Customer Centric Marketing

This piece was based on an interview that Hotjar conducted with Bill Macaitis for their "Humans Strike Back" podcast. Bill is a former executive who helped shape winning marketing strategies for Salesforce, Zendesk, and Slack.

You can view the live article [here](#).

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An expert's advice on successful customer-centric marketing

In the world of marketing, there is no shortage of approaches and strategies.   One such method is called customer-centric marketing. We were fortunate enough to interview Bill Macaitis, a marketing leader who served Salesforce, Zendesk, and Slack, about this approach, and learn exactly *how* customer-centric marketing has helped him—and can help you—grow these companies.

What is customer-centric marketing?

Customer-centric marketing is a marketing approach designed around [customer needs](#) and interests. It is about prioritizing customers over any other factor, using a blend of intuition, common sense, and solid data about customer behavior.

Bill Macaitis was in charge of online marketing for Salesforce when he noticed a significant, consistent drop in leads over a relatively short time period.
How much of a drop?

Bill wasn't sure of the exact figure when [I interviewed him for 'The Humans Strike Back' podcast](#), but he guessed it was around 10% or more—significant enough to represent more than statistical noise or random fluctuations, and large enough to keep his team up at night.

It was around 2010 and Salesforce (a customer relationship management platform or [CRM software](#)) was already a global company by then, so that kind of drop in leads would have a significant impact on revenue down the line. "*We had a massive [sales team](#),*" says Bill, "*They [were] depending on a steady flow of leads coming in.*"

Despite the pressure, Bill knew they couldn't make any assumptions about the root cause of the issue. In order to solve the problem, they had to see their company, brand, and services through the eyes of a new prospect who had just entered their sales funnel.
You'll learn exactly how they did this in a minute, but first…

Who is Bill Macaitis?

Over the past decade, Bill played an integral role in the growth of three tech giants—Salesforce (Senior Vice-President of Marketing), Zendesk (Chief Marketing Officer), and Slack (Chief Marketing Officer and Board Advisor).

He's a straight-talking marketing veteran who believes that Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and e-commerce companies succeed when they adopt a customer-centric approach at every stage of their sales cycle. He argues that companies can achieve this by treating their employees right and playing to their strengths, which he discusses in detail during his Ask Me Anything (AMA) talk in the 'The Humans Strike Back' community.

Throughout my interview with Bill and his AMA, two prominent themes arose. The first (succeeding with customer-centric marketing) is the theme of this post, and the second (building a customer-centric marketing department) is the theme of the second piece.

4 tips for infusing customer-centric marketing into your company

#1: See the world from your customer's point of view

Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff is a big believer in seeing the world from your customer's perspective, but as Bill learned through first-hand experience, this is sometimes easier said than done.

After working for the same company for years, marketing professionals can become myopic about their industry, company, and product. They know their business intimately, but a prospect with minimal brand exposure needs to figure out what your company does at a glance.

Otherwise, they're on to the next shiny object.

When Bill's team noticed that drop in leads, they tossed around a number of theories about the root cause, but they knew they couldn't draw conclusions on a whim. "*I think it's important to have the right market intelligence, the right customer listening, the right tools just to understand [what's] happening,*" says Bill.

It wasn't until they used a service called Five-Second Test that they realized the issue had to do with their core messaging. During a five-second test, a panel of test subjects view a webpage for only five seconds before it disappears. Then they're asked to identify their first impressions and what they recall about the company.

Five-second tests can be used to test home page designs, landing pages, logos, brochures and marketing material.

Earlier that year, Salesforce began a new approach to messaging, branding themselves "*the social enterprise.*" The phrase appeared front-and-center on the newly designed homepage,

and it was meant to imply that Salesforce was a platform that connected professionals teams from across departments, much like social media.

The problem?

This was seven or eight years ago, and the phrase "social media" wasn't yet a household term outside of the tech community. **After running a series of five-second tests, Bill and his team learned that newcomers to their website didn't understand the new messaging.** "*At the time, they were thinking `social' was more like `social causes,'*" says Bill.
Five-second test respondents assumed Salesforce sold software exclusively to non-profits, which explained the high bounce-rate and sudden drop in leads. Prospects from for-profit businesses would visit the website, quickly assume it had nothing to do with them, and disappear.

The moral to the story?

As marketers, we can be blinded by our own knowledge and extensive experience with our industry.

To counter our own assumptions, we sometimes need to take a step back and use feedback directly from people of interest (such as five-second tests, surveys, customer interviews, or even in-page feedback widgets) to understand [how our target market experiences our brand](#).

#2: Don't piss your customers off

Seems obvious, right? And yet… we're bombarded these days with sleazy marketing tactics that drive us crazy.

During his AMA, Bill referenced a new tactic that just about anyone with a cell phone has experienced. A robocall spoofs an incoming number that closely matches your own number (off by only a digit or two), hoping you'll be more likely to pick up since it looks familiar. If you *do* pick up, your experience with the brand will most likely be negative—and the company will create an instant detractor out of you.

These tactics, according to Bill, arise from an excessive focus on short-term metrics, such as lead generation.

But wait a minute…

Didn't we just spend 400+ words talking about a drop in leads at Salesforce and the panic that ensued?

Yes, leads matter—it's an important metric, but it's not the *only* metric that should concern you.

A narrow focus on leads (to the exclusion of all else) drives marketing tactics that nobody likes. Those tactics degrade your brand integrity, and they leave you with more detractors than promoters… which doesn't bode well for your long-term success!

So… what long-term metrics should you focus on?

#3: Use the insightful long-term metrics to understand your customers

Bill is an advocate of data-driven marketing. Without the right data, it's difficult to understand your customers at all.
Here are a few of Bill's favorite things to measure when assessing public perception of your brand.

Aided Recall

Aided recall measures how well people recall your brand with a little help. Can they watch the first half of your TV commercial and tell you how it ends? Do they recognize your logo in a list of other logos in your space?

Unaided Recall

This metric goes a step further and asks, "Does your brand come to mind without any prompting?" For example, if you run an e-commerce website and you ask someone about popular places to shop online within your niche, do they name your website?

Sentiment

How does the public feel about your brand? Do they see you in positive, neutral, or negative light based on news stories and their own experiences?
You can glean Voice of the Customer (VOC) data can from surveys that ask specific questions about their feelings toward your brand and analyze the open-ended answers, but you can also get data from things like customer reviews. How does that work? Services such as Amazon Comprehend use Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms to mines qualitative data for keywords that indicate customer satisfaction (or lack thereof).

Net Promoter Score ® (NPS)

Do they like you? Not just enough to buy your product, but to *recommend* you to their colleagues, friends, and loved ones? Net Promoter Score measures how likely a customer is to recommend your brand to someone else.

An example of using NPS for customer-centric marketing

For example, here at Hotjar, we asked our customers, "*How likely are you to recommend Hotjar to a friend or colleague?*" on a scale of 1-10 (where 10 = very likely). To calculate our NPS score, we subtracted the percentage of detractors (those who ranked us 0-6) from the percentage of

promoters (those who ranked us 9 or 10). The neutral respondents (those who ranked us 7-8, in our case) do not factor into the NPS.

The result? Our NPS was 59 (64% - 4.8% = 59.2%), and this figure serves as the benchmark by which we can evaluate progress in the years to come. For a detailed analysis of our adventures with NPS, check out my post from: 1 Year into NPS: The good, the bad, the ugly of getting our users feedback.

Why is determining your NPS so important?

When clients become promoters, that represents a level of commitment to your brand that goes beyond mere customer satisfaction. They've become an advocate of your business, and personal recommendations are a powerful way to attract new clients.

#4: Give your customers an amazing experience

We, marketers, talk a lot about improving conversion rates from step of the funnel to another these days, but what about the bigger picture? Do our customers actually *like* us? Are we giving them a good experience at every stage of the sales funnel, from awareness to return-purchases?

Three ways to improve customer-centric marketing efforts

When we take a step back and broaden the focus, Bill believes some obvious areas for improvement typically arise.

1. Website usability

Is your website easy to use? Is the experience you're providing valuable, relevant, and even safe?

One way to measure your website usability is to use Incoming Feedback by Hotjar to see what people love and hate, and identify issues.

It may seem obvious to you where they go to change their shipping address or their credit card information, but it may not be clear to *them*. If they have to hunt around to figure things out, they're going to be frustrated… even if they *do* convert. Bill says, "*All these little experiences build up to what your brand is. The brand is the sum total of every micro-experience someone has with you.*"
That's why Bill is a fan of Hotjar (if we may toot our own horn for a second). "*I think it's the preeminent tool out there when you're looking at heatmaps, listening, understanding your customers [and] where they're going. The recordings are just invaluable.*"
The bottom line, of course, is that however you do it—you've got to deliver a seamless online experience if you want to turn customers into promoters.

2. Content marketing

When your prospects and clients experience your brand through relevant, engaging content that actually improves their lives in some meaningful way, they'll gain a more positive association with your brand.

According to the [B2B Content Marketing 2018 - Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends – North America](#) report (from the Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Profs), 79% of respondents said that they can demonstrate how content marketing has increased audience engagement, and 65% can show how it has increased their total number of leads.

Podcasts, vlogs, and blogs can all achieve this effect when they focus is on producing quality content (rather than overt advertising trying to pass for content marketing).

When Bill was at Slack, they made their own [podcast](#), which focused on real human stories exploring how work transformed people's lives. "*I think [our cost] was something like 6 or 7 cents per listen, and I think we had 6 or 7 million listeners,*" he says. "*That's 7 million people [who] have experienced your brand for 20 or 30 minutes, for 6 or 7 cents [each].*" Bill estimates that today, Slack's podcast has more than 10 million listeners.

"Work in Progress" is Slack's podcast about the meaning and identity we find in work.

What's more—a podcast can be a rich source of material for blog posts. Not to get too "meta," but that's exactly what we did with this blog post by mining *'The Humans Strike Back'* for blog topics.

Now, you may be asking yourself, "*Can content marketing work for companies who sell tangible products?*" Australian digital marketing agency Gorilla360 features a blog post that highlights some of the [best content marketing in the e-commerce space](#). Among their favorites is LifX, a company that sells lightbulbs that interface with smart-home systems—and yes, they produce an engaging blog.

How do they do it with a less-than-fascinating product? The LifX blog covers all kinds of subjects that homeowners (their target market) would find interesting, including "how to" pieces that cover everything from [mood lighting](#) to [extending the night vision of your security camera](#).

And that's really the secret to exceptional content marketing—the brand is always in the background, while the focus is on engaging topics that relate to the company's mission.

3. Customer Support

Too many companies cut corners on customer support with the goal of spending as little as possible—and they get what they pay for! This is an integral part of their brand experience, and mediocre support service will leave an awful taste in a customer's mouth. Fortunately, there are a few key things you can do to improve that experience.

Bill is a believer in making customer support available to everyone across the globe, so if you have customers in Pakistan, don't limit your support hours to 9-to-5 Pacific Standard time. "*We want to support people wherever they are,*" he says, "*So organizing around time zones is very important.*"

Bill goes on to explain that, as Slack grew, their customer support team began to include more specialists who would handle specific support tasks, such as integration or billing. "*I think that's the natural evolution,*" he says.

Finally, it's important to make support available through a variety of channels—phone, chat, email, social media, etc.

In the end, a customer-centric approach to marketing weaves intuition and common sense with solid data about customer behavior.

Consider the brand experiences that have turned you into an advocate for a particular company, and do your best to emulate those techniques. Resist quick and easy marketing tricks (even if they generate easy leads or conversion), test your assumptions using helpful, long-term metrics, and work to provide real value every time a prospect or customer interacts with your brand.

Key Takeaways

- Assume nothing: collect data to understand your customers
- Use the long-term metrics to figure out how prospects and customers experience your brand
- Engage in marketing practices that offer real value
- Aim to delight at every point in your sales funnel
- Set the bar higher! Your mission is to create promoters—not just paying customers.