



## The New Push-Pull Marketing

*By Jean Van Rensselar*

Online/digital promotion has completely changed the definition of *Push-Pull Marketing*. Marketing strategies - such as emotional appeals - that have been sound for decades are now obsolete.

The textbook Push-Pull definitions are roughly this:

- Push marketing refers to marketing through the supply chain – specifically by incentivizing wholesalers and distributors - rather than marketing directly to consumers.
- Pull marketing is marketing directly to the consumer.

But marketers have broadly been referring to Push marketing as what happens when the company seeks out the consumer and Pull as what happens when the consumer seeks out the company.

It used to be that successful marketers tried to strike a balance between Push and Pull marketing, but online the Push is all but gone. Online, the main function of Push is to ignite the Pull – it's a small, but very important role. And the difference between the old Pull and the new Pull is that successful online Pull is completely devoid of any marketing message.

Online, the Push strategy creates a following and buzz, while the Pull strategy creates awareness and – hopefully – demand. For example, websites and blogs are Pull – they create awareness and keep the company brand in front of consumers without aggressive marketing. But without the promotion of Push, websites and blogs would never get off the ground. Consumers need to find out that the blog exists and they need to have some reason to participate.

Companies typically launch a big Push campaign to announce the medium and then, once participation becomes viral, they focus on the Pull – enhancing the site with consumer-friendly features and offers that they hope visitors can't resist.

## The Sharp Decline of Overt Marketing

Most consumers will reject overt marketing online and most companies know this. They know this, but few can resist spinning facts their way or squeezing in a 2 x 2 ad on their blog's landing page. They don't know when it's time to stop pushing.

There's this definition of insanity: *doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result*. Sane people do that, though, because they don't know what else to do – especially when they're in a bind. If you've ever been stuck in sub-freezing weather with a dying car battery, you know what I mean. Even though you're fairly sure the car isn't going to start, you keep pumping the gas pedal and turning the key in the ignition because you don't know what else to do – and there is that faint hope that it might work. But you keep doing it until the battery is completely dead.

That's about where marketing is right now.

Companies continue with the heavy pitch online because they don't know what else to do. They can't really believe that the way marketing, advertising, and PR have worked for the last 50 years is over – online at least.

As a consultant, it's difficult to make clients understand why I can't squeeze a few subtle promotions into online posts and articles. They don't see the harm and they don't see the point of creating marketing materials that don't market the way they know and love. But research results are very clear about what consumers respond to online.

So what *do* consumers want? They want to learn – it's really that simple.

The drive to learn and grow – to be a better person – is a basic building block of psychological health. Online consumers gravitate toward sites and tools that help them do that. They inherently know the difference between truth and spin, between altruism and self-interest.

## Some Examples

Online Push marketing often involves short-term strategies for specific event or time-based campaigns while Pull marketing develops trust and demonstrates value. Here are some examples.

Push	Pull
(Company seeks consumer)	(Consumer seeks company)
Email	Search engine optimization
Twitter	Adwords
Online display ads	Website
	Blog
	Forum
	Facebook

There are many more Pull than Push opportunities online - even email and Twitter require consumers to opt in – meaning they both have Pull components. Twitter is especially interesting because it's the only widely used social media tool that was originally designed to directly access consumers – and it's this direct company-to-consumer access that makes it a Push rather than Pull medium.

When is it OK to Push?

Consumers understand that some Push marketing is essential at the beginning of a campaign. You won't turn off most people by sending out a regular email blast announcing and promoting a new blog and you won't turn off most people by sending out email and Tweet promotions that those people will predictably be interested in – a sale preview announcement to opt-in email customers.

In other words, online the main purposes of Push marketing are to promote Pull marketing efforts and reach consumers who have asked to be notified of events and promotions.

Push and the Undisciplined Spin

Spin – which some call *looking on the bright side* (the spin on spin) - doesn't work online. But industries have been spinning for so long that they can't separate spin from fact.

I did some PR work for the funeral industry and was astonished to realize that they truly believe that the amount of money families spend on funerals is directly proportional to their love for the deceased. They'd been spinning this tale in their heads for so long that they actually believed it was true. It's not just the funeral industry – all industries do this. They mistake the spin for the truth. The mistake is believing that if you repeat a lie long enough it becomes true. But consumers can smell self-interest a mile away – they see the Push and they don't like it.

The Push-based professions are perennial favorites on the consumer mistrust list:

- Car salespeople
- Real estate agents
- Attorneys
- Politicians
- Televangelists

Nurses, farmers, and teachers are never on the list. Why? Because consumers know that they don't aggressively market their products and services – they aren't salespeople.

So what do consumers do when they see something they don't like? The same thing you do – they click away instantly. A company can post an extremely compelling article about how to shop for a home alarm system and then kill the whole piece by finishing with; *Someone may be breaking into your home right now.*

Choose where you want to Push selectively and Push wisely.

What Does the Online Pull Look Like?

It looks like you're helping consumers, because you actually are.

In online Pull marketing, the recipients of the message are in control of the message. Pull marketing requires information to be available on consumers' terms, when and where they want it, rather than when and where it's convenient for the resource providers to deliver it. Pull marketing involves the development of a visible brand that consumers trust.

Online, Pull marketing is likely to be much more fruitful than Push marketing attempts only as long as the Pull message is not contaminated with Push. A consumer who comes to a company

online through Pull marketing and is impressed by the content, generally becomes a loyal fan and a great source of word-of-mouth advertising.

So What Does all This Mean in the Offline World?

What offline world? Most print and digital marketing materials will eventually appear online. Someone will post a brochure to a website, salespeople will email sell sheets, managers will use informational videos for podcasts, etc.

When you plan offline marketing materials, you have to assume that they will find their way into the digital world. This means be sparing with the Push and pay careful attention to the Pull both online and offline.

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Social media is creating small groups of demographically identifiable traffic. This presents marketers with a chance to introduce and demonstrate brand value to a precise group of core prospects. It's an excellent opportunity that no one should waste.

For more information related to Push-Pull Marketing read:

Thought Leadership

[http://www.smartprcommunications.com/files/Thought\\_Leadersip.pdf](http://www.smartprcommunications.com/files/Thought_Leadersip.pdf)

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