MARKETING FLEXOLOGY

How to Outsmart Change and Future-proof Your Career

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Marketing Flexology: *How to Outsmart Change and Future-proof Your Career*

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YOUR CTA

"There lives in each of us a hero awaiting the call to action."
—H. Jackson Brown Jr.

We marketers know a thing or two about CTAs. We use them in just about every campaign we create.

CTAs—calls to action—are a prompt (in the form of a phrase or button) that induces a reader, listener, or viewer to perform a specific act. The best CTAs offer the target audience a valuable benefit in exchange for taking that next step, provide clear direction, and create a sense of urgency. Here are some popular examples you've probably heard before:

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Get your advance copy before it goes public!
Start my free no-obligation trial!
Sign up and reserve your spot today!
Don't delay, get your free evaluation now!

CTAs are littered across our marketing materials and for good reason: They successfully get people to act *now*.

While most marketing CTAs are *engineered* to create a desired change, they occur naturally and frequently in the business world, which we'll look at next.

Organizational Change

In business, a change in model, a change in market, a change in management, or a change in metrics often trigger CTAs. I refer to these as the 4Ms—the 4 motivations for organizational change. Let's unpack each one in greater detail.

The First Motivation: Change in Model

Sometimes, changing your business model is the only way for a company to survive. It could be as part of a company's natural evolution from startup to IPO to maturity. It could be as an outcome of an acquisition, merger, or divestiture. Or it could be a conscious decision to shift away from your flagship products as the following four companies did.

IBM is one of the rare companies to have thrived over a century after it was founded by continually evolving its core product offerings. The company first sold commercial scales and punch card tabulators, and, later, massive mainframe computers and calculators. Today, IBM is focused on software, consulting, and IT services.[1]

DuPont shares a similar story. In 1802, Lammot du Pont developed a less expensive way to manufacture black gunpowder, which also produced a stronger blast. Today, DuPont sells polymer adhesives, insecticides, fire extinguishers, and weatherization systems, a far cry from its original model.

NCR also successfully reinvented its core offering. Founded in 1884 as the National Cash Register Company and maker of the first mechanical cash registers, the company changed its name to NCR Corporation in 1974 to symbolize its more diverse product lines, including bar code scanners and computers. Today, NCR calls itself a leader in omni-channel solutions.[2]

Formerly known as Flextronics, the company had evolved from a contract manufacturer to an electronics manufacturing company to an end-to-end supply-chain solutions company. But the company's reputation as one of the world's largest electronics manufacturers still remained. Enter Michael Mendenhall, the company's first chief marketing and chief communications officer. In 2015, Mendenhall led not only a name change from Flextronics to Flex, but also a strategic repositioning for the company. Six months following the rebrand, the company's share value had increased 44 percent, much of which could be attributed to the company's new narrative and communications.[3]

In the past, many brands lived to be 100 years old. Today, the average life span of companies in the S&P 500 is fifteen years.[4] Just as companies can increase their odds of survival by evolving their business models, marketers, too, must continually evolve their model and practice. That is the basis of the first motivation for organizational change.

The Second Motivation: Change in Market

Transformations are often sparked by a fluctuation in market conditions. A competitive advance, entry of a new market player, market consolidation, and a technology disruption can each necessitate an organizational change. But perhaps the biggest market driver is appealing to a new audience or generation of customers.

In 2006, Old Spice was a seventy-year-old brand, predominately associated with old men and losing ground.[5] But it became a cultural phenomenon and overnight success after a now-legendary advertising, social media, and video campaign. Sales were up 125 percent year over year by the end of July 2010, and Old Spice had become the #1 selling body wash brand for men in the United States.

KFC has had similar success appealing to a new generation of consumers while also rekindling nostalgia in an older generation.

The company has embarked on a multiyear revitalization strategy, which includes not only a new Colonel and less messy menu items for a generation that wants to eat something on the go, but also a return to its Southern hospitality roots. Part of the plan is to appeal to older adults who no longer frequent the chain but have fond memories of KFC before it became associated with fast food.

These are just a few examples of the success stories. Sadly, other brands have not been as successful in appealing to new markets or new generations of consumers.[6]

The Snapple brand of tea and juice drinks has gone through many changes since the company originated in Long Island, New York, in 1972. Snapple found its success using quirky, irreverent, and fun advertising, and a niche distribution strategy, typically selling one bottle at a time in convenience stores. When Quaker Oats acquired the brand in 1994, it quickly set out to bring Snapple to every grocery store and chain restaurant possible. The company's efforts failed miserably. Quaker completely missed the Snapple audience and appeal, and after just twenty-seven months sold it at the fire-sale price of $300 million—$1.4 billion less than it paid for the company.

Another sad example is Sears. Once the stalwart department store for working-class American families, the more than 130-year-old brand is now perceived as out of step and out of style. Toward the beginning of 2000, Sears found itself struggling to remain profitable and relevant amidst the successes of big-box stores like Target and Walmart. A hedge-fund investor whose fund controlled Kmart decided to merge the two companies, and in 2005 they became Sears Holdings. It seemed to be a promising merger, but it hasn't stopped the downward spiral of the two brands. According to the company's website, Sears and Kmart continue to close unprofitable stores and hold liquidation sales, as the company "transforms our business model so that our physical store footprint and our digital capabilities match the needs and preferences of our members."

Remember, it's not only about successfully marketing to millennials, but also about anticipating and being prepared for what's next in an ever-changing marketplace.

The Third Motivation: Change in Management

A management change can also prompt a CTA, especially if the new chief is brought in from the outside. It's often a signal that the company has lost its way, needs to grow in a new direction, or requires a reset. Turnover at the top almost always sparks upheaval. But it could also lead to opportunity. Here are a few examples that highlight this point:

The arrival in July 2006 of new CEO Angela Ahrendts turned Burberry from an aging British icon into a global luxury brand. When over sixty managers flew in from around the world into classic damp British weather for a strategy session, not one was wearing a Burberry trench coat. "If our top people weren't buying our products, despite the great discount they could get, how could we expect customers to pay full price for them?" asked Ahrendts, who now runs Apple's retail division.[7] It was a sign of the challenges the company faced, including a meager two percent annual growth rate. Through refocus and a tightened rein on out-of-control licensing, by the end of fiscal year 2012, Burberry's revenues and operating income had doubled over the previous five years.

When Jorgen Vig Knudstorp came in as Lego CEO in 2004, the Danish toymaker was on the brink of bankruptcy. Knudstorp, a former McKinsey consultant, launched a painful turnaround plan. He laid off nearly half of the firm's employees as he dramatically consolidated and streamlined operations and components. Knudstorp also began personally engaging with customers in their homes and at fan events to bring creativity and simplicity back to the company.[8] By 2013, Lego was the world's most profitable toymaker.

Both of these examples highlight how hard it can be for an existing team to take action when their company has clearly drifted off course. Sometimes it takes a new leader, with a fresh set of eyes and a change mandate, to right the course.

Most always, a change in management leads to a re-examination and a change for the marketing organization. If you've built an agile marketing team, being able to pivot at a moment's notice might be your opportunity to shine.

The Fourth Motivation: Change in Metrics

The fourth trigger for marketing reinventions is misaligned metrics resulting from a new direction. As a marketing leader, you may be focused on brand awareness, marketing effectiveness, and customer experience, and have built your team and allocated budgets accordingly. Based on shifting priorities, senior management may now expect marketing to drive incremental revenue, share of wallet, and customer advocacy. This usually requires a reset of marketing programs and a redistribution of people and budgets.

Put yourself in the heels of the CMO in each of the following examples, and then consider how well you and your team would be able to respond.

In 2012, Procter & Gamble chairman and CEO Bob McDonald told analysts in an earnings call that the company was looking to lower promotion costs, which had historically run 9 to 11 percent of revenue. With earnings softening and under fire for its bloated promotion budget, the company was turning to social media to improve its return on investment. In 2015, P&G announced a multiyear agency consolidation initiative expected to save $500 million annually in agency fees and production costs, incremental to what the company had already accomplished through belt-tightening efforts of recent years. The agency consolidation continues today.[9]

McGraw-Hill Education (MHE) is one of the big three educational publishers. In 2014, David Levin was brought in as president and CEO to transition the company from a traditional textbook publisher to a provider of digital content and technology-enabled learning solutions. Traditional textbook publishing is not known for spending heavily on marketing, and MHE's long-tenured execs were reluctant to invest in rebranding. Tough tradeoffs were needed. Previously, a large portion of the promotional budget was earmarked to provide complimentary copies of its printed books. By converting to e-sampling of books, the marketing team was able to carve out needed monies for new content, talent, processes, and technology to help scale e-learning at a global level.[10]

Founded in 1918 as United Newspapers, UBM today is a multinational media company primarily focused on business-to-business (B2B) events. Over the years, the company has repositioned its focus to live events and online communities and away from its legacy printed magazines. Through more than 100 acquisitions and more than a dozen divestitures, UBM has reoriented the company from a broad media conglomerate focused in the UK and the US, into an events and communications business with a significant proportion of its business in emerging markets.

In each of these scenarios, change created an urgent call to action and, likely, a lot of turmoil across the marketing ranks. Change required new marketing skills and processes for UBM and McGraw-Hill Education as they digitally enabled their business models. Change led to fewer agencies and programs as P&G consolidated its agency roster and moved programs and budgets to social media. Only the most flexible and adaptive marketing organizations could survive these transformations and emerge unscathed.

In Chapter 8, we'll take a closer look at the marketing dials that form the foundation of *Marketing Flexology*. These include:

1. People
2. Programs
3. Budgets
4. Agencies

These are the only four dials to which marketing leaders can turn to achieve business and marketing objectives. Our ability to structure and manage these dials often determines how smoothly and successfully we can adjust to organizational change.

The unspoken truth is that there will always be a change in model, market, management, or metrics. It's the new reality in today's hypercompetitive fast-moving world. We had better get used to it and prepare ourselves to stay one step ahead of the transformation curve. Don't waste a good crisis by being unprepared.

Personal Change

Each of the motivations referenced in this chapter have at least one thing in common: They all involve a response to change. For many people, change is an unwelcome source of stress, anxiety, and fear. That's particularly true when change is thrust on us and we're not in control. But not all change is bad or unwanted, as Tim Kastelle, a student and teacher of innovation, reminds us.[11] Kastelle says, "It turns out that people don't hate change at all. In many cases we actively seek out change. We move to a new city or country, we get married, we have children, we take a new job. These aren't just changes—these are massive changes. And we often seek them out. People don't resist change. At least, they don't when they expect the change to make their lives better."

That's really the key, isn't it? If we are in control of the change and believe it will make our lives better, we're in. If not, we resist.

Create Your Own CTA

How, then, do we engineer change within our teams and our own careers, rather than merely reacting and responding to change? Here's where our skill in developing customer CTAs comes in handy. Earlier, I stated that strong CTAs have three things in common. They:

(1) Offer a valuable benefit

(2) Give clear direction

(3) Convey a sense of urgency

Let's apply these same three elements to create our own personal CTA.

Offer a Valuable Benefit

From my experience, the communicated goals of most change initiatives are either overly lofty, uninspiring, or nebulous. While companies may aim to restore #1 market leadership (lofty), reverse a downward sales trend (uninspiring), or increase the speed of innovation (nebulous), at the employee level they often fail to translate into tangible benefits.

As a result, employees frequently wonder *What do you want me to do with this?*, or *What should I be doing differently?*, or worse, *Why is this my problem?*

Successful CTAs answer the question *What's in it for me?* They inspire, motivate, encourage, and compel employees to own the problem, achieve the goal, and act in a way that benefits the company, and them, personally.

Successful CTAs provide a benefit in exchange for taking the requested action. If you take this action, we can avoid laying off employees. If you take this action, we all will receive a year-end bonus. If you take this action, we can fund the annual holiday party. Make it personal, make it valuable, and make it tangible.

Give Clear Direction

The second element of a successful CTA is providing clear direction. Most companies have dozens of change initiatives and business improvements that need attention—and usually all at the same time. We learned from customer CTAs that limiting the number of options actually increases the likelihood of success. Be clear about what you need your team, or yourself, to do and in what order of priority.

Successful CTAs use verbs to persuade. They aren't the *sign-up, register, subscribe,* or *call* verbs used in customer CTAs. Rather, they use specific actionable statements such as *stop doing X,* and *start doing Y&Z.*

Limiting the number of options and using direct, simple, and actionable language helps us give clear direction in our CTAs.

Convey a Sense of Urgency

The third common element of a CTA is creating a sense of urgency or scarcity. Deadlines and time limits make people act quickly rather than think too much, wait too long, or simply not respond. To create a sense of urgency, use urgent language in your CTA such as *now*, *immediately*, *today*, *hurry*, and *fast.*

Scarcity also works to convey a sense of urgency. When people know there are a limited number of days, seats, free tickets, job openings, or other enticing opportunities, they are propelled to action. Another powerful motivational tool is the fear of missing out (or FOMO). It's that anxious feeling of envy and insecurity that something more exciting is happening elsewhere and you're not included. (In fact, "FOMO" was officially added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2013.)

In the marketing world, a campaign, advertisement, or promotion without a call to action is considered incomplete and ineffective. The same holds true for any change initiative. To be effective, all change needs to provide your team with a valuable benefit in exchange for taking that next step, giving clear direction, and conveying a sense of urgency.

Will You Take the Next Step?

#IfIOnlyKnew is a trending hashtag on Twitter. It talks to interview techniques, dealing with your boss and coworkers, leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and a host of other career topics. There is no shortage of good advice or good intentions. However, there is a lack of action. I'd like to see a subsequent trending hashtag: #WhatWillYouDoNowThatYouKnow. Taking that next step is the hardest.

Seth Godin captured the sentiment well: "The easiest thing to do is react. The second easiest thing is to respond. But the hardest thing is to initiate. Initiating is difficult but that's what leaders do." Maybe we're hoping for better times, better luck, and better days ahead. Maybe we're just too busy to initiate a needed change. Maybe we're ignoring the warning signs of a subpar organization because we have too much invested in its success. Or, just maybe, we're waiting for that call to action. If so, here are a few of my favorites:

Transform or be transformed; the choice is yours.
Create your own "call to action."
There is no opportunity in comfort.
Change the rules before someone else does.
Don't waste a good crisis by being unprepared.

Summary

We've all heard why people are resistant to change: fear of failure, uncertainty, risk, loss of power or control, stepping outside one's comfort zone, and even inertia. Change requires effort—added time, skills, and learning—and that's why people often chose to stay right where they are. They subscribe to the *change only when you have to* mantra.

Whether we love change or hate it, we have no choice but to embrace it. To be sure, we will be faced with evermore-frequent organizational change in the years ahead, accompanied by an abundance of marketing course corrections. Perfecting our response to change, as well as initiating our own personal CTAs, will determine our career success or failure.

Chapter 2 Key Takeaways:

- Four motivations spur organizations to act: a change in model, market, management, or metrics (the 4Ms).
- Every organizational change creates a corresponding call to action (CTA).
- Just like companies, marketers must continually evolve their model and practice or face the consequences.
- Building a dynamic marketing organization that can pivot with business change can turn upheaval into opportunity.
- Strong customer CTAs have three things in common: They offer a valuable benefit, give clear direction, and convey a sense of urgency. Successful marketers apply these same three elements to create their *own* CTA.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a former VP of marketing and VP of sustainability for Fortune global companies, **Engelina Jaspers** knows that delivering tangible business results is crucial—not only to the success of your organization, but to the success and longevity of your career too.

Over the past thirty years, she has worked for some of the finest consumer and technology brands. She's been privileged to partner with smart business leaders in building high-performing teams and turbocharging their marketing investments and sustainability credentials.

Along the way, Engelina led a number of complex business transformations requiring diplomacy, diligence, and change leadership. These experiences led her to develop the *Marketing Flexology* management framework—a mindset and a toolset for outsmarting change and future-proofing your career, your team, and your marketing platform.

As VP of corporate marketing and global citizenship for Flex, Engelina led a pivotal transformation of the Flex strategy, corporate identity, and brand internally across 100 global sites and 200,000 employees and externally through storytelling tools, high-profile events, and visual identity assets. She and her team also crafted a new global citizenship strategy, direction, set of key initiatives, and external website that aligned their company's strategy with the UN's Sustainable Development goals.

As VP of marketing strategy and effectiveness for HP, Engelina led a global PMO and ten work streams that aligned her company under a focused global strategy and set of marketing priorities . . . and delivered $172M in savings within six months.

When Greenpeace appeared on the rooftop, she was tapped to drive a turnaround for her company's sustainability efforts and named VP of environmental sustainability for HP. Two years later, HP was ranked #1 greenest consumer electronics company by Greenpeace, #5 best global green brand by Interbrand, and #2 on *Newsweek's* Global 100 Greenest Companies ratings.

Engelina now shares what she's learned through customized workshops, presentations, and collaborations, where she provides real-world insights, practical tools, and actionable steps to help you "up your game," grow your mindshare and market share, and stay ahead of your company's ever-changing business dynamics. Find out more at www.marketingflexology.com and connect with her on Twitter @Ready2Flex.