The Role of Technology in Modern Marketing

Interview with Scott Brinker, blog author and MarTech pioneer

Modern marketing is relying increasingly on technology. This trend began more than a decade ago and got another boost during the ongoing pandemic: Over the last few years, the technology landscape has experienced an explosion of available applications. While apps and software are collecting and deploying more and more data, privacy legislation is being put in place by many countries, limiting the scope of what marketing is allowed to do with data. In this challenging environment, will MarTech still thrive? How can managers organize and integrate different applications and govern MarTech to comply with consumer expectations and regulations? In this interview, MarTech guru Scott Brinker shares his thoughts on the evolution of platforms, services and technology and how marketers can successfully implement the most promising MarTech applications.

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Bernd Skiera ✕ *We have been discussing digital transformation for over a decade. The process is still underway, and the marketing technology landscape is evolving rapidly. What is happening in Marketing and Sales?*

Scott Brinker ✕ On one side, the way customers engage with brands is now through more digital channels and digital processes; on the other side, our businesses have much more digital processes built into them. The changes on both sides create enormous opportunities and demand for software entrepreneurs.

We see an increasing number of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) applications, where software is licensed on a subscription basis and centrally hosted by a cloud service. Why do we see so many SaaS apps in marketing?

Actually, this is not only happening in marketing. As software moved to the cloud, creating and deploying on state-of-the-art infrastructures like those provided by AWS, Azure or Google Cloud became much easier. Companies are leveraging all sorts of API services and Open Source frameworks. It has never been a better time to create software in marketing

← **SCOTT BRINKER**

ABOUT SCOTT BRINKER

Scott Brinker writes the Chief Marketing Technologist blog, chiefmartec.com, where he has tracked the rise of marketing technology – and the profession of marketing technologists – for over 15 years. He is the author of the best-selling book Hacking Marketing.

Scott also serves as the VP platform ecosystem at HubSpot, an all-in-one platform that connects MarTech and SalesTech, helping to grow and nurture the company's community of technology partners. Previously, he was the co-founder and CTO of the platform ion interactive, a pioneer of interactive content marketing software to many of the world's leading brands.

Scott has had articles published in Advertising Age, Adweek, Harvard Business Review and TechCrunch. He holds degrees in computer science from Columbia University and Harvard University and an MBA from MIT. Connect with him on Twitter @chiefmartec.

THE INTERVIEWER
Prof. Bernd Skiera conducted the interview in June 2022.

and sales, resulting in a tremendously long tail of MarTech applications. And the market is growing rapidly.

It is amazing, and I am wondering how to integrate all these apps. Or can we ignore the integration part?

No, the single greatest challenge with MarTech today is integration. Usually, the software is developed around some common platform, like, initially, Windows or, more recently, Apple's iOS or Google's Android for mobile phones. These common platforms provided a structure for the creation of hundreds, thousands and, in the case of mobile, even millions of new apps, and they all integrated because the platform came first. In MarTech, we have had this explosion of software without a core platform at the center.

### How is the industry solving the integration challenge?

Basically, there are two approaches. One is by trying to create de facto standards or own platforms. For instance, my role at HubSpot is to help them be one of those platforms that makes it easy for hundreds or even thousands of apps to integrate well. But we also see this with Salesforce or Microsoft Dynamics. The major tech companies are trying to lean into such platform approaches to help solve the integration challenge.

What is the second approach for integration?

There is a whole category of software called iPaaS, which stands for ''integration platform as a service,'' and they offer workflow automation tools and the like. Their purpose is to make it easier for companies to integrate any disparate set of apps. We have Workato, Zapier, Marini Systems and others, and this is a thriving category just focused on helping to address the integration challenge.

Is the integration in marketing different from the integration in other areas, or is it irrelevant whether we integrate MarTech solutions or solutions that focus more on finance, accounting, production or operations?

At a technical level, it follows very similar patterns, and the mission for digital businesses is to integrate all of these solutions. You want the entire business operating on a more unified structure, not just MarTech or finance. Right now, it is a long way until we reach this goal, but I am confident that we will keep getting better. Interestingly, marketing operated as a silo. Many of the initial MarTech products were not integrated. There was one application to manage social media accounts, another to run advertising, a content creation platform, and so on.

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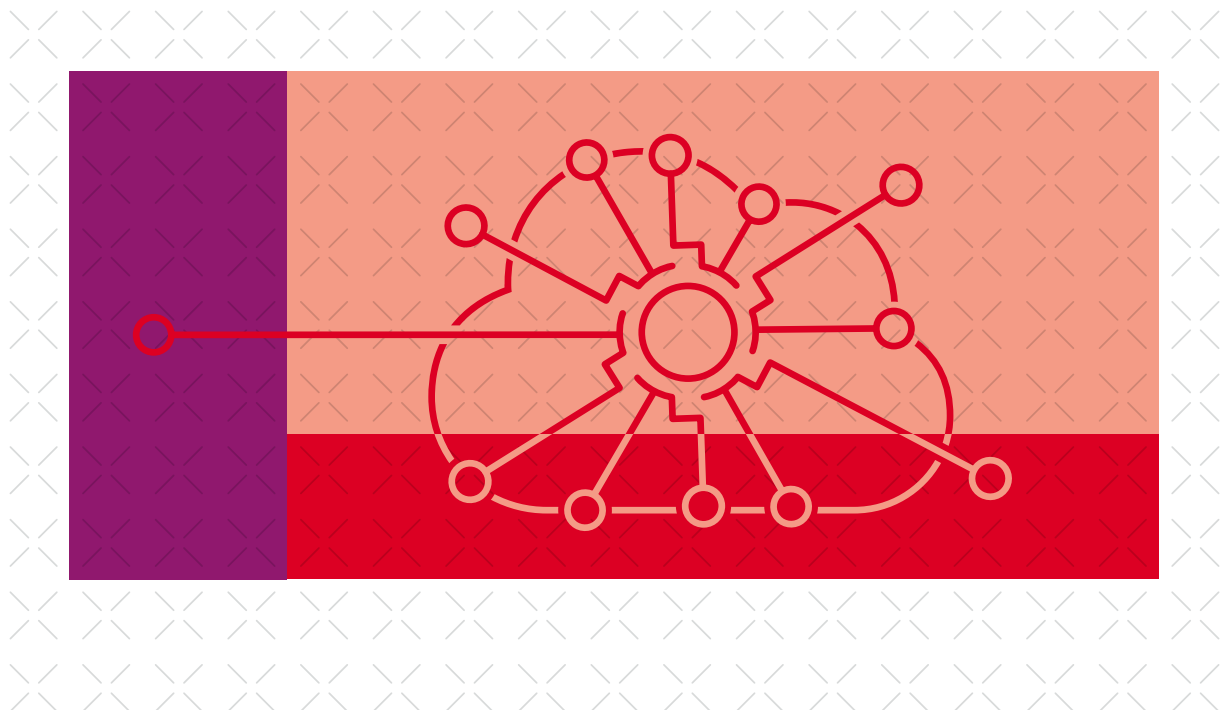
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What is the problem with operating in silos?

For a long time, marketing focused on a particular output. For example, in B2C, driving people to an e-commerce sale and in B2B, getting qualified leads. And you can easily measure this output. But ultimately, this is not an efficient way to run a business because marketing engagement with customers happens for the entire lifetime. It's not just about an initial sale or qualified lead but about building relationships over time. To do that, you need to integrate all digital systems that customers interact with into a ''golden record'' to know who the customer is.

Do you see a difference between MarTech and SalesTech, or is this just a different label for the same content?

They went different for a while as long as there was an almost binary handover from marketing to sales with different motions for both. But this is changing, partially triggered by the pandemic. Suddenly, many traditional channels like in-person meetings, trade shows or field visits that had worked for decades got shut down or dramatically minimized. So, some salespeople started to embrace more digital ways of interacting with prospects and were getting much more digitally savvy. Consequently, we saw an explosion of SalesTech and the SalesTech landscape went from a few hundred products to a few thousand. And there is now an increasing intersection, if not outright overlap, with how marketing teams use these tools to collaborate with sales teams.

What do MarTech and SalesTech mean for marketing professionals, and what do they need to learn? Do we have to change how we educate students or managers, or could we continue as we did for a long time?

A little bit of both, because marketing is a very rich profession. Understanding everything from consumer behavior to pricing, packaging, and the four Ps, in general, are still relevant today. If you're a marketer, you need those foundational principles of understanding to be able to think strategically. But now, on top of core principles, we have more and more technologies that let us get more creative in how we engage with customers. We get a lot more data from a much more granular set of interactions, which can then feed back into our models of understanding.

Meaning that marketers must also become data-savvy?

Yes, managers need to be able to evolve their marketing strategy based on what they are learning. They can run a lot more experiments. They can learn what works from digital experimentation, which is extremely important for marketing. So, it would be best to become comfortable leveraging data and technology.

The industry promotes so-called no code solutions, allowing nontechnical people to build software without programming skills. Do you think that is an essential feature of software solutions?

I'm a big fan of what's happening here, that you can build an app and just drag and drop things and need no code. No-code is a way of empowering general business users and marketers. It allows them to self-service their needs, like creating a landing page for a marketing campaign. For example, once upon a time, you needed a web developer capable of HTML and JavaScript to create a landing page, which was a huge bottleneck. That is no longer the case because almost all landing pages are created using a no-code approach.

Can no-code also be extended to data analysis?

There will always be a place for expert data scientists, but marketers are curious. They wake up every morning with 100 questions about what happened and how that relates to

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something else. If they were asking data scientists all the time, they wouldn't get the answer because it would be too expensive and take too long. But it is undoubtedly empowering if you have no-code tools that allow you to get quick answers. So, I look at this whole no-code movement as a way of putting more capabilities directly into the hands of marketers, and I think it will change marketing productivity and creativity.

All those dreams only fly if the data quality is good; otherwise, we have garbage in – garbage out. Are we already capable of avoiding duplicates or inconsistent data?

This topic is related to the no-code discussion because no-code is enabling us to gather or leverage more data in more ways. The upside is a wonderful set of new capabilities, but the other side is how to ensure that the data is adhering to policies and complying with privacy and data governance laws in all countries you are operating in, and this is a real challenge. Companies like DataGrail or OneTrust help aggregate and manage compliance for data across a wide variety of apps. But ultimately, you need to combine technology and people. It's not that you just plug in the technology and it magically does it all for you. There's an enormous people and governance component.

Let's return to the problem of integration and APIs, the application programming interfaces. How important are those and the management of all those APIs?

API gateway management is super important. The pretty pictures of the graphical no-code interfaces need to be translated into a set of API calls that interact with different pieces of software. API gateway software becomes a way to help companies manage commercial third-party APIs from MarTech platforms. But companies also create their own APIs that their employees, partners and customers can leverage.

With all this technology, will the CTO become the CMO, or could we marketers take over the CTO position? How do you see their roles?

Marketing should not live in a silo but become part of a broader digital business strategy where the CMO, CIO, CTO, the chief revenue officer and all these folks are collaborating to develop a common underlying technology framework to leverage their respective responsibilities. CMOs must be pretty savvy about technology, but I don't think the CMO has to be a technologist. The depth of expertise now required in marketing operations and marketing technology is not something that somebody can just pick up on the side. Both are respected professions by themselves. So you want someone really good at marketing operations and marketing technology working for you.

In Europe, we are very proud of our privacy rules – the GDPR is probably a buzzword worldwide. Are privacy and MarTech a clash of approaches, or are there ways to combine them smartly?

MarTech can either help or hurt the agenda, depending on the specific technology. It's really valuable to have companies like OneTrust or DataGrail, or technology tools that help you understand the provenance of data so that you can live up to any responsibilities, like respecting customer preferences of if and how they want to interact. MarTech can do that and can support modern privacy. Yet suppose you have a diverse and not well-organized collection of different MarTech solutions. In that case, it becomes a liability because you will likely be unable to live up to your compliance responsibilities. We must know the provenance of the data and be able to not only activate the data to engage people. Yet if someone wants to be removed from that process, we must be able to thoroughly respect that.

How do you see the future after, for example, the death of third-party cookies or the death of cookies in general?

If we assume that third-party cookies are going away, one of the natural conclusions would be to focus more on managing first-party relationships with prospects and customers. Many experiences and touchpoints are managed through MarTech capabilities, whether on your website, a mobile app
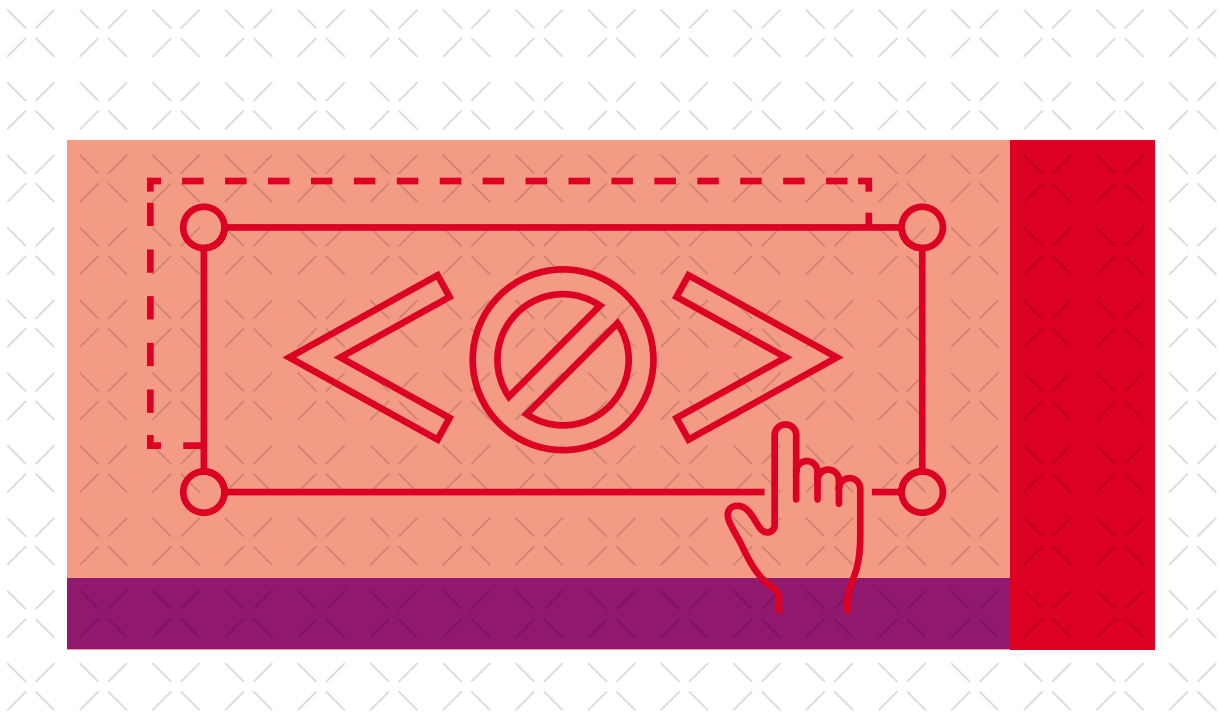
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or another engagement channel. So you have to make the marketing technology effective for a first-party world.

Let's quickly hit another much-debated topic: the metaverse. Is the metaverse just a buzzword or indeed an upcoming opportunity?

Both. The metaverse is probably one of those classic Gartner hype-cycle topics where we are approaching the peak hype. Ultimately, there's something very real in the metaverse, ironically. The technology keeps advancing to allow us deeper engagements through augmented or virtual reality. Some things we used to think of as science fiction will become real, not necessarily in a year or two years, but over 5 to 10 years.

How should marketers deal with the metaverse?

They should be careful about getting ahead of themselves, as some of the metaverse platforms are mature. It depends on your business. If you are primarily selling to people through online games, for instance, worlds like Roblox or Fortnight are already very real channels. The metaverse can be a new channel for marketers in various industries. Even if it is a buzzword today, something big is evolving slowly and steadily, and I would pay attention to it.

With this outlook, I would like to conclude. Thank you very much for this fantastic interview, and good luck with your ventures.   ⨯