ROLAND SMART

THE AGILE MARKETER

TURNING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

WILEY

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Preface

The goal of this book is to share some of what I've learned from my own journey as a marketer. My motivation stems from the fact that some of my greatest insights have come from books that I've read while learning my trade in the trenches. Books like *Competitive Advantage*, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, *Crossing the Chasm*, *Predictably Irrational*, *The Lean Startup*, and *Digital Body Language*—to name a few—made me stop and reevaluate how to approach my work. Sometimes they even took me in a completely new direction that proved rewarding. I've applied the insights from these readings over the years in ventures that succeeded and ventures that failed. Throughout my journey, I've been exposed to just about every aspect of marketing. I've also been fortunate to work at companies where I could balance my interest in marketing and product design with my broader interest in entrepreneurialism and business. This explains why I've grown to be a product-oriented marketer who appreciates and embraces contemporary innovation practices.

My interest in marketing technology started in earnest when I joined a consumer packaged goods company as its first employee. Adina was founded and managed by a successful entrepreneur, Greg Steltenpohl, whose previous company, Odwalla, was acquired by The Coca-Cola Company. For three years, I worked with him running the marketing group. We launched three products into national distribution as social marketing became a thing.

After moving to the San Francisco Bay Area to join Adina full time, I quickly became immersed in the marketing technology community. I joined a remarkable user experience (UX) design firm named Adaptive Path (which has since been acquired by Capital One). Adaptive Path was working on some of the most cutting-edge social technologies on behalf of such clients as Flickr, MySpace, and Nokia. Though Adaptive Path specialized in UX design, I probably learned more about marketing

there than at any other place I've worked. That's because the company was laser-focused on improving the process by which companies develop products and services with customer experience in mind. Though I did not know this at the time, these same approaches would ultimately transform my view of marketing.

Later I joined Sprout, the first of two marketing technology start-ups where I would be responsible for leading the marketing group. Sprout was acquired by InMobi, at the time the largest independent mobile advertising network. The second company, Involver, was acquired by Oracle, where I am currently the VP of Social and Community Marketing.

Much of my work today centers on the Oracle Technology Network, but I am also part of a cohort of marketers who are focused on modernizing Oracle's own marketing platform with many of the scores of technologies we have acquired, including Eloqua, Responsys, BlueKai, Compendium, Vitrue, and Involver.

It's in this capacity that I've been exposed to the enormity of the challenge that marketers face today. The marketing technology industry is going through a tremendous cycle of innovation. New technologies have yielded unprecedented business value based on deeper insights into customer behavior, but the speed and volume of innovation has also spawned new problems: data fragmentation, platform/product overlap and integration overhead, as well as challenges to management structures and traditional organizational norms.

My hope is that this book will help you overcome some of these challenges in your efforts to modernize your marketing practices and the platforms that support them. Part 1 explains why and how the adaptive development approaches used by development organizations are driving change in the marketer's world. Part 2 examines these approaches in detail and how they work in a marketing context. In Part 3, we explore how adaptive approaches can be integrated with traditional marketing practices, how they change relationships across the C-suite, and how they ultimately lead to better internal alignment. Finally, Part 4 focuses on what modern marketing looks like in practice, how it changes the relationship between the company and its community of customers, and how it uniquely positions marketers as the steward of customer experience.

In short, *The Agile Marketer* presents ideas to help marketers create a new culture to meet the imperatives of modern marketing. Let me emphasize up

front that this book is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to implementation. Such a book would be nearly impossible to write, given how company-specific the cultural transformation that implementation requires must be. But herein you will find numerous examples of the kinds of strategies and tactics that you'd expect to implement as part of a transformation, regardless of your industry, the nature of your organization, or the maturity of your current marketing practice. I hope these ideas help make your journey productive and successful.

Roland Smart
September 2015

Acknowledgments

Many marketers provided feedback on this book during its development. For the last year it has been evolving as a shared document with more than 25 collaborators logging in to comment, suggest changes, and make edits. In this way, it's fair to say the book has been developed using an Agile process.

Oracle deserves recognition for its support of this project and for making internal teams and customers available to participate. Beyond this access, my colleagues at Oracle have inspired me—and challenged me—to expand my thinking about how to apply an approach that was pioneered at smaller companies inside the enterprise. Their willingness to grapple with these ideas, provide feedback, and share insights has demonstrably improved this book.

I also had the great fortune of working with a talented editor, Jan Koch, whose efforts went well beyond editing.

Finally, a heartfelt thanks to my wife, Alicia Smart, for her support and encouragement throughout this project.

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Why Marketing Needs to Adapt

Why do marketers need a new approach?

With the rise of social media, marketers entered an era of heightened exposure in which any kind of product or brand failure has the potential to echo virally and at lightning speed through the marketplace. This vulnerability has intensified the pressure on companies to treat customers better and to share information with them in a more transparent manner. And the information sharing has evolved to include the active solicitation of feedback to incorporate at increasingly earlier stages of the product cycle. Many refer to this period as the "age of the empowered customer." In this book I'll explain how it's also poised to be an "age of the marketer."

This heightened exposure has certainly benefited the customer, but it has also benefited those companies that have organized themselves to harness customer feedback to quickly improve their products and services. Those companies that can meet and exceed customer expectations (that is, create a great customer experience) have a competitive advantage. Because marketers play a critical role as a conduit between the customer and the company, they are positioned to have a greater role in the business than ever before. In fact, if they get it right, they have an opportunity to serve as the steward of the overall customer experience.

Many marketers are starting to recognize this possibility. But few would claim to be close to achieving this stewardship role. The truth is, there are far more companies that don't get it right. If anything, they are undermining

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the customer experience. But let's consider for a moment what kinds of customer experiences trigger criticism and harsh responses. No doubt some of these examples will ring a bell for you:

- The company whose software you use to organize your photos does a major relaunch of its site with no warning, and suddenly you can't find all of your photos. You visit their community to find that many users are having the same issue, but no one seems to have a definitive answer on how the new system works.
- You buy a product from the manufacturer, only to have one of its retailers offer you the same product at a discount a week later. You e-mail customer support; they are unaware of the promotion and unwilling to offer you a refund.
- You reach out for customer support on Twitter, go through the process of mutual "following" so that you can direct-message and then explain the issue, only to get redirected to another channel where you have to start all over again.
- You research a product online and find some great reviews, but you've also spotted some dismal ones, and the company has not responded to the concerns. You reach out on social media to hear from the company, but they don't respond.
- You visit an online clothing retailer and browse its entire sweater catalog. The company follows up with a series of e-mails containing offers, but none are for sweaters. You then pass by one of the company's retail stores on your way to work and discover that there was a storewide sale over the weekend.
- You call one of your phone service provider's retail locations to ask if it does handset exchanges in-store. The representative says "yes" and tells you to come over, but when you arrive you discover there's an hour wait for service. The clerk asks for your phone number but then tells you that you have to stay in the store in order to keep your appointment. When your turn finally comes up, the clerk informs you that in-store exchanges are subject to a restocking fee that does not apply to online exchanges.

Every one of these examples is the result of a failure that is due—at least in part—to marketing platforms and practices that have not kept pace with innovation and customer expectations. They represent a disconnect

between marketing and the group responsible for developing the product or service. None of these, moreover, is a small failure, because even a single poor customer experience can do long-lasting harm to the company's reputation (especially if you haven't delivered a particularly great experience in the same period). What's more, within every one of these examples there are many opportunities for the company to deliver a consistent and great experience that could differentiate it and establish loyalty.

These are hardly isolated examples. Many companies suffer from these same flaws. Comcast is frequently held up as a poster child for customer complaints—complaints over customer service, billing practices, and the customer experience on its websites. In fact, so long is the list of complaints that there's even a Twitter hashtag—#comcastoutrage—where the disgruntled can vent. At the heart of the complaints is frustration over Comcast's approach to its core service: The company forces customers to buy services in bundles that include many items that they simply don't want. Granted this can be an effective way to get customers to try new content, but Comcast has taken it to such an extreme that it actually infuriates customers.

The fact is that Comcast's approach has for years been out of sync with the market's direction. And that is why services like HBO diversified and joined forces with younger Comcast competitors that are allowing customers to buy just what they want, when they want it.

An empowered marketing organization that was aligned with the rest of the company would have early on recognized this as a problem with the marketing mix (in this case, the mix of products and prices). It would have engaged with the core service team to address it. In companies where marketing is disconnected, marketing is relegated to amplifying the success of good products—which often don't need much help—or doing damage control by spinning the facts in the best possible light (if the product is bad). Either represents a reactive, if not impoverished, approach to marketing from which the stewardship of customer experience is out of reach.

To put this in perspective, consider that just 30 years ago, we were still living in the so-called broadcast era of marketing, when brand perception could be managed quite effectively by marketers. Then, innovation was often driven by marketing, and product development had less influence; it was there to execute. Companies could get away with this approach because consumers had little ability to share their experiences freely or amplify their voices above the companies' megaphones. So companies faced less pressure to improve their products and services. On top of this, the broadcast system