Hitting the target

Analytical imperatives for telecom marketers in emerging markets
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The telecom sector has reached saturation point in many emerging markets, with market penetration sometimes higher than 100 percent of the population. Mobile operators are finding it increasingly challenging to compete and grow in such markets by employing a traditional go-to-market strategy. This well-worn blueprint has rested on their understanding of aggregate demand, and has been based on the underlying assumption that there are still new users to acquire and that these acquisitions would compensate for price reductions. Telecom operators must now rethink their entire approach to marketing, fundamentally reorganizing themselves to allow more effective growth campaigns.

Telecom companies need to embrace a new level of targeting and reject the outdated view of customers as large, indistinct, and coherent segments. To tailor offerings to specific customer needs, companies should employ analytical marketing, mining the Big Data already at their disposal to respond continually to the behavior of individuals and market micro-segments. Investment can therefore be channeled productively, rather than wasted through overly simplistic assumptions about the general market.

For this transition to take effect, telecom operators must build five key capabilities within the marketing function: data management, micro-segmentation, commercialization, product design, and adaptive learning. Deploying these capabilities will ensure that customers’ needs are more accurately identified and serviced. Customers will be more likely to respond positively to marketing approaches, with growth resulting from the combined profitability of each micro-segment.
The mobile telecommunications market in developing economies has become saturated, with subscriptions frequently outstripping the size of population. For example, market penetration (the number of subscriptions divided by the number of people living in the relevant market) is estimated to have stood at 105 percent in Arab states in 2013, while the corresponding figure in the Commonwealth of Independent States, comprising most former Soviet republics, was 170 percent.¹

Most operators have been unable to sustain growth levels by relying on traditional go-to-market approaches. Any observed growth is for the most part produced by the prepaid SIM card market, with its low average revenue per user (ARPU). The traditional, aggregate method of marketing products — taking consumers as large averaged groups or as a few segments — is failing to yield results as it is now more difficult to use pricing as a means to stimulate top-line growth. Customers are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and have arguably become more advanced than telecom marketers themselves in their understanding of the mobile market. As a result, telecom companies are being forced to pay high subscriber acquisition costs, and have an elevated churn rate for subscribers and declining ARPU.

Competition within the industry has also increased. Revenue from services has stagnated as operators seek to combine dwindling traditional offerings with new avenues of growth, such as broadband and content. Turning this tide poses a major challenge (see Exhibit 1, page 5).

The following conditions now characterize the telecom sector in emerging markets:

- A decreasing number of new subscribers, who also represent a lower ARPU, not least because companies need to reduce their prices to attract them.
- Price reductions that are cannibalizing existing revenues, with current customers moving to more attractive plans.
- Natural erosion of traditional telecom services (messaging and...
voice) by over-the-top services, such as Google Voice, Skype, and WhatsApp, and increasing competition within the industry itself.

- Operators are also confronting the need to rationalize their spending, with investment in marketing and sales falling victim to the ongoing search to improve profitability. Chief marketing officers therefore need to operate within constrained budgets, despite the fact that the ever-growing inflation of key marketing tools is raising the cost of subscriber acquisition and retention. Their current priorities are to minimize spending on customers who generate the least return, and maximize the value from existing customers by serving their untapped needs.

Exhibit 1
Shrinking growth rates with competitiveness rising as market penetration increases

Market Competitiveness Index (HHI) & Penetration as Percentage of Population (Selected Middle East Markets, 2007–2012)

Note: CAGR = compound annual growth rate, HHI (Herfindahl-Hirschman Index) is a common measure of market competitiveness, calculated by summing up the squares of operators’ market shares — lower index reflects higher market competitiveness. UAE = United Arab Emirates.

1 These figures are for (2007–2009) and (2009–2012) respectively.

Source: Strategy&
Following the lead of mature markets, operators should adopt an analytical marketing approach, identifying pockets of value in the market, and then generating maximum possible returns from these small areas. The rationale behind this strategy is twofold. First, while various markets taken as a whole may have approached saturation, there remains pent-up demand in a multitude of niche segments. Second, by mining such segments, and intimately understanding what prompts the relevant customers to make a purchase and why, operators can increase profitability simply by adding together the marginal returns from every micro-segment.

Rejecting the one-size-fits-all mind-set of the past, some organizations have started to understand that they will need to develop a long-term relationship with each unique customer. More broadly, they are grappling with three sets of challenges and related questions.

**Boosting revenue:**

- How can the customer response rates to promotions be increased?
- How can customer loyalty be strengthened?
- How can unexploited pockets of revenue be spotted?
Reducing customer acquisition and retention costs:

- How can the effort and investment made to retain customers yield better results?
- How can the best potential customers be identified and then acquired?

Cutting the cost of service:

- How can campaign costs be reduced?
- How can communication costs be minimized without imposing a limit on the number of customers?

Having collected large amounts of data relating to customers’ profiles and communication behavior, operators are in an ideal position to respond to these challenges. The answer already lies within their grasp, from what is commonly referred to as Big Data.

We refer to the process of mining Big Data for such commercial purposes as analytical marketing. Such activities involve extracting commercially exploitable insights from every data set in order to improve understanding of individual customers and their behavior, as well as of the general dynamics of the market and its micro-segments.

With the enhanced awareness that comes from analytical marketing, operators can develop completely tailored value propositions that specifically cater to individual customer needs, and reduce the overall cost to serve. To give two examples:

- A customer in the United Arab Emirates is frequently sending texts to his friend in Oman; the mobile operator detects his behavior and offers an additional service with discounted international rates to Oman.
- A customer is downloading her favorite show on her tablet; the mobile operator offers an additional service to improve the quality of service and the speed of download.

Incorporating analytical marketing into the organization entails making data mining a priority, a major shift in operators’ marketing practices. Only when information is mined out of aggregated data does it become
invaluable in helping operators to stamp out inaccurate assumptions about customer behavior and market trends. The transition from mass marketing to analytical marketing (see Exhibit 2) also implies among other changes:

- **Target segment**: Operators need to move from the aggregate to the unique customer level in their targeting efforts.

- **Appeal**: Operators must cater for latent needs that are specific to each individual customer, or a small group of customers, carefully tailoring their value proposition.

- **Communication style**: Communication needs to move from broadcast to narrowcast, with a focus on developing an individualized communication channel.

- **Communication effectiveness**: Operators should stop relying on retrospective, aggregated campaign assessments and replace them with near-to-real-time, highly specific evaluation of customer responses, thus honing the lessons learned about a campaign’s effectiveness and commercial success.

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**Exhibit 2**
 Increased customer-centricity is forcing the transition to analytical marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Segment</th>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>Value Proposition</th>
<th>Data Mining</th>
<th>Communication Style</th>
<th>Communication Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass marketing</td>
<td>Any customer is a good customer</td>
<td>Evident needs</td>
<td>Broad value proposition — “build it &amp; they will come”</td>
<td>We aggregate the data we have</td>
<td>Broadcasting to the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical marketing</td>
<td>Each customer cluster has a different addressable value</td>
<td>Evident &amp; latent needs</td>
<td>Value proposition tailored to each target customer’s needs</td>
<td>We mine the data we have at the deepest level possible</td>
<td>Building relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Strategy&
Getting the most out of analytical marketing

Analytical marketing methods have demonstrated proven results in markets that are becoming saturated. The techniques of analytical marketing run through the entire marketing cycle (see Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3  
Customer analytics can be applied across the entire marketing value chain

Analytical Marketing Offerings Along the Marketing Value Chain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insights</th>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Product development</th>
<th>Channel strategy</th>
<th>Pricing</th>
<th>Commercial strategy</th>
<th>Sales</th>
<th>Product experience</th>
<th>Post sales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio risk analysis</td>
<td>Brand, portfolio &amp; product innovation</td>
<td>Channel optimization</td>
<td>Profitability analysis</td>
<td>Trade &amp; marketing effectiveness</td>
<td>Loyalty program design/optimization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer segmentation</td>
<td>Device subsidy optimization</td>
<td>Time-to-market improvement</td>
<td>Supply chain management</td>
<td>Promotions optimization</td>
<td>Range &amp; assortment optimization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer value analysis</td>
<td>Geo-marketing integration</td>
<td>Web commerce analysis</td>
<td>Posted pricing (I.E., B2C pricing)</td>
<td>Media 2.0 strategy</td>
<td>Customer experience optimization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product synergy development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk management</td>
<td>BTL promotions program &amp; revenue uplift initiatives</td>
<td>Commercial channel optimization</td>
<td>Sales footprint optimization</td>
<td>Granular performance monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granular demand forecast/ smart broadband deployment</td>
<td>Gamification strategy</td>
<td>Distribution optimization</td>
<td>Vendor performance analysis</td>
<td>Predictive churn management &amp; win-back campaigns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: B2C = business to consumer, B2B = business to business, BTL = below-the-line.  
Source: Strategy&
The three main phases of marketing are:

- **Upstream (researching market potential):** Applying analytical marketing techniques can help to identify and analyze existing needs, prompting new marketing concepts.

- **Midstream (preparing to go to market):** Analytical marketing can also help to accelerate the marketing cycle time by identifying the optimal offering and channel for a particular customer.

- **Downstream (going to market):** Using analytical marketing methods can markedly improve customer experience at those key moments that influence acquisition and retention.

Two examples of analytical marketing in action are from Turkcell and Verizon.

**Turkcell — Below-the-line promotions and revenue uplift programs:** Turkcell is a long-time player in the market, but by 2011 had been facing increasing challenges in customer retention, coupled with flattening subscription growth. In response, using the strength and creativity of its analytical teams, Turkcell introduced an initiative that provided the company with a new real-time view of the data from all its 34 million customers. Turkcell started to offer its customers the right product at the right time.

This solution resulted in the marketing cycle time being reduced from a matter of weeks to a matter of days, and an increase of approximately US$15 million in gross revenue in 2011.²

**Verizon — Sales footprint optimization:** In 2007, Verizon identified a growth opportunity in the midsized company market. This market had become highly competitive, and was also very fragmented, leading to an inefficient sales outreach process. To differentiate itself, Verizon decided to incorporate analytics into its operations, and identified micro-segments with different service needs and preferences. The operator tailored its offerings and selected the appropriate sales channel for all customers.

Two years later, Verizon’s targeted campaigns generated 25 percent more revenue than generic campaigns. The number of sales went up by 250 percent year on year.³

Operators must build their data management capabilities — data collection and cleansing, storage and ease of access.
Preparing the organization for analytical marketing

The analytics-based approach requires a far-reaching transformation within various aspects of the marketing function, in particular three areas: data gathering, insight generation, and customer interaction.

Data gathering: Capabilities for data capture and storage have to be second to none, enabling quality data mining to register a positive impact on IT and network operations.

Insight generation: Dedicated marketing teams should be trained in the skill of hypothesis formulation and confirmation. There is currently a great shortage of people in the marketplace who can translate raw data into meaningful conclusions that generate revenue opportunities.

Customer interaction: Decision-making processes should be made more efficient, allowing for a multitude of market simulation initiatives to be run concurrently, and adjusted on an ongoing basis according to user response.

Operators should embark on a major change program for marketing, revolving around five key capabilities:

First, operators must build their data management capabilities — data collection and cleansing, storage and ease of access. Doing so provides comprehensive, reliable data assets that are amenable to analysis. This project demands close collaboration between commercial and IT functions so that the right systems and software for business needs can be acquired.

Second, operators should strengthen the analytical prowess of the organization through improving micro-segmentation and profiling capabilities. Expertise in dissecting data is necessary, but not sufficient. Relevant business acumen, built around an intimate understanding of telecom customers, is also essential.

Indeed, the marketing function as a whole must undergo a process of commercialization, becoming more nimble and responsive to customer
needs. New ideas must be encouraged and then disseminated quickly, resulting in a more efficient decision-making process where the commercial concepts with the highest potential are seized upon without delay.

Fourth, better product design capabilities are necessary to accelerate the marketing cycle. Marketers should be trained in all areas of design — innovation sourcing, pricing, economic analysis, product prototyping, testing — and encouraged to introduce innovations throughout the product/service delivery chain. Such innovation can be made possible only by flexible network and IT platforms that allow complex products to be implemented quickly.

Lastly, operators should foster adaptive learning capabilities, with more accurate measurement of the effectiveness of marketing activities by means of performance tracking and efficient feedback, and through strengthening the ROI (return on investment) mind-set within the marketing function.

This transformation program may at first seem complex. However, operators often fail to realize that they already possess most of these capabilities — they simply need to be refined and unleashed. Success will eventually hinge on the interaction between three core enablers — people, systems, and processes — across all capabilities (see Exhibit 4, page 13).
Exhibit 4
Building differentiated analytical marketing capabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enablers</th>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Desired end states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Data Management</td>
<td>IT team with consolidated view on all data sources &amp; clear understanding of business needs</td>
<td>Reliable system infrastructure, allowing real-time data update &amp; management</td>
<td>Coordinated, strict &amp; frequently tested data gathering, cleansing &amp; storage mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Micro-Segmentation</td>
<td>Qualified “hypothesis-driven” marketers – encouraged to innovate &amp; synchronize with marketing strategy</td>
<td>Advanced yet user-friendly &amp; reliable analysis tools</td>
<td>Dynamic segmentation framework, frequently updated &amp; monitored over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Commercialization</td>
<td>“Empowered” marketers – encouraged to innovate &amp; synchronize with marketing strategy</td>
<td>Knowledge-sharing platform, promoting innovation &amp; increasing collaboration</td>
<td>Streamlined ideation process, allowing for faster decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Product Design</td>
<td>Qualified product managers, trained on design best practices (pricing, etc.)</td>
<td>Flexible &amp; adaptive technical platforms, able to deliver against product manager needs</td>
<td>Streamlined service development life cycle – ensuring coordination between commercial &amp; technical teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adaptive Learning</td>
<td>Cultural mind-set based on performance monitoring (ROI per initiative), adaptive learning &amp; know-how sharing</td>
<td>Real-time reporting &amp; performance tracking systems</td>
<td>Top-down support for program institutionalization &amp; continuous development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ROI = Return on Investment.
Source: Strategy&
Conclusion

The deluge of customer information is just beginning. Every digital packet transmitted through the operators’ network is a potential source of information. When this is combined with customer information from external sources (such as from social networks, or from online shopping and behavior), companies will attain a more holistic view of customers’ lifestyle and preferences.

Telecom companies will have a natural advantage in the new era of Big Data, as they possess more customer knowledge than their counterparts in a range of other industries. As a result, they have a growing number of monetization opportunities. However, many operators still have a great deal of catching up to do. The race is on.
Endnotes


5 For an example of such opportunities, see Telefónica’s latest Telefónica Dynamic Insights venture, which proposes to sell anonymized subscriber insights to third-party entities (http://tinyurl.com/c2mufby).
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