

Aida

By Jeffrey L. Josephson

At the end of Giuseppe Verdi's great 19th century opera, Aida, the captured Ethiopian Princess dies in the arms of her lover Radamès, the Egyptian general, as their tomb and their fate are sealed.

Today, in a case of life imitating art, AIDA, the classic marketing process, is dying at the hands of marketing directors around the world as the fate of their marketing programs, and their companies, are similarly sealed.

Attention, Interest, Desire and Action (AIDA)

Based on the work of Elias St. Elmo Lewis, an early advocate of advertising, AIDA describes the steps through which an advertisement should take a reader in order for it to be effective:

- Attract the **Attention** of the customer or prospect
- Stimulate the prospect's **Interest** by focusing on benefits
- Convince the prospect to want, or **Desire**, the product because it will satisfy their needs
- Lead the prospect to take an **Action** towards purchasing the product

For over a hundred years, advertisers have used this concept as a literal checklist to insure that their marketing programs would work. And because it did, they did.

But now, with the rise of the Internet and inbound marketing, many so-called marketing experts would like to relegate AIDA to the historical dustbin. And in the name of engagement, or simply as a rejection of traditional "interruptive marketing," marketing leaders are churning out content in the hope that someone will see it, and respond.

But has the Internet obviated a concept as basic as AIDA? Or do you ignore it at your peril.

What's Wrong with Abandoning AIDA?

The fundamental argument, for many so-called experts in the business-to-business (B2B) segment who favor inbound marketing, is that decision makers don't like cold calls (and most sales people can't, or won't, make them anyway). Instead, they argue, the Internet empowers buyers to find their own solutions, uninfluenced by the bias of the proximal vendor. And you only need to put your information out there to be found.

They draw an analogy to the consumer world, where experts tell us that people who are engaged with their computers, tablets and smartphones have no need – no less the time – to talk to a salesperson, or look at an ad. And instead, your job as a marketer is to somehow insert your content into the torrent of information and entertainment that users

suck up throughout their day. And if your content is good, it will rise to the top of the filter, precipitate out, or go viral – the ultimate marketing success.

But wait. With your prospects hoovering up orders of magnitude more information, doesn't that mean that you need to work harder to get their attention, not less?

With the cost of putting information online so low, doesn't that really mean that you're actually competing in a vastly more cluttered and noisy environment, not an easier one? And again, doesn't that mean you need to work even harder to get attention?

Maybe the reason that so many content marketing programs fail is precisely because they fail at the front end of the AIDA process – they fail to get anyone's attention.

Think about it for a moment. When consumers were forced to sit through eight minutes of commercials during the course of a 30-minute analog TV broadcast, you only had to compete with seven other vendors to break through.

Now, with an infinite number of channels on dozens of platforms, you have to compete with billions of messages just to be heard. How is "getting attention" not *the* problem?

"Attention" is objectively a finite resource. A person only has a few things they can notice (and fewer that they can buy) and everything else fades into the background. And, let's be clear, if you're part of the background, you're not getting noticed.

Even if you assume that your prospects can multi-task (which, for most people, is a myth) does that compensate for the extra millions of messages that you now have to compete with?

It is, to be charitable, delusional to think that the marketing messages of the vast majority of marketers are going to be heard. And if that's the case, how can you possibly stimulate interest, desire and action?

In short, Aida's not dead, she's just being dissed.

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