



TECHNOLOGY

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Look Before You Leap

As you have seen throughout this issue, the theme of this year's LIMRA Annual Conference is *The Leadership Challenge: Connecting in a Distracted World*. The basis of the theme is that consumers increasingly are confronted with a multitude of distractions that can impact not only where in their priorities the products and services you provide fall, but also how they may prefer to (or at least be willing to) interact with your company. The conference message further says:

To keep up with the velocity of today's change, we must leverage the latest technology to enhance marketing efforts, maximize today's social sharing culture for our competitive advantage, and connect with consumers in the customized manner they now experience on a daily basis.

It turns out that consumers aren't the only ones who can get distracted. Leaders can and do as well, whether due to a new regulation that could have a major impact (good or bad), a competitor introducing a new product type or feature receiving a lot of attention, the latest management fad (think "total quality management," "business process re-engineering," etc.), or a hot new technology that their competitors have begun to implement.

Let's go back 20 years to the mid-1990s when most of us first heard of the World Wide Web. Though it already existed, it wasn't until the web became available for free and the web browser Mosaic facilitated navigation that virtually every company in our industry published its first website. Was this a distraction, or did every company conduct a rigorous cost-benefit analysis and

come up with the same answer? How many companies know whether their public websites have delivered improved business results over and above what they've spent on them to date?

Despite the fact that few financial services organizations offer the ability to purchase products directly from their website, most probably would agree today that having a public-facing website is table stakes for any company in the industry. Further, they likely would agree that password-protected sites for customers and/or financial professionals can be a great cost-saving mechanism while adding enhanced functionality and convenience.

More recent technologies include social media and mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. According to LIMRA research, in 2013 nearly all companies (93 percent) were using social media with the public, and more than half considered themselves to be "actively using" it (i.e., with multiple large initiatives in place). In addition, 70 percent of life insurance companies had current mobile initiatives for at least one stakeholder (such as the public, policyowners, or financial professionals) — up from 55 percent in 2011.

Were solid business cases developed in all of these implementations, or was there a rush to implement when leadership was blinded by a new technology's dazzle or afraid of being left behind? Have those implementations demonstrated the anticipated improvements to business value and/or results? As new technologies appear at an ever-increasing pace, companies will need to decide whether there is a way to leverage them or whether it makes sense to take a pass — at least for now — before jumping in too soon. 🌐

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