

# Accelerate Your Innovation

**M**ost CEOs are challenging their marketing leaders to deliver measurable performance in the marketplace at an accelerated pace, both in terms of demand-generation and traditional brand building.

Most CMOs understand that innovation is the ultimate driver of the kind of growth the CEO is demanding. The problem is that innovation traditionally takes time—often longer to show results than the two-year tenure of today's average CMO.

The solution is to move quickly to build innovation into your nearer term (6-12 months) efforts and resources while also building disruptive innovation over the medium term (12-24 months).

This will put innovation on a faster, accelerated path, and do so within your current direction and resources. However, it does require a different approach and scope of innovation, as well as a challenge to your team and external resources.

## ACCELERATOR FOCUS

The first step toward accelerated innovation is to change your innovation focus. For many marketers, innovation traditionally is about product improvement or a change in packaging. Innovation can be those things, but ultimately innovation needs to be *everywhere* a brand touches the consumer.

Innovation has to be embraced by almost everyone in the marketing department as well as at the brand's agencies. It needs to emanate from the brand experience... from where it is purchased... out into where consumer lifestyles and passions take them... across their peer group or family... and into the culture around them.

Accelerating innovation begins with a focus on an expanded set of pressure points that deliver your brand proposition to your consumers in the most complete way.

It requires reaching beyond the obvious ideas and pushing for the kind of "surprise and delight" that touches their emotions and passions, changes

behavior and creates advocacy among your target audiences. It extends across almost every area that today's marketers lead:

**Challenger Platform.** Marketplace and consumer needs change constantly—so how about your positioning and strategic platform? Even a number-one brand needs to challenge the status quo every day.

## Stronger growth demands faster innovation.

**Claims.** What new forms of brand claims can be created or established—or aimed at sub-target groups—to drive greater reconsideration? Don't forget syndicated awards, J.D. Power-type ratings, etc.

**Design.** Procter & Gamble is leveraging passion-based design intended to generate an experiential response across every aspect of all its brands. Where can design innovation give you the edge? Likely everywhere!

**Content.** Your brand needs to tell its story in different ways to best engage your consumer. Think about supplementing your ad agency work with a part-time "indie" film team or a couple of "Mac-Jocks" who can turn around viral content in 48 hours.

**Assets.** When was the last time you reviewed all your brand assets and considered how they might fit into your innovation strategy? Do you have a set of 3-D icons for your brand—a dynamic logo animation or an audio branding signature? How about your passion-point assets?

**Experiential.** Is there a way to touch your target consumer one-on-one to promote brand switching? Can you create an online experiential contact (e.g., an online test-drive)?

**Retail.** Bring innovative solutions to your retail

customers while also engaging your consumers when they are shopping. Transform the point-of-transaction into a point-of-experience.

**Publicity.** Public relations is among the most underutilized marketing options. For example, Volkswagen previewed its very disruptive “Safe Happens” crash TV spot on *The Today Show*. It reached millions of people at nominal cost.

#### ACCELERATOR DRIVERS

Accelerating innovation requires an understanding of—and coupling with—your growth drivers. For example, in the automotive category, the top two directional drivers (beyond styling and price) are test drives and word-of-mouth. In food and beverages, it can be new flavors, sampling, displays and retail innovation.

In your category, when you bring forward a pipeline of innovation accelerators, you need to engage them through your most important drivers. These usually start with product and brand experience and word-of-mouth, and then they echo out.

Too often, budgets are not allocated against the growth drivers and innovation capable of impacting them. For example, if the influence of television advertising is only at 10 percent (as it is in the automotive category), then why does it so often account for as much as 90 percent of the spending?

#### ACCELERATOR EPISODES

An innovation accelerator needs to drive the core idea—the brand’s current and fully differentiated proposition. It needs to be intriguing, surprising, delighting and fully engaging the consumer. In essence, you need to think like *American Idol*, and create periodic episodes that reach out to touch and involve millions of people, again and again, in a very compelling way.

This requires a passion-based marketing idea at the top, and then a series of six-to-eight week episodes underneath that contain an accelerator or some form of marketing news-value at the center. That way, when you are on, you are on with a compelling idea with all your marketing components firing.

You create episodes with innovation accelerators inside them that unfold as a story over time—engaging the consumer, driving your brand and business with each new episode.

One of our long-time clients, SAB Miller, is a great example of how a wide range of marketing innovation can deliver aggressive business results. Working with Miller’s senior team, its marketing group and its agencies, we adopted an episodic marketing approach and applied it to Miller Lite over the past five years.

For example, Miller Lite’s challenger strategy was strengthened with more news value versus Bud Light, such as *50% Less Carbs*. An innovative “fridge pack” created a new benefit at home, while on-premise Miller Lite “referee bottles” rolled out as the playoffs and related ads were breaking. High-impact, disruptive episodes included *Miller Lite For President* during the primaries. In collaboration with *Playboy*, a “spin the bottle” game involved consumers in a new way. A series of 15-second TV spots engaged sports fans with customized team messages during the playoffs—done rapidly at a fraction of regular television production costs. These are just a few examples.

The result has been renewed energy, an engaged consumer across ongoing episodes—all accelerating Miller Lite’s business and double-digit volume growth over several years, turning a 20-year decline into continued momentum over time.

Now it is your turn. Expand your scope of marketing innovation focus; extend out through your growth drivers; engage passion-based consumer input and ideas; and create go-to-market episodes with innovation and news-value inside.

You will be on an accelerated path to innovation that will surprise and delight the consumer—and deliver performance to your CEO. ■



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