Book Real-Time Marketing & PR

How to Engage Your Market, Connect with Customers, and Create Products that Grow Your Business Now

David Meerman Scott
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Recommendation

"Real-time" marketing calls for promotion and public relations activities that move as fast as contemporary business. Time-consuming planning and procedures must yield to rapid action and reaction. Online news business and marketing expert David Meerman Scott explains how to plan and conduct marketing and public relations activities that move as quickly as the audience they seek and the competition they have to beat. *BooksInShort* recommends Scott as a trusty guide for leading the uninitiated through the online marketing wilderness. His book offers much for businesspeople, especially marketers, who want to develop implementation in real time. Now.

Take-Aways

- Today's marketing must operate in real time – the here and now.
- Marketing includes rapid product development, customer service and communication.
- Executives must adopt a real-time mind-set to help their companies make this transition.
- Many companies do little or nothing to transform into real-time firms.
- As an early adopter of new social applications, your company can stake out a leadership position and outdistance competitors.
- Publish bad news that affects your company before the media present it so you can frame the story.
- Use Twitter and blogs to communicate with the public in real time.
- Track what others say online about your company, products and executives.
- Crowdsourcing provides superb, free consumer feedback, suggestions and expertise.
- Mobile devices with GPS links allow companies to engage customers at the point of sale.

Summary

"United Breaks Guitars"

In March 2008, singer-songwriter Dave Carroll and members of his band, Sons of Maxwell, were waiting for takeoff aboard a United Airlines connecting flight from Chicago to Omaha. Looking out the window, Carroll saw United's baggage handlers hurling his band's fragile guitars into the plane's storage area. Carroll complained to the flight attendants. They said, "Talk to the ground staff." The ground staff told him, "Talk to the ground staff in Omaha." Upon arrival, Carroll found his $3,500 Taylor guitar smashed. United's Omaha staff told Carroll they would reject any claim for damages.

> "We need to unlearn what we've learned in the last half century about communication."

Carroll communicated with United representatives by phone and email, but no one helped him. Carroll then wrote and performed a song called "United Breaks Guitars," which he published on YouTube on July 6, 2009. The song attracted one million views in four days. Bloggers took up Carroll's cause and sent hundreds of daily posts excoriating United.

"It's a real-time world now, and if you're not engaged, then you're on your way to marketplace irrelevance."

Bob Taylor, president of Taylor Guitars, created and uploaded a YouTube video telling musicians how to pack guitars to minimize baggage-handling damage. Calton Cases, which manufactures robust cases for musical instruments, introduced the Dave Carroll Traveler's Edition Guitar Case. CNN, CBS, Fox, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other media outlets interviewed Carroll. All this occurred within a few days after Carroll uploaded his song to YouTube.

"The larger the business, the more difficult it is to adopt a real-time mind-set."

This viral online media blast had three big winners – Dave Carroll, Taylor Guitars and Calton Cases – and one big loser – United Airlines, which ignored the hoopla. Carroll moved quickly and creatively to inform the public about United's irresponsibility. Taylor Guitars and Calton Cases leapt to exploit the immediate publicity wave. Today, Carroll and his band are famous. Taylor Guitars' sales are up 25%. United stuck its head in the sand and suffered a huge black eye.

Real-Time Agility

Agile companies and entrepreneurs leverage "real-time engagement," which involves "real-time marketing, real-time product development, real-time communication and real-time customer service," to win in today's real-time marketplace. For example, on June 25, 2009, entertainment superstar Michael Jackson died at the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles. Established players like *Los Angeles Times*, Fox and CNN did not break the story. Instead, TMZ, a heads-up "celebrity media news service," got the scoop.

"Huge advantage flows from delivering in real-time content that satisfies intensely focused public curiosity."

Politico.com is the website of choice for political junkies. Bloomberg News Service provides real-time financial news and information. Why are these relative newcomers – TMZ, Politico and Bloomberg – so successful? They understand that the Internet has dramatically compressed time, making real time the only framework that counts, particularly in business. They move to provide the "real-time content" and connections their niche audiences crave. To remain competitive, your firm must develop the same capability.

The New Speeding Laws

The "real-time power law" expresses how public interest in "widespread significant" breaking news stories immediately spikes and then precipitously trails off as stories age. You quickly must get out in front of any news that touches even obliquely on your operations. If you deliberate or take too much time to respond, you will miss the publicity wave. The "real-time law of normal distribution" concerns stories that build slowly over time via an online story, activity or blog post that develops an interested audience slowly, hits critical mass and gradually diminishes.

"Scale and media buying power are no longer a decisive advantage. What counts today is speed and agility."

This new business mind-set runs counter to deeply entrenched, traditional corporate thinking, where the basic attitude instructs your firm to "wait, to make certain," "conduct extensive research," "run decisions by your staff" and "respond to customers on your time frame." This outmoded mind-set hampers you from moving quickly to satisfy hurried customers. By the time you get around to answering, they will have moved on to your more supple competitors.

"As media tied to rigid production cycles decline – morning papers, evening newscast and weekly newsmagazines – real-time media grow audiences and profits."

A real-time mind-set tells businesses to "act before the window of opportunity vanishes," "measure results today" and "execute based on what's happening now." Many companies – in particular, many larger firms – still communicate and perform PR as if today were 1950, when business and circumstances moved at a snail's pace. On the other hand, some famous organizations are well ahead of the real-time curve, including Boeing, Chevron, Coca-Cola, Ford, Intel, UPS, Verizon Communications and Wells Fargo.

A Week from Now May Be Too Late

Companies once spent a week or more planning responses to news stories that might negatively affect their markets or images. They used valuable time to set up task forces, research issues, develop recommendations for senior managers, create press releases and disseminate their responses. Stretching out the response cycle no longer works. When bad or even pertinent news events occur, you must respond immediately – you must "shoot on sight."

"In an always-on world, people get news on their terms, from their platform of choice, and at the time convenient for them."

To connect with members of the media in real time, submit news items directly to the websites or email addresses of targeted media outlets. Add hashtags to your Twitter posts to alert reporters monitoring their Twitter feeds that you have timely news concerning breaking stories. A hashtag is the pound sign (#) followed by "a single word or acronym" – for example, #Titanic. Make your blog your megaphone to get your story out in real time. To communicate quickly with the public, utilize news release distribution outlets such as PRWeb, Business Wire and PR Newswire, which excel at issuing media alerts. If you hold a press conference, offer live-streaming video.

"Why is it that only a quarter of the *Fortune* 100 companies respond in real time to media inquiries?"

Get the attention of media outlets by including their Twitter IDs in your tweets. For example, type @nytimes to address *The New York Times*. Employ Twitter to follow the reporters who are relevant to your company. Introduce yourself by email, and stay in touch via Twitter, blogs and other links. Add constructive comments on their blogs. Of course, the best time to reach out to the media is before any crisis strikes. Still, you should have communications plans ready in case of emergency. The most important rule: Mitigate bad news about your company by reporting it yourself first. Frame the story to your purposes and not as the media would without your input.

"When you start the conversation, you are recognized as someone who is plugged into the marketplace of ideas."

Companies that operate successfully in real time work hard to track what people say about them online. Perform keyword searches on Google, Bing and other search engines to find individuals and organizations – journalists, bloggers, trade magazines, security analysts, and so on – that focus on businesses like yours. Check out all relevant blogs through blog search engines, including Google Blog Search, IceRocket and Technorati. Employ an RSS ("really simple syndication") feed to aggregate the most relevant online content. Google Reader works well for this purpose. Use TweetDeck to aggregate relevant Twitter feeds.

"There is room in every market for smart organizations to seize market share and profits by providing service at speed."

These efforts will enable you to stay on top of what your targeted audience says about your company, your industry and related topics. To find out what the people you do not target say about you, develop a list of relevant keyword terms (your company name, names of your executives, your products, and so on). Use Google News to set up news alerts for each search term. You can do the same with blog search engines, such as Google Alerts. TweetDeck performs the same function at Twitter. Social web analytics services not only monitor what people say about specific topics online, they also analyze and interpret this information. Some noteworthy free services include Google Trends, BlogPulse and Twingly. Reliable commercial services include Brandwatch, Radian6 and Trackur.

Connecting with Your Customers

Real-time companies apply crowdsourcing – getting people online to work for them for free – to accomplish tasks that otherwise would cost them dearly – for example, garnering suggestions for product names or providing expert user advice and answers to customer questions. Crowdsourcing can prove more on target than anything a paid specialist might develop. For instance, every year, which Super Bowl ads are the best? The authoritative BrandBowl relies on online crowdsourcing to develop quick, reliable reports on which are most popular. For the 2010 Super Bowl, BrandBowl collected 98,656 tweets to rank Super Bowl ads. Doritos had the most tweets, and Google the most positive tweets.

"An immensely powerful competitive advantage flows to organizations with people who understand the power of real-time information."

Marketers connect with prospective customers before they buy but often disregard the rest of the sales cycle. To develop customer loyalty and repeat business, promoters must be nimble with real-time connections at three after-sale "contact points": "Immediate postsale" establishes the tone of your future relationship with the customer, "ready to receive" invites customer inquiries, and "problem resolution and crisis communication" fixes problems right away. Clicksquare employs email programs to help companies develop strong real-time relationships with their customers. When choosing where to focus your contact efforts, learn which online channels your customers prefer, and use those.

Real Time Is Mobile Time

With global positioning, or "GPS capability," companies can contact prospects and customers near their retail outlets to offer special deals. Plus, they can benefit from the real-time recommendations of satisfied customers. For example, Foursquare, a social networking application, lets users alert their friends about featured retail locations in specific areas. For example, when author David Meerman Scott updated his location to Boston, he received this recommendation for Neillio's Gourmet Kitchen: "Derek P. says: Get the Bacon Turkey Terrific on focaccia bread." Besides being mobile-ready, you can transform your website into a "real-time machine." Automate your site so visitors can secure immediate, real-time answers to their questions and concerns.

"Reaction speed is critical. Of course, you can't react unless you instantly know (and understand!) what's being said."

Establish your market niche and competitive advantage by providing your product or service faster than anyone else. Furthur, a band featuring some of the original members of the Grateful Dead, quickly produces real-time concert CDs. Fans at concerts who want to buy the CDs pay around $20 and receive wristbands that identify them as CD purchasers. After the show, they line up at a special counter, flash their wristbands and pick up their newly burned CDs, which Furthur technicians rapidly mass-produce behind the scenes.

"The media is already operating in real time. You must, too."

Encourage your employees to communicate in real time with customers and other important audiences. Informal surveys indicate that one in four companies block their employees' access to online social media. Even more companies do not permit staffers to provide work-related commentary on blogs, forums or chat rooms. Such practices are self-defeating.

Instead, adopt IBM's enlightened approach. The company's "Social Computing Guidelines" (a good model to follow) include recommendations like these: Think carefully about how you showcase yourself online. Pay attention to "copyright and fair use laws." Don't reveal "confidential and proprietary information." "Always write in a first-person singular voice." If an employee applies a "we" construction in his or her online commentary, people may assume that the individual speaks on behalf of the company. An "I" construction clearly indicates that the person speaks for him- or herself. Establish a "chief real-time communications officer" to coordinate all "real-time communication strategy and tactics" at your company.

Real-Time Success

Real time success depends on data, data and more data. To compete in the real-time arena, your company must be data-driven. Create a sophisticated infrastructure to deliver correct information to your professionals. Include a "real-time dashboard" that marketing, sales and PR staffers can access at any time.

All these forward-thinking steps might represent a radical departure for companies that operate in a traditional time frame. Your firm must make this heady real-time transition. Brian Halligan, CEO at HubSpot, a prominent Internet marketing software company, explains that "the Internet fundamentally changes the time scales of business."

About the Author

David Meerman Scott wrote the best-selling *The New Rules of Marketing & PR.*