

the Long and SHORT of It



Planning is one of the least sexy aspects of life as a marketer, but toeing the line between long-term planning and reactionary real-time marketing is nonnegotiable.

By Tim Sweeney

In theory, a marketing department sets its plans for the year around a solidified budget, landmark events, large-scale paid media campaigns, product launches, and even sales. That's "in theory." As any marketer will tell you, budgets are made to be slashed, events get cancelled, and product launches move forward and backward or get dropped altogether. For those reasons—as well as the fact that today's news cycle moves at warp speed—balancing long-term planning with real-time opportunities is more crucial to your marketing success than ever before.

"I view our marketing team as a newsroom, and our brand calendar as an editorial calendar that ensures we're delivering timely,



relevant, and engaging content," says **Chris Koske, Chief Marketing Officer** at GOLFTEC, a company that provides worldwide locations where golfers can get instruction with the aid of technology and data-

driven feedback. "Having a structured calendar is key. Even when we have to adjust, it helps us manage what potential opportunities we say yes or no to. It allows us to shift content without losing focus, ensuring that every piece still supports our broader marketing goals."

While the propensity to think more like a news team and less like a traditional marketing team is certainly not something that applies to every industry, it is becoming more common within corporate industries.

"I 100 percent see this trend in the work I do with clients," says **Annie Gould-Magee**,



a UK-based strategic advisor on marketing and corporate communications who specializes in reputation management, audience engagement, and brand positioning. "What I also see is that, even if nearly all clients know very

well what's coming in the next year, they often don't plan well enough ahead of time because they think, 'Oh, we have six months to create this content.'"

For global brands, proper planning means having a top-level yearly calendar as well as local calendars aligned with the overall company strategy, objectives, and global initiatives. Your calendar should also have a task manager and deadlines, be easy to edit, be shareable, allow for comments, and offer as much granularity as you want to give—potentially right down to your planned social media posts.



At Polar Electronics, a Finnish brand that makes wearable electronics, including watches, sensors, and other accessories, **Chief Marketing Officer Anssi Mäkelä** >

says his team's brand calendar is intended to make marketing objectives transparent, easy to follow, and easily adaptable. Polar starts the process by identifying brand storytelling opportunities, seasonal campaigns, commercial product launches, and current events that will be relevant to the brand. From there, they leave space to read and react to what pops up.

"Let's face it: the yearly top-level plan isn't something you would like to change constantly, because that will drive everybody nuts," Mäkelä says. "For us, the calendar is always in the background and we work around it, but it is not a fixed contract. We want to have enough elements in our brand calendar so that actions, initiatives, campaigns, and product launches are clear for teams to adapt to suit their needs, whether that is the sales team or teams in local markets, but you need to have flexibility and the ability to react."

Allowing room to adapt is all well and good, but Gould-Magee says that even companies who excel at long-term planning and on-the-fly adaptability often forget one crucial element: "One thing many brands don't do when they create their marketing plans is save that 10 percent of budget or whatever they might need for things they don't see coming," she explains. "Adaptability doesn't just mean being able to create content for social reactions you will want to use in real time. It also means having the budget approval process all set up for those funds to be used in the moment, so you can execute quickly."

For companies such as GOLFTEC that react and use the momentum or conversations created by news items or events (golf related, in this case), flexibility is critical. Keeping with the newsroom mentality, Koske says weekly creative meetings are more like editorial meetings where the team reviews what's launching, what's trending in golf, and where the company can pivot. The

GOLFTEC brand calendar is central to those discussions, which keeps the team aligned with priorities and execution, and the items that populate the calendar are driven by what meets the audience's needs.

"We always leave room for shifts," Koske says. "Product delays, last-minute retail promotions, or global events can require quick pivots, but because our calendar is built like an editorial road map, we can move things around without losing sight of our core messaging."

GOLFTEC also owns SKYTRAK, a golf simulator that can be installed right in your home. Even if both brands cater to golfers, they have distinct audiences and, therefore, nuanced marketing strategies and timelines. Armed with a statistic from the National Golf Foundation that 68 percent of golfers return to YouTube for instruction, Koske and his marketing team drive their GOLFTEC marketing strategy with content that is as much about lead generation as it is about



Reacting IN REAL TIME

Annie Gould-Magee Offers

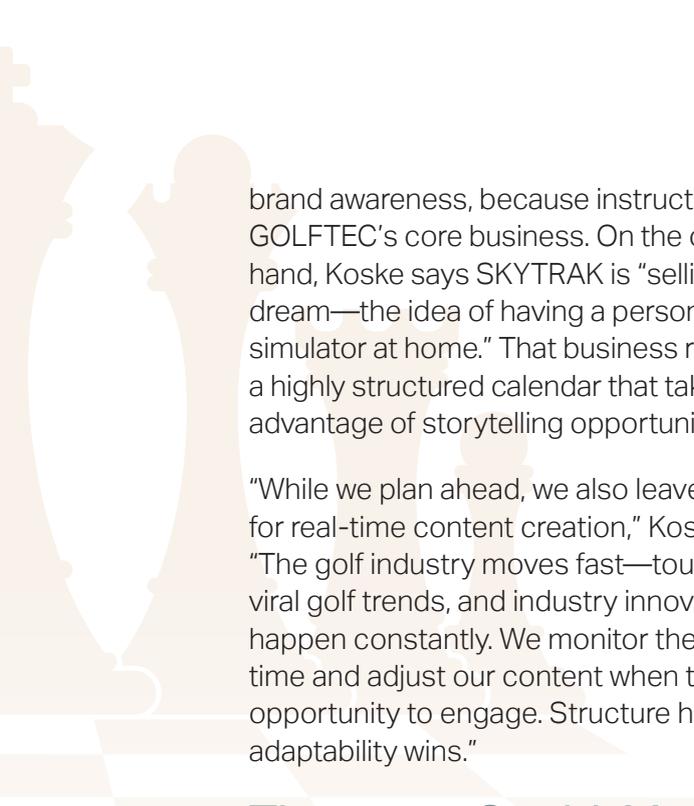
4 TIPS to Get Your Marketing in the Moment Up to Speed

1 Step in Their Shoes

This sounds basic, but not enough people do it. Brands really need to put themselves in the shoes of their customers. Be the audience you want to reach, which means moving away from what you want to say versus what they want to hear.

2 Click "Subscribe"

Sign up for and read newsletters that focus on consumer campaigns. Newsletters such as *The Hustle* can be super helpful. Tell yourself: "I'm going to read this at the end of each week so I know what's going on in the wider world and see how people will comment on what's happening." You will start to learn what is culturally relevant and how you can be part of the conversation. Then ask yourself: "How can we recreate that? What do we have coming up over the next year where we can apply the same approach?"



brand awareness, because instruction is GOLFTEC's core business. On the other hand, Koske says SKYTRAK is "selling a dream—the idea of having a personal golf simulator at home." That business requires a highly structured calendar that takes advantage of storytelling opportunities.

"While we plan ahead, we also leave room for real-time content creation," Koske says. "The golf industry moves fast—tour news, viral golf trends, and industry innovations happen constantly. We monitor these in real time and adjust our content when there's an opportunity to engage. Structure helps, but adaptability wins."

This, says Gould-Magee, is a savvy approach that not enough brands are taking.

"I see so many brands—certainly corporate brands, but also many consumer brands—that are inward looking," Gould-Magee says. "Brands are too focused on what they want to tell others and don't recognize that

no one cares. Very few people are following brands so closely that they are so keen on their updates. People are looking at cultural trends, responding to news of the moment, and [sharing] memes. If companies aren't seeing that and responding, they are missing out."

Gould-Magee believes that if more marketing teams were structured differently—with communications and marketing teams operating under the same umbrella—those brands would be better suited to capitalize on opportunistic moments. "We can't keep marketing and comms separate anymore," she says.

Mäkelä, who hails from a social media background, says that because new channels and mediums have completely changed how people communicate online—even in the last five years—the potential for how brands communicate in return is also evolving. To achieve the level of reactivity required to be part of the conversation, he emphasizes the importance of processes, people, and organizational structure to govern real-time responses. "I think you will see more and more companies using automated AI tools that allow you to 'teach' the language and responses to match your brand tone of voice," Mäkelä says. "These are tools that will make it easier and faster with a hint of help from machines."

So where does a brand calendar live that can be built around long-term planning and augmented with opportunistic marketing moments? Excel is one enduring option, but spreadsheets have never been the favorite domain of marketers. It's always a good idea to see what tools exist within your company before upsetting the folks in IT, but **Trello**, **Asana**, **Monday.com**, **Microsoft Planner**, and similar platforms can provide great functionality for brand calendars and even team tasks.

Just remember, as Mäkelä says, "It's also a good idea to put some policies in place to manage how things happen inside the tool." ■

3 Mimic What Works

Ask yourself: "Whom are we comparing ourselves to?" Then, look at brands that saw great reach on things outside of product launches. If a brand in another space did something effective, why not mimic it and apply it to your own world, especially if you operate in a corporate industry? Corporate learning from consumer businesses is an underutilized resource.

4 Rely on Your Partners

Smaller businesses without in-house resources always ask: "Who will monitor for these trends so we can be more reactive with our marketing and communications?" This is where agencies should be shifting to help clients. A PR agency, for example, is not just about outreach and placing stories today; they should be monitoring trends that your brand should jump on quickly.