



Findability: Catch the Fourth Wave

“We made a major sales push. Ad campaign, direct mail, outbound telemarketing, new brochures, the works. Results were ... very disappointing.” Well, Duh.

We hear this lament a lot, from companies stuck in 2003. Findability is the fourth wave in connecting enterprises to customers. The evolution: **manufacturing-driven** companies to **sales-driven** companies to **marketing-driven** companies, and now **findable** companies. The last is a huge sea change, so take notes while history class is in session.

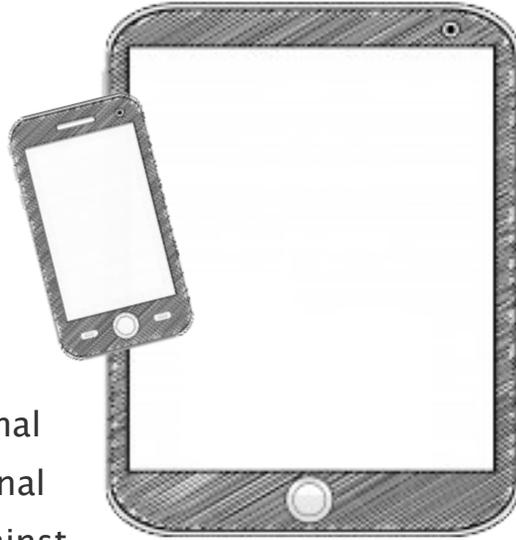


11,000 years ago last Thursday, we gave up the hunter-gatherer life, settled down into villages, divided the tasks, and lookie here, we raised more wheat than we can use. Let's load it on the wagon, and hope we can sell it to Og in the next mud hut over. Lest you think we evolved past this ancient history, there are to this day manufacturing-driven companies who make stuff because they can, then afterwards try to find who the heck can we sell this to? Remember Kodak disc cameras? Antibacterial tooth brushes? The hideous Pontiac Aztek?

The second wave? Sales-driven firms have also existed for centuries. A skilled sales force used to be able to move whatever you gave them. Think Glengarry Glen Ross. Or Avon. A sales force with too much say in a company's strategy, however, can lead to low margins, "opportunistic" deviations from a brand strategy, short-term wins and long-term disaster. Dinosaur enterprises, unaware of the approaching meteor

Third Wave: the marketing-driven company has been the success story of the last 60 years. Peter Drucker taught us to go out to markets, find out what people want (and therefore need), then go back to the factory to nail it together, confident that a segment of the population will buy, and profitably, too. This was the ideal business model, until very very recently.

New rules. New tools. Though different in many ways, all three of those types of enterprises depend on outbound communications that are increasingly expensive and often ineffective. “Sales Avoidance Technologies” are killing traditional sales methods, including traditional advertising. Today, you’re up against voice mail, spam filters, do-not-call registries, DVRs, downloadable (un-sponsored entertainment) programs, and a dozen other barriers to your outbound message. Run all the morning drive-time radio you like; iPod users just ain’t going to hear it.



Welcome to the Fourth Wave: the Age of Findability

Buyers today feel empowered to gather information, source vendors worldwide, draw up selection sets, research to their heart’s content, then consummate a purchase ... often without the vendor being involved or even aware. Is this just for big-ticket B2B considered purchases? Heck no. The corner pizza delivery guys are also subject to the rules of findability. Any brand’s 100% reliance on costly traditional outbound media = a slow death spiral.

Consider the implications, first from a cost-of-customer-acquisition perspective. Sales-driven enterprises still rely on such dubious practices as cold calling, extensive sales forces,

and communication budgets bloated by excessive waste circulation. (Any cold-calling success stories? Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?)

The marketing-driven company has been (in theory, and in practice) more efficient. If we know our new improved widget will be a big hit with Asian females ages 35 to 59, we can focus our messaging, establish distribution where it matters, and advertise with less waste circulation.

But even this more-cost-effective model often involves heavy outbound communication costs, and considerable waste. Traditional advertising strategies to introduce a new national brand, for example (150 TRPs on network TV for 8 weeks, 50,000,000 high-value coupons in FSIs, sampling in the supermarket, skywriting, prayer, fasting, Jennifer Aniston tapdancing, choirs of angels, etc.) are becoming more expensive, less effective and more zapped-past every month. Consumers have many more media and entertainment options than ever, have learned to tune out Selling Messages, and just plain don't want to be Sold anything. They do, however, still love to Buy.

And that's the point. People love to Buy as much as they hate being Sold. So, in every category, they're taking control of the transaction, looking for and finding findable companies.

Consumer example: who sold you your last car? Probably nobody. You did your own research on the web and perhaps

made up your mind before any test drive.

Business example: 20 years ago, manufacturers had the upper hand over retailers, since they had relevant information: market tests, sell-through rates, research. The rug got pulled out from under them when scanner data gave retailers more and better usable information. Now retailers dictate terms, set slotting fees, and push vendors around.

Twenty-first Century truth: buyers, not sellers, control all transactions.

That's a sweeping generalization, but let's sweep together: Your prospects feel entitled to do their own research, given that they believe they have the information resources to find you (and, of course, find your competitors). Since a brand's first duty is visibility, it's essential that every organization with competitors (let's spell that out: You) must engage in findability engineering. Your future depends on it.

Immodest self-serving example: type "advertising agency Chicago" into Google or Yahoo, and we come up very high on the first page, often in the top three. There are 900 or so "advertising agencies and counselors" in the Chicago Yellow Pages (a medium fading fast in this century) yet there we are on top of



the web search. We're certainly not among the biggest: in fact, among the local AAAA member agencies, we're one of the smallest. Nevertheless, we appear to be among the most findable. Now type "Chicago branding agency" into the Search box, and we're normally found on the first page, sometimes first. So? Here's how this plays out: we get serious inquiries from organizations we might never have found, but who found us.

How cost-effective is that, in a profession that last century was 100% referral-based? We have no sales force, and yet we counted up nine requests for proposals in the past month, from six states and three continents. Ridin' the fourth wave, babe.

One more food-for-thought snack: if you were made more visible (and we can help you do that), then got found by a good prospect – as opposed to you playing hunter-gatherer and finding them – how much would that shorten the sales cycle? Remember, now it's their idea. How much easier will it be to close the sale?



"Branding, done well, does three things to your best prospects: it makes you more visible, differentiated, and relevant than your competitors."