Your Digital Team Is Sitting On Some Game-Changing Insights. Here's How to Take Advantage of Them.

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The importance of digital to your organization's success can't be overstated. And yet I repeatedly encounter large brands — who should really know better — making mistakes with their digital teams.

Why does this keep happening? From a distance, it seems like digital teams aren't always the best advocates for digital operations. Because if they were better at self-promotion, they would know they're sitting on all kinds of valuable consumer and brand presence insights that any company would want to leverage.

Conversely, it may also be that digital is constantly sharing relevant data, but these reports are not going to the right people. Either way, your organization is at a significant disadvantage when your digital operations aren't aligned with your broader business strategy.

Here are five immediate ways you can start to narrow the gap between digital and your other teams.

1. Integrate digital throughout your operation.

When leaders talk about silos developing in organizations, they often point to marketing and sales teams — which in bad scenarios can operate independently of one another, and in really bad scenarios will actually compete against one another. In my experience though, the single most misaligned department is often digital, which can fall under the purview of marketing, communications, or even brand divisions.

It should go without saying that keeping digital in silos — or worse yet, simply forgotten — is a huge mistake. The digital team should have direct lines of communication with all operational functions: fulfillment, talent acquisition, customer success, as well as sales and marketing. This is because the feedback the digital team collects from customers could be relevant to any of these divisions.

Here's an example: Let's imagine you're part of the digital team for a beach resort and you see guests repeatedly complaining about the availability of umbrellas at your beach café. These comments are showing up everywhere, from comments on your Instagram photos to Yelp and TripAdvisor reviews.

In a broken, siloed organization, these social media insights are shared only within the marketing team. This team will brainstorm public-facing comments and discuss whether to delete the comments. But that's the extent of it.

In an optimized organization, marketing would share this insight with operations, and the conversation would be focused on how to get more umbrellas.

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2. Audit your digital presence to see what information people see when they search for your brand online.

We tend to think of digital as capturing an organization's website and social channels, but digital can and should reflect your entire web presence. This is especially true for top pages on Google search, as the information customers, reporters, and investors are seeing is far more important than any copy you've put on your "About Us" page.

Some questions to consider:

- What "related searches" does Google generate for your brand name?
- Do searches for your brand generate a Google Knowledge Panel?
- Does the knowledge panel feature a Wikipedia article?
- Are your social channels showing up on the first page of results?
- Do you have a Glassdoor page?

Now read those questions again and ask yourself who in your organization is currently responsible for monitoring that information. All of those answers are extremely relevant to your operation, which is why you need to ask your digital team to supply a quarterly report to leadership, including specific comments and feedback they see on digital channels.

3. Take action on feedback.

You can choose to look at negative feedback as a thorn in your side or as an opportunity to optimize your operation and delight customers and employees alike.

Glassdoor is maybe the best example of this. I can't tell you how many organizations I've spoken with that have brushed aside negative reviews on their Glassdoor pages. You can't expect to please every single employee, but in the same way that social media offers a direct line to customers, Glassdoor can be extremely useful for collecting unmitigated employee feedback.

Let's say, for instance, you notice a sudden uptick of negative Glassdoor reviews – and can see that several of them are coming from the same location. Maybe the problem isn't that employees there are complaining, it's that you've got a clear HR problem in your Louisiana office that needs to be addressed. By ensuring that employees at this location are happy, you're likely going to improve or maintain a high level of service as well.

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4. Don't be afraid to trim back your presence.

Do you still have a profile on Slideshare? On Vimeo? On FourSquare?

You might have forgotten about these accounts, but Google hasn't. They could still be showing up on the second or third pages of search results for your brand. That's why it's important to actually deactivate these accounts, not just abandon them.

You may even want to trim back accounts like Facebook if they're no longer an important part of your digital operation. Too many organizations keep these pages going even after engagement drops down to the single digits. If your customers aren't finding you on Facebook and your profile there serves no purpose, consider just removing it and putting all of your attention on platforms that do move the needle.

5. Create one set of guidelines to rule all of digital.

Your organization probably has social media policies and guidelines for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

But do you have a policy for posts on Reddit? On Glassdoor and other job review sites? How about Wikipedia? Having an employee "go rogue" on these platforms can cause all kinds of headache.

How do you address this? By explicitly covering other parts of your digital footprint with the same internal policies you have in place for social platforms. These rules don't need to all be negative. You can (and should!) encourage employees to engage with your corporate content, share updates on their own LinkedIn profiles, or even post pictures of the office on the Google Business listing.

But these guidelines should also include responsibilities. You need to know who is in charge of monitoring, say, Glassdoor and Indeed and pass along summaries of recent posts.

With these five tips, you can start to see how "digital" is an invaluable channel – a two-way form of communication where you can learn from your most important stakeholders and improve your business in a meaningful way.

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