For those that want to stop it but can't figure out how, when or where, I think there's a better way to maximise ROI.

The value of your investment may go up or down.

A bit like watching the stock market, the skill is picking those tactics and ideas most likely to go up and making it happen quickly, evaluating as you go so you can abandon those that don't improve performance. No breakthrough technology, no over-hyped pseudo-methodology, no repackaging of old ideas with new names, no over-intellectual hypothesising.

No snake-oil.

Just a common-sense, practical approach to maximising return on marketing investment that will make life easier, more enjoyable, more productive and more effective.

Article 2 | Surfing the next wave

Lately I've had the previously unknown luxury of time – and with this came the opportunity to revisit some of the magnificent coastline, towns and villages in Devon and Dorset. I've been able to enjoy great weather and explore new things without the pressure of deadlines and targets to return to.

On my latest trip, I was struck by the behaviour of the huge number of surfers also enjoying the conditions.

They sit on their boards patiently waiting and watching the surf, bursting into action to paddle furiously in pursuit of a wave, ride it as best they can and then return to repeat the process.

Surfing, it seems, requires a lot of patience, the right tide, and a certain element of luck.



Waiting for the perfect break.

Some waves they let pass, some they paddle to catch. Some they time perfectly, and some they don't. Some they ride and on others they fall. It struck me as I watched how similar their behaviour was to the marketers I had been working with for so many years. Watching and waiting for the next big marketing wave, the perfect break that will catapult their programme forward.

So how do you choose when to paddle, which wave to ride, or how long to ride it for? New marketing technologies, techniques and tactics are constantly emerging. Some are big and powerful, others tiny tweaks, but full of promise that never quite delivers, fading out as quickly as they rose up.

Learning from failure, yours or theirs.

Is it better to wait for the one big one and ride it right in, or to ride lots of smaller ones so you can jump on and off more quickly? Expertise and experience become really obvious when you have the opportunity to observe at leisure, from the cliff-top.

To maximise your surfing performance (the equivalent of your surfing ROI i.e. 'maximise your return on effort invested') it seems to me that it's about riding as many of the waves you have the skill and energy to catch. Every now and then they can be bigger and more testing than you expected, but more importantly, it's about knowing how to recognise a 'fail' so you can peel off and paddle back out for the next one.

You can tell a lot from those around you and can use their choices to influence your own. Wasting energy and time on waves you don't have the skill to ride, or coasting to the shore on a wave with no break, brings little reward.

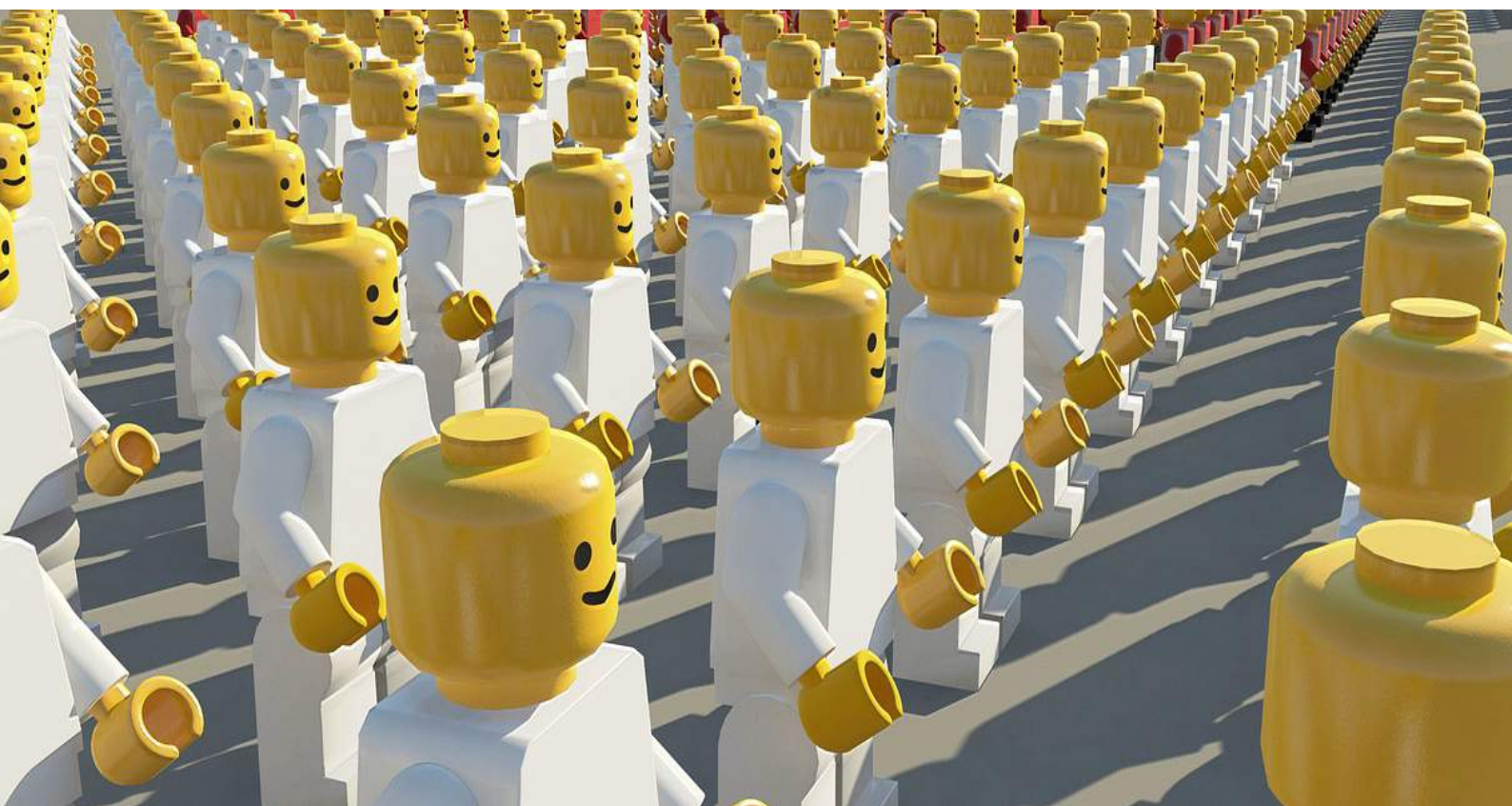
In the same way, marketers need to constantly look for new ways to improve their ROI. New tactics, new techniques, new technologies. It's impossible to catch them all. Making good choices about which ones to paddle for, and which ones to let pass, is paramount.

The wisdom of the crowd.

There are surprising statistics that show how tough it is to make a change to a program or campaign that improves your marketing performance in this blog at Ladder.io (whose technology BH&P uses with every new client BTW),

“Noah Kagan, an early employee at Facebook and founder of AppSumo, only sees a 1 in 8 success rate. An industry study by VWO shows a 1 in 7 success rate. A study by Harvard Business Review pegs the failure rate at 80-90%.”

Having others around you with more experience and knowledge definitely gives you an advantage, helping to spot the right wave, encouraging you to go when maybe you wouldn't, offering advice and guidance, watching and providing feedback to help you develop and control your own skills. There's a lot to be gained from working with others who collectively spend a lot of time in the water.



This is huge. More marketing initiatives fail, than succeed. Period.

All resource constrained organisations, small or large, face significant challenges to improve their marketing.

Relying on your own innate capability and existing knowledge isn't enough, particularly in the current build up to changes in the rules surrounding the use of prospect data. Your expertise in one technique won't always translate into capabilities in others.

Coaching through failure to achieve success.

The collective experience of other practitioners, either individuals or agencies, are an invaluable resource. Used properly they can accelerate the improvement of your marketing programmes, campaigns and tactics.

Their reservoir of knowledge and experience can be used to quickly identify where the most significant improvements can be made, one after the other, to maximise marketing programme performance.

Knowing how different tactics, techniques and technologies work, what to try next, how to execute on the proposed changes, evaluating the results and quickly changing the plan in response are the attributes of a great marketing partner, and inevitably of a surf coach.

Fail fast to succeed sooner.

Maybe this summer has been the one where you donned the wet-suit, paddled out into the waves and started working with a surf-coach on improving your skills. Or maybe not!

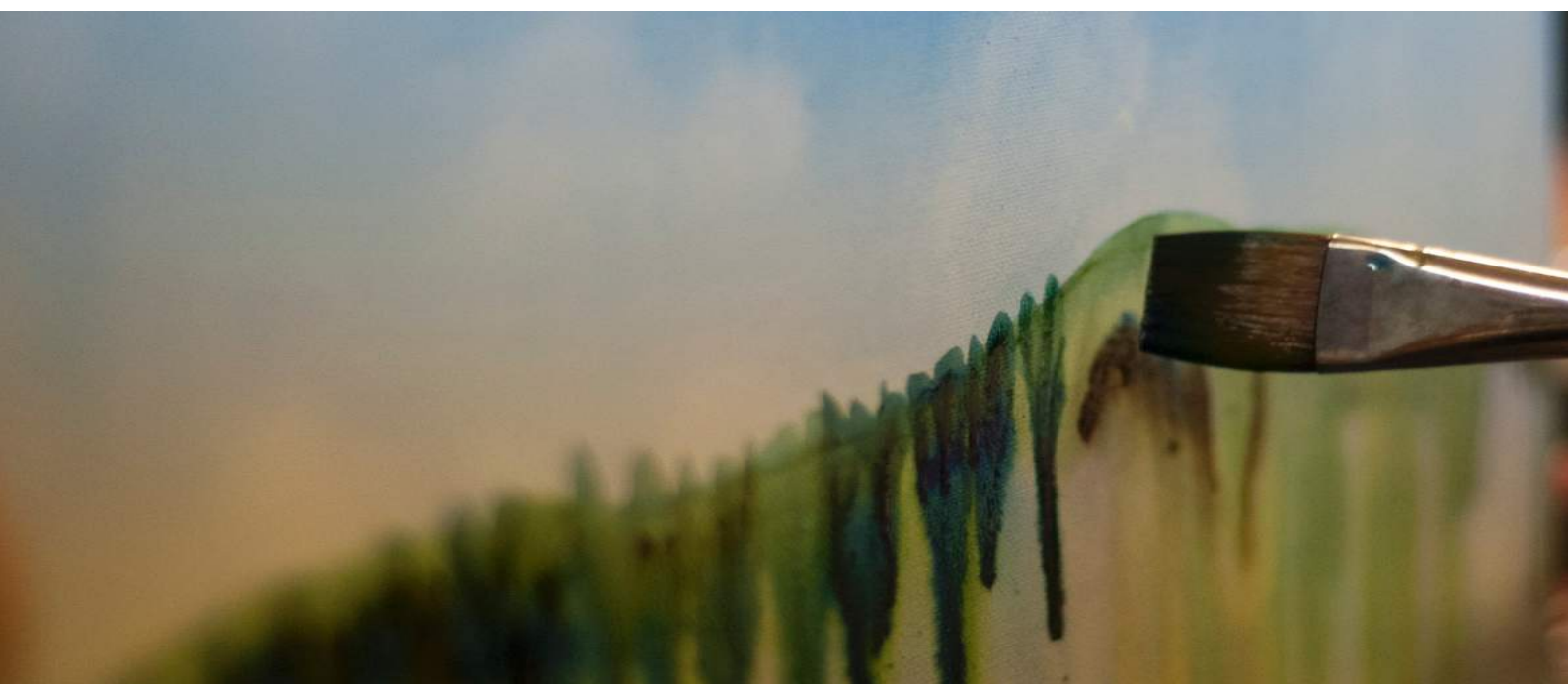
Even if surfing is not your thing, hopefully the analogy rings true. If so, you'll be inspired to think about experimenting more, testing and enhancing your marketing, to put you and your organisation on a path to improving not just marketing ROI, but business performance.

However you decide to go about this, you'll build a better return on your investment of time and money, faster, if you can learn quickly from the successes and failures of others.

Article 3 | The happy accident

One of the best parts of my recent career break has been the opportunity to develop my (limited) skills with watercolour. It's been a long time since I picked up a paintbrush and it isn't proving easy. Satisfying, yes. Easy, no.

With the luxury of time I've been able to explore the vast resources of the web, absorbing advice from much more accomplished artists than me. The advice is varied but there are common themes.



Don't just start, first prepare to start.

The first piece of advice is nothing to do with paint.

The foundation of a great watercolour is a great drawing. Composition, scale, proportion, perspective. Not where a novice like me wants to focus when I have dreams of a great masterpiece.

Second is to experiment. Copy techniques of others, find what works and how, what fails and why. Use their experience to build an understanding of the fickle

nature of watercolour. Learn to layer and blend colours into the hues and tones you need, learn when to paint and (importantly) when to stop.

Watercolour is also about happy accidents. The effects caused by water, pigment and paper reacting to each other in unplanned and unexpected ways. Learn when to intervene and when to hold back, learn when enough is enough.

Finally, it's about volume. You have to be prepared to sketch and sketch and sketch, paint and paint and paint. Learn to move spontaneously and make quick decisions. Practice will make perfect, but there's a lot of failure on the way.

Satisfying, yes. Easy, no.

Can you ever know enough?

Is it possible to practice every conceivable technique with every conceivable variation in hue and tone? Transparent and opaque colours, staining colours, wet-on-wet, wet-on-dry, textures, brush techniques, paper types. The possibilities are endless and knowing enough to master watercolour can take a lifetime.

Who has a lifetime? I'm too impatient, but the web allows me to absorb the experience of others. Collectively we're spending multiple lifetimes practicing and sharing our experiences with each other. Someone, somewhere, has tried it before and posted the outcome online.

Use shared knowledge to reduce your fails.

As a novice, I know the value of knowledge and experience. As a marketer, I know it too. When you read back over the advice above, imagine I was talking about maximising the return on investment of your campaign.

Build a solid foundation, know your market, your audience, your value proposition, your positioning, your message. Know it before you start building campaigns.

The difficult part comes when you have to practice and experiment, learn what works and what doesn't, what has the best outcome, what destroys the work

you've done before. As an aspiring artist, I may struggle to accept it, but the stakes are usually much higher in marketing than in watercolour painting. Failure can be much more costly.

This is where you need a way of accessing the collective knowledge and experience of other marketers who have gone before, and of those who are developing new technologies and techniques. Unfortunately, this knowledge has significant value to those who have it and quantified performance information is very often confidential, or expensive.

Making a breakthrough by accident.

The infinite variations in value proposition, positioning, message, market behaviour, communication channel preferences, cultures and tactics make it impossible to predict every campaign outcome perfectly. Some marketers are fortunate enough to guess correctly. They get their masterpiece, but it can often be a happy accident.

The fastest way to success is to test changes to campaigns quickly and efficiently. Get the first washes of colour down, then layer and blend to produce the best effect. Rather than acting randomly, using collective knowledge and experience to pre-select choices will massively increase your success rate.



The gift of experience.

Rapid performance improvement of campaigns demands the rapid execution of multiple tests. Time is the enemy, resources are scarce and ROI is king. If you could access the quantified past experiences of other marketers, and a ready source of knowledge to replicate their experiences, why wouldn't you?

A database of qualified and quantified techniques to improve the performance of any and all of the tactics you are using would be invaluable. You would pre-select those that have worked for others, focussing time and resource where it has most chance of success.

It would be just the same as me watching videos of watercolour experts, wondering how they make it look so easy, and then deciding to try it myself. I'm absorbing a little bit of their lifetime of experience every time.

Time will tell if I ever produce a masterpiece. I'd settle for a few 'wow!'s.

Where's your next 'wow!' coming from? What chance do you have of a 'wow!' campaign?

Article 4 | Can you fix the odds?

I was able to enjoy watching a lot of sport this summer and even though I'm not a betting man, autumn sporting events like the Invictus Games, the UK Masters Golf, a whole host of Rugby Internationals, and of course, the upcoming Ashes, have started me thinking about the similarities between marketing and gambling- and how alike gamblers and marketers sometimes are.

However much we attempt to predict outcomes, carefully researching, planning, testing and measuring changes we make to our marketing plans, sometimes what actually happens is still unexpected.

Probable or improbable, we're all trying to beat the odds.



Going for the long-shot

Some gamblers are lucky. So are some marketers. They place their bet or launch their campaign and win big. A big stake, long odds and a huge return. It's a gambler's dream. It's a marketer's dream.

Correction. It's an inexperienced gambler or marketers dream.

Basing your success strategy on picking a long-shot is not an approach anyone with a track record of success would recommend. They'll tell you that you have to do your homework and be smart, know when to bet and just as importantly, when not to.

They'll also tell you that in marketing you can make your own luck.

Risk, reward and consequences

When you bet on the winner of a sporting contest you don't just predict the outcome, you weigh up risk and consequences with the potential reward.

Check your own gut reaction to the opportunity presented by a million to one chance.

Imagine betting £1. Then imagine betting £100,000.

They feel completely different. The more you bet, the greater the risk, and the faster your heart rate. But the event you're betting on and the odds of winning are the same. When does it start to feel risky? With a £10 bet? A £100 bet? £1000? More?

Everyone has a different perception of risk, and different circumstances that describe the consequences of losing your stake. What if you could place a stake within your risk threshold at the start and then choose to increase it during the contest as you see it unfold? What if you could test the outcome of choices during the contest before you change your bet? Hit the next shot down the line or try a lob? Shoot for the green or lay up?

Cut your losses or double-down?

Gamblers can limit their exposure by not betting any more when the result isn't going their way, and "double-down" if it is. Fortunately for marketers, this is exactly the situation we enjoy.

The creative campaign development process will always require an investment of both time and money, but gambling on a marketing campaign isn't necessarily an "all or nothing" proposition.

As investments increase, so does the consequence of underperformance. Testing the effects of both tactical and strategic choices during the campaign allows us to choose when to bet, and importantly when to stop.

In recent years, with the advent of new marketing technology such as the Ladder marketing tactic database used by results-focused agencies such as BH&P, A/B testing has become a lot easier.

BH&P clients typically run between 6 and 20 experiments every month, allowing them to ramp up or drop tactics almost in real-time. And whilst entire strategy pivots are less common, they are possible.



Can you pause the game?

Choosing what to test and when to test it, is where knowledge and experience pays off. It's the reason why marketing technology on its own can't help you fix the odds.

The best sports' people know intuitively which choice is right for the moment. They can't stop the game, test a couple of options, and then choose which one to take. They have to know instantly that the right shot is the passing forehand drive down the line, or the lay-up on a long par five in front of the water. It takes experience and practice.

For most marketers, it's just as difficult and impractical to stop the game. It can also make bad business sense to stop a campaign mid-flow. But you can test changes that are intended to improve performance during a campaign. Yes, it's still a gamble. But with the right tools, you can reduce the risks and improve the odds of this gamble quite dramatically.

Play the shot that's already played

Marketers today have the opportunity to use the experience of others who've played the same shot.

You can identify which possible change to a campaign tactic is most likely to improve performance by selecting it from a database of previously executed experiments. It's no guarantee, but it can improve the chances of improvement more than threefold.

This database, documenting past experiences of other marketers executing thousands of tests on their campaigns and tactics, combined with sound creative thinking from an agency partner that really understands this type of testing framework, is like having a personal coach and tipster at your side. It will help you become a better marketer, one who places more winning bets than those who play every shot as if it were the first time it had been played.

Article 5 | If only we were superheroes

Until recently, I was in the kind of senior marketing job where time seemed to be the one thing that was impossible to enjoy. It was always moving so fast and there was never enough of it. Straight from meeting to meeting with barely enough time for proper planning before the urgency of execution, rinse and repeat. If only I'd known a superhero with the ability to turn back time.

Yes, of course we analysed performance, refined and reviewed tactics, but there were (and I suspect still are) lots of immovable objects that made the pursuit of excellence a challenge.

Looking back now, with the gift of time now firmly on my side, I can see a number of ways we wasted one of the most valuable resources we had. Time.

We procrastinated and hesitated.

We repeated mistakes and re-lived successes.



We were quick to execute and slow to stop. We were busy and we were achieving goals, but we weren't excelling. We were human, not superhuman.

We were typical, I'm sure, of many marketing departments. Achieving a lot – but perhaps not always the right things – and with little time for reflection.

If only we were superheroes

I'm reminded of the 1978 Superman movie where Christopher Reeve flies so fast around the earth he reverses the world's spin, turns time backwards and is able to prevent Lois Lane from dying in a car crash. Imagine being able to go back in time, make changes to your campaign and start again. You could repeat the process over and over until you knew exactly which version of the past performed the best, repeat it and then let time continue.

You'd definitely be a marketing superhero if you could, but it's unlikely – however much I want to believe in superheroes (yes, I do still really want to believe it's possible!).

So until Superman actually makes himself known to us, we'll have to make the best use of the real time we have.

Known knowns and unknown unknowns

The problem of getting the best possible results from a campaign requires that we use time effectively and efficiently, speeding up execution and feedback so we can eliminate waste and improve performance. But just doing things right doesn't always mean you're doing the right thing. I'm reminded of this quote from Donald Rumsfeld (former US Secretary of Defense),

“There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know.”

Even the most experienced marketer can only develop and execute campaigns within the bounds of their own experience.

The known knowns.

Even if you know there are technologies and techniques that you have no knowledge of that may improve results, they can be inaccessible to you.

The known unknowns.

Chances are, there are marketing techniques, tactics and technologies of which you have no knowledge that may be equally promising.

The unknown unknowns.

Eliminating procrastination

Three things might really help at this point:

1. a way of identifying what you don't know;
2. a way of prioritising their potential to improve performance; and
3. a way of acquiring the knowledge to implement them.

The challenge is the same, no matter how experienced or capable you or your team are. Your bar may be set low or high, but you are limited to your known knows.

With an ever-increasing pressure to deliver better ROI, no-one can afford to ignore the need to seek campaign performance improvement month on month, year on year.

By ring fencing part of your marketing budget (and resources) over a period of time, there may be a viable solution to this dilemma. Take £10k a month, for example (perhaps £5k for media, and £5k for the time to manage and create the necessary assets). And build an experimental framework. Every month, try running 2, 4, or more experiments. This experimental budget does not even need to touch on your main marketing activity, but will allow you to test like crazy, and find out exactly what combination of sign up forms, offers, calls to action, form fields (etc, etc) will give you the best ROI.

Rinse and repeat on a monthly basis.

All of a sudden, you have the real data needed to eliminate procrastination when managing multiple tactics, campaigns or programmes.

Suddenly it's much easier to decide know what to do next. You know where the greatest improvement potential lies, and how to test for it.

And you always have next month to test something new.



Planning the right things right

Having the confidence to execute is half the battle.

Having access to a rich database of tests relating to almost every marketing tactic imaginable, each quantified with performance improvement potential derived from tests run by other marketing professionals, enables the creation of such a plan.

Everyone's situation, programmes, audiences, technologies and tactic choices are different, but a rich database with thousands of potential performance-improving tests can help anyone and everyone improve.

Top tips to eliminate procrastination

1. Build a new plan. A framework with experimentation baked in.
2. Don't repeat your past, replicate someone else's.
3. Don't just succeed, excel.
4. Don't be limited by your known knowns – explore your unknown unknowns.

THE BH&P SOLUTION

Experimentation is key if marketers want to improve and enhance the performance of their campaigns.

But how do you decide which technique to trial?

At BH&P, we're proud that our retained clients genuinely improve the ROI on their marketing activity month on month, every month.

We test lots, change tactics frequently, and report everything to the client, creating not only ever-improving performance, but a culture of learning.

The Crimestoppers Trust and The British Business Bank both benefit from working in this way. Each month we check the database for new tactics that we can apply and create a testing matrix designed to generate the best campaign performance for our clients.

We do this in four ways:



1. **We start with a really strong idea or piece of content.** With the Business Finance Guide, for example, we have a strong overall proposition, website and hero content, developed by BH&P. We have an annual plan with KPIs set by the bank. And we have a rolling content schedule with bi-monthly themes and tiered messaging for each audience and channel
2. **Our teams have the idea of experimentation literally baked into their way of thinking.** Within every campaign brief we include a set of hypotheses that we will test, and a methodology for not only testing, but for pivoting completely if our hypotheses turn out to be wrong
3. **We subscribe to the world's largest database of marketing strategies and tactics, Ladder.** These tactics have been tried and tested by literally thousands of marketers around the world, allowing us (and our clients) to learn from their successes and failures, based on actual performance data.
4. **We're passionate about reporting.** Each month, we report on the performance of every test, whether it's a new channel (beer mats, for example); a new call to action ("get informed" rather than "download report"); or a change to a poll, landing page, colour or incentive. And then we set the tests for the next month. We test between 5 and 20 things for each client, every month.



Application of the experimentation framework

Using this approach, we have managed to increase social shares, gain higher conversion rates on lead generation forms and refine online ad targeting audiences. Here's how

For sophisticated marketers and mid-sized organisations

When your marketing "machine" is generating leads, and creating engagement, it may feel that introducing experimentation is unnecessary. Armed with a sophisticated segmentation, content and marketing strategy and strong brand, testing the positioning of a call to action, or the colour of a landing page, may be difficult ("Sorry, that's not on brand"). But there's a way to change this. Ring-fence £10,000 per month (£5k for media, and £5k for creative work and to manage the spend) and use this purely for testing. When something improves performance, transfer those learnings into your main programme. And where tests fail to add value, share what you have learned, and test something new.

Of course, you can manage this in-house. But if you'd like some help in setting up and running the experimental framework, BH&P can help.

For our smaller clients, including start-ups and local non-profits

For our smaller clients, having access to all of these experiments and tests gives them a significant competitive advantage. They can be more responsive to changes in their market, and focus their budget where it will have most impact.

If you have up to £5,000 per month to spend on social / PPC / digital media (or access to the Google Ad Grant), and the same amount available to invest in strategy, creative development and reporting, then we guarantee that by

adopting an experimental approach, you will improve the performance of your marketing activity within 3 months.

For start-ups and microbusinesses, we offer coaching and support, to allow you to create your own testing framework, and to start small.

Stop guessing, and make your own luck



To improve traffic, conversion, awareness or retention, get in touch - and start making your own luck.



Get in touch