



Marketing Society Excellence Awards 2016

Category Q:
Business To Business Marketing

Entry title:
The Thunderhead: kicking up a storm across the unadventurous software landscape

Thursday 18th February

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Executive Summary

We're Thunderhead, a cloud-based tech company, with a revolutionary customer engagement product. You may have heard of us, but maybe you haven't... yet. This is the story of how we kicked up a storm across the unadventurous software landscape.

Scale of task:

As dawn broke on 2015, so did the realisation that to conquer the 'customer engagement' market Thunderhead had to change. Until now, we were guilty of conforming to traditional B2B software practices with bland, unadventurous, undifferentiated and often confusing marketing. Something had to quickly change.

Where our competitors talk to the IT crowd in a classic B2B dry, dull, rational and feature-led way this entry tells how we disrupted the software landscape by talking about a complex subject/product to a brand new audience in a creative, emotive, customer-centric and benefit-led way.

Unfortunately, this new audience had never heard of us, let alone appreciated the power of our product.

Objective:

Completely change the way we market ourselves, shifting away from B2B clichéd marketing and take a B2B-2C approach that would 'prick the ears' of a newly defined audience of marketers, earning their admiration for the work we do and an interest in the product we offer.

Key results:

From an unknown brand with zero customers signed to our engagement product, to a brand making waves amongst the marketing community, grabbing marketing headlines and securing a number of high profile customers and partners along the way, plus building a healthy pipeline of both.

Executive summary word count: 243

Our entry comprises 3 sections:

- A bit about us
- Our new brand approach
- What we achieved in 2015

A bit about us

Customers don't talk to you because they like you, they talk to you because they need something; they need it now and on the platform that suits them. At Thunderhead we join up web, mobile, high street and contact centre customer experiences, connecting them with a brand's existing CRM system giving them a multi-dimensional view of their customers. We allow brands to act on the right customer need at the right time. For the first time, customer relationships can be effectively managed at scale enabling brands to interact with customers as individuals. Customer engagement just got personal.

OK, it'll never pass an elevator pitch, maybe in The Shard, but that's what we do, and this is the short version. Fundamentally, here lies the challenge.

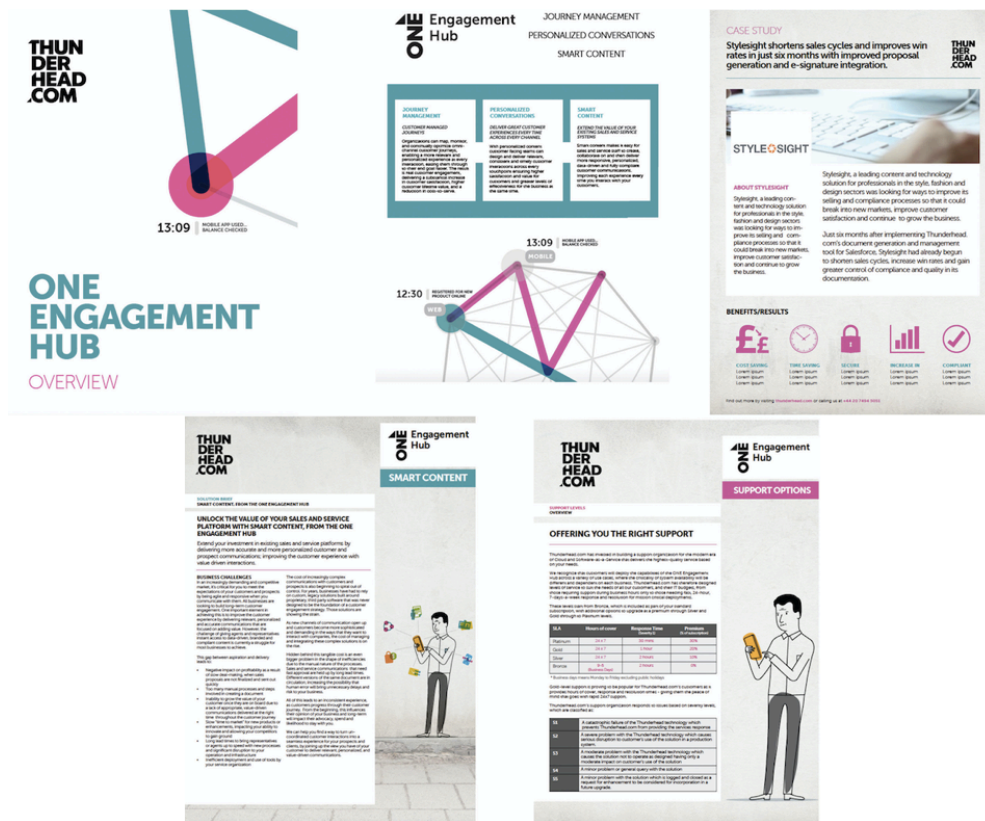
Our marketing position pre-2015:

To highlight the issue, let's pop back to 2014 when we focused our marketing entirely around traditional B2B methods.

Our marketing consisted of flat packed stands at trade events with TV screen demos, innocuous colour pallets and branded USB sticks for the 'hottest' lead; wordy direct mail packed with technical patter; indecipherable white papers and pay-per-click pop-ups lurking in the shadows of the net, ready to jump at someone searching 'customer engagement'.

Jaw jarring jargon overshadowed key product messages, a competitive point of difference was difficult to

pinpoint and the notion of a brand beyond a logo was unheard of. Our marketing efforts pre-2015 blended into the mire of typical B2B dredge, remove our logo and you'd be hard pressed to pick us out of an identity parade with: HP, Salesforce, Oracle and IBM.



We were also so proud of our product that we overlooked just how fledgling the notion of 'customer engagement' was and were guilty of discussing it in a foreign language. What's more, the definition of 'customer engagement' varied from provider to provider, brand to brand and even the oracle Wikipedia gives a wayward synopsis.

[Our new brand approach](#)

On 1st January 2015 we switched every communications channel off and as a brand 'went dark' for 3 months, during which time we scrutinised, researched, developed and re-defined our...

- Brand promise/values: Thunderhead's **cleverness**, makes customer engagement **effortless**, which delivers customer **happiness**.
- Audience: CMO's of innovative, forward-thinking businesses who know that a more engaged customer is a happier customer.
- Approach: Be disruptive; behave like a challenger brand with a B2B-2C mindset.
- **Objective: Prick the ears of this audience and be admired by the marketing community**

Our people

"It takes great effort to be effortless at anything." As a marketing team, we were masters of the brand's wider reaching destiny, but we could derail everything unless we involved our staff from the outset. It was of the utmost importance that everyone from sales to HR were behind us and worked with us to employ this new

strategy across the business. So we...

1. Presented our new strategy to the entire business before anything launched.
2. Audited all sales and marketing materials, introducing simpler language.
3. Overhauled all our brand touch-points – website, PR, comms, brand identity, filtering them through our values.
4. Encouraged everyone to change their language, behaviours and working style to appropriately fit our new strategy.

Our 'dark' months resulted in the launch of Thunderhead's first brand campaign. Introducing *The Thunderhead*, a cloud dwelling genius and the personification of our product. He is the intervention, the cure to a brand's customer relationship problems.

The Thunderhead had 3 strategic roles:

1. Grab the attention of marketers, announcing Thunderhead as the solution to 'better engaged customers'.
2. Communicate key product attributes and benefits in a refreshingly different way.
3. Be creatively bold; start marketing tongues wagging.

Phase 1 - Unleashing *The Thunderhead*

In April 2015 we introduced marketers to Thunderhead, in a way that could be easily understood and would allow key product benefits to shine. Our launch campaign was a simple product demonstration, but a bonkers one. Leaping down from his home in the cloud, *The Thunderhead* comes to the rescue of a car salesman, lacking customer knowledge, and teetering on the edge of losing a sale. Cue *The Thunderhead* who provides the relevant insight and uses intuition to suggest other products the customer might like.

Brand film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oXABTjoYPc>



The Thunderhead was unleashed in the opening ad spot during the final series of *Mad Men* and ran there for 5 weeks. Given the epic scale of the creative, he also ran in cinemas for three weeks, and was supported with online seeding to help reach our target audience in both the UK and US.

In June *The Thunderhead* landed on the French Riviera; with the cream of global marketing heads attending Cannes Lions 2015 it presented the perfect opportunity to get amongst our audience. And true to our new values we did, with three ideas:

Effortless: Armed with a fleet of Bentley's, *The Thunderhead* enabled CMOs attending the festival to travel hassle free around Cannes, a notoriously difficult place to get around during award season. A free ride was just a tweet away and a pre-Cannes email held the 'ticket-to-ride'.

Cleverness: We held court on the Lions Innovation Stage with an audience of 50 marketers, an invaluable opportunity to present our technology - 'thank you' to the Unilever Foundry.

Happiness: *The Thunderhead* has a passion for music, so where better to throw a party, and some shapes, than the at Cannes Connect Bar, which we sponsored for an evening.

Cannes Lions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjWdKHYvQX8>



Phase 2 - Journey with *The Thunderhead*

The Thunderhead had started to create waves, now was the time to pull our audience closer, asking them to step in and experience our product first hand.

At the Festival of Marketing (FOM) 2015 we invited 3,000 marketers to journey through *The Thunderhead*'s world 'Above The Clouds', a 360 degree, **effortless** and immersive experience that transported marketers from the real world into a virtual one, using Oculus Rift technology.

The metamorphic journey educated marketers (**cleverness**) of the benefits of Thunderhead, demonstrating our ability to *listen, understand, act and learn* about an individual customer throughout their on-and-offline journey, in real-time.

Above The Clouds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTsBF-xhNHo>



To extend 'Above The Clouds' beyond FOM we identified key targets who had shown a deeper interest in us at the festival. The following week 100 senior marketers received a Thunderhead branded Google Cardboard (**happiness**) in the post, coinciding with an activation email in their inbox to relive the experience. Follow up calls were arranged for the second and third week, these calls were undertaken by our sales team and were suddenly far less 'cold' than they once were.

What we achieved in 2015

Phase 1 results

Within a minute of *The Thunderhead* airing, traffic to our website soared; April 2015 saw a 209% increase in average daily visits... People wanted to know more.

We've had circa 400,000 YouTube views of the brand film (4m counting Facebook). Yes, these views were paid for, but this helped ensure that we were talking to the correct audience. A week later a Land Rover dealership called wanting to see how we could help them... Importantly, it was the right people who wanted to know more.

A string of naughts sounds impressive, but actually, the effect that had internally was the real success. Scrutiny on the marketing department to deliver their 'wild' new strategy was intense, and impressive viewing figures alleviated any initial concerns the CEO had, this helped pave the way for phase 2.

Phase 2 results

Over 2 days at FOM, a third of festival goers took a virtual journey with us. On the day we gave away 250 Thunderhead branded Google Cardboards, with instructions to follow/tweet in return for a link to re-live the experience - 33% obliged and our social scores spiked: 207 mentions and 50 new followers, importantly the majority of these new followers were marketers and thus individuals who we would continue to share content with.

The real business success came from the 100 marketers we emailed and sent Google Cardboards to after the event. We achieved a 38% open rate and 32% click-through rate, a level of engagement far beyond any that Thunderhead had previously recorded. But so what? Well, with 'warm' follow up calls made the following week we secured meetings with marketing decision makers at:

- Virgin Holidays
- William Hill

- Bravissimo
- YPO
- The Financial Times
- O2

Overall results

Of our 2015 objective, we've undoubtedly changed our approach to marketing and in the process have certainly 'pricked the ears' of our target audience of senior marketers, many are talking about us and a fair few are now talking to us. And the wider marketing community are certainly reading about us, with 20 articles featured in leading marketing trade titles during 2015.

Our success at this point should be judged by the number of customers secured in 2015:

- Marston's
- Saga
- Titan Travel
- ██████████ - Premier League Football Club
- ██████████ - European utility company
- SSAT

We've also engineered a pipeline of well over 100 leads including ██████████ ██████████ and ██████████. Many conversations remain in progress given our 9month average sales cycle.

Our partner program also flourished in 2015, with consultancies and agencies keen to find out more about us, The Thunderhead and importantly our customer engagement solution.

This extended family includes global management consultancies, system integrators and agencies, as well as enterprise technology and emerging platform and data companies. We now partner with: agencies like SapientNitro, Rufus Leonard, Fearlessly Frank, AMV BBDO; specialist consultancies like CRM Partners, QA Consulting, Dicitas Consulting, BrightONE; management consultancies like PwC, Accenture, Capgemini; technology companies like Microsoft, Salesforce and Localz.

Partners are a critical part of our business, helping unlock the true potential of customer engagement and ensuring our customers get the most from their investment. They also help us scale more quickly, supporting the growing number of customers wanting to deploy Thunderhead into their businesses.

The luxury of our 'SME' status is that we work incredibly closely across all business disciplines. Attributing success per department is therefore redundant and to say that one department was responsible for a particular customer win would do a disservice to the wider team - every success is a shared success here.

Our real win was our ability to employ a new brand strategy that subsequently became our business strategy. Having united behind it we are witnessing growth.

Testimonials:

What Mike McMinn, CMO Marston's had to say about us. *"In some ways it's been quite remarkable, we've found out a lot about our customers that we didn't know before. There is code embedded in the websites, both the pub and the corporate one, and from the activity of the user we're able to determine a lot about their individual preferences likes and dislikes. The marketing we produce targeting those individuals is now more precise and personal. This is key for us, you can't make friends with somebody unless you know something about them."*

Of the email sent from The Thunderhead to delegates heading to Cannes Lions 2015 Geoff Seeley, Global Media Director at Unilever said:

"Whilst I won't be requiring the services of a Bentley I would like to congratulate you on easily the best pre-Cannes marketing I've seen this year!"

Of our virtual reality experience exhibited at the Festival of Marketing, an IBM Marketing Manager said: *"You really want to know why we're all at your experience room and not ours? The reason is because our room is crap, this is how we should be doing our marketing."*

Of our virtual reality experience exhibited at the Festival of Marketing, Nicky Holt, MD Centaur said: *"This is how to have an impact and stand head and shoulders above everyone else at a marketing festival, Thunderhead's experience room was the most visited room of any brand there by a country mile. We'd love to use Thunderhead as a best practice case study."*

Word count (excluding summary): 1,996