



Push or Pull Marketing for Innovations?

by

Braden Kelley

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Innovation is all about value, and both internal communications and external marketing have a critical role to play in determining whether an invention has any chance of becoming an innovation. When it comes to both the Value Access and Value Translation components of innovation, in most organizations the marketing department holds the keys to success. But, unless the team does a good job of evangelizing the idea and resulting solution internally first, even the most promising innovation may never see the light of day.



Value Access is all about how easy you make it for customers and consumers to access the value you've created with a potential innovation, and could also be thought of as friction reduction. How well has the product or service been designed to allow people to access the value easily? How easy is it for the solution to be created? How easy is it for people to do business with you?

Value Translation is all about helping people understand the value you've created with a potential innovation and how it fits into their lives. Value Translation is also about understanding where on a continuum between the need for explanation and education that your solution falls. Incremental innovations can usually just be explained to people because they anchor to something they already understand, but radical or disruptive innovations inevitably require some level of education (often far in advance of the launch).



Design, operations, sales, and marketing all have roles to play in successful Value Access, while Value Translation usually falls primarily to sales and marketing, but with roles to play for all employees, suppliers, and partners to serve as innovation evangelists. To successfully educate or explain to the customer the potential value of your innovation, marketing has two main tools to help achieve their mission – “push” marketing and “pull” marketing.

Just what are “push” and “pull” marketing?

Describing push marketing is easy (or at least it should be). Push marketing is the traditional marketing and advertising seen everywhere. Push marketing starts with the product or service, identifies the features or benefits that potential customers will find most compelling, and then utilizes targeting and segmentation to “push” carefully crafted marketing messages out via a variety of advertising, sales, and social media channels to the most likely potential customers.

But, stray into the pull marketing universe and prepare to be inundated by a plethora of widely divergent definitions. Some people would define pull marketing as similar to push, but instead of marketing to potential customers, potential decision makers or consumers (or even influencers) are targeted so that hopefully they will pull customers to the business. Still other people talk about technology push versus market pull in the context of determining which products get developed and sold (or should be developed and sold). Making it even more confusing, some people call the direct advertising to consumers of prescription medications like Viagra a pull marketing strategy. So just what is a pull marketing strategy then anyways? Who’s right?

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I would argue that none of them are correct. While the communications produced might talk to different groups of people than traditional marketing or in a slightly different way, they all are still, at their core, push marketing strategies. Pull marketing is something else entirely (and should be in order to maximize your investment in marketing). While push marketing focuses on the most likely potential customers, pull marketing should be focused on a totally different group of people – non-customers who are not yet ready to become customers at this time.

An **effective pull marketing strategy** begins with extensive research into what makes a person evolve from someone who is disinterested and unaware of a solution area, to seeing how it might fit into their personal or professional lives and make it better. This usually involves the creation of content that will raise awareness, interest, inspiration, and understanding of the whole solution area, and the need for it, not just the features and benefits of one company’s particular product or service. Pull marketing strategies are very uncomfortable for most marketers, and as a result most companies have no pull to balance their push.



So which is better for an organization – push marketing or pull marketing?

Any organization that is interested in sustained revenue and profitability growth over time should invest in both, but most companies are seduced by the immediate payback of push marketing and pursue only push marketing strategies. Meanwhile, pull marketing helps grow new potential customers (or accelerates their purchase readiness timeline), so it is equally important in the long run. Smart companies, organizations that intend to succeed in the long run, need to invest in both push and pull marketing strategies in order to keep their sales pipeline full both for now AND for the future. And if your company is focused on innovation, then the more disruptive that you try to be, the more important that having a pull component to your marketing strategy will become. Push or pull? The answer lies in... the balance.

And what about for marketing an innovation – push or pull?

The more disruptive an innovation is likely to be, the more important it will be for you to craft and execute an effective **pull marketing strategy**. The main reason is that in every situation, despite the popular belief among inventors, a customer already has a solution. It may be the “do nothing” solution, but they have a solution.

Therefore, proposing a big departure from their existing solution will be seen as very uncomfortable by the recipients of your message, even the most likely customers. Also, the most likely customers in your mind may not end up being those customers that are most likely to be the first to adopt your innovation. The reason is that it may not be immediately obvious how your solution (or even your solution category) fits into their lives, or even that your solution is actually better than their existing solution. So, you may have to a fair amount of education (pull) to do first, before you even begin talking about the merits of your particular solution (push).

At a deeper level, it will also be crucial for you to build awareness, interest, and desire for several key technical (and potentially safety) aspects of the solution, and possibly for the entire solution category, not just helping people how your particular solution might fit into their lives. Pull marketing is incredibly important for innovations because of the fact that for great inventions destined to be great innovations there are often few ready customers early on to orient push marketing towards, so instead the focus should be on using effective pull marketing at the beginning to grow the numbers of future potential customers, and to learn as you go what some of the successful elements of your pull marketing are that you might want to reinforce or utilize in your push marketing later on.

So, are you ready to begin pulling customers to your potential innovation, or are you intent on trying to push it on those people you HOPE will become your customers?

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Braden Kelley is a popular **innovation speaker**, embeds innovation across the organization with innovation training, and builds **B2B pull marketing strategies** that drive increased revenue, visibility and inbound sales leads. He is currently advising an early-stage fashion startup making jewelry for your hair and is the author of ***Stoking Your Innovation Bonfire*** from John Wiley & Sons. He tweets from [@innovate](#).

Braden's Message

A sought-after public speaker, Braden makes innovation and marketing insights accessible for audiences. At the same time, Braden challenges audiences to question their assumptions about what it takes to successfully innovate, and creates dynamic, engaging interactions with attendees.

Braden's Presentations

Braden can speak on a wide range of innovation and marketing topics including:

- His book – *Stoking Your Innovation Bonfire* (from John Wiley & Sons)
- Building a Social Business Architecture
- Creating Continuous Innovation
- Open Innovation and Social Media
- Strengthening Customer and Employee Relationships

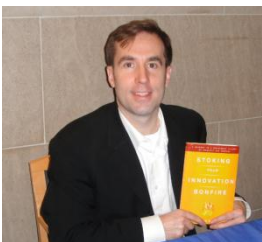
Formats:

- Keynote Speeches – usually sixty to ninety minutes in duration
- Workshops (Public or Private) – From a half-day to three-days in duration
- Executive Briefings – usually two to four hours in duration

Testimonials

"You got terrific feedback from the attendees... We really hope to have you speak at a future event!"

--- Pippa Callaghan, Event Producer, Connecting Group

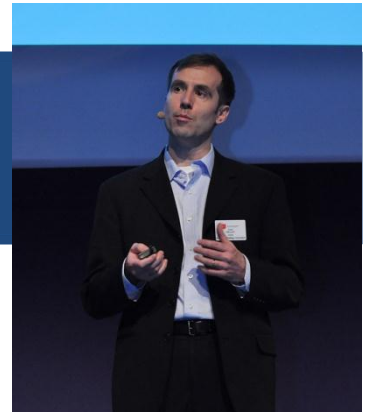


"You were one of our top-rated presenters, and your presentation was mentioned frequently as most useful and of highest value during the summit."

--- Jonathan Bahe, Managing Director, Design Futures Council

"Braden is a very good speaker who can transmit key messages with clarity and originality. I wish the best to Braden in the future!"

--- Nathalie Hublet, Media Manager, UBA



Speaking Clients

