# MATTHEW PELOQUIN

Case Study

Higher Learning Technologies – Growth & Marketing Strategies

About:

I'm a marketing executive and data-driven strategist with over 20 years of experience guiding growth for B2C and B2B products and services. Seven of those years have been focused on the e-learning space, driving B2C enrollment for such institutions as Stevenson University, where I devised strategies for the entire online program for enrollments, as well as the University of Phoenix and the criminal justice Master's program for University of Cincinnati. I've continued working in the e-learning space for the past two years, devising strategies for over 100 e-learning products at Higher Learning Technologies, and most recently a catalog of approximately 50 continuing education programs at Relias for ContinuingEducation.com and Nurse.com.
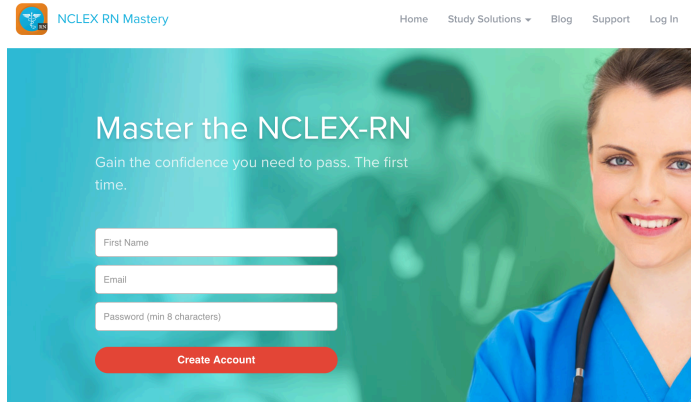
The Challenge:

Higher Learning Technologies (HLT) provides digital certification preparation programs ranging from NCLEX for nursing students, to NBDE board preparation for dentists, to ASVAB prep courses for those in the military. In Q4 of the previous year, HLT had switched from a one-time e-learning program purchase format, to a subscription model. Sales were initially impacted negatively and company revenues hit hard due to the primarily mobile product out-performing web subscriptions, as both Google and Apple claimed their 30% cut of the subscription price. The goal was to devise and execute marketing strategies to increase overall growth while also aiming to increase the proportion of subscriptions that were web-based versus the nearly existing 99% mobile share.

The Solution:

Strategy:

Create a multi-faceted marketing program across email, content marketing, organic and paid social, SEO, paid search, Apple Search and Google UAC, that would position HLT as the leader in the e-learning space for certification preperation. In building the reputation, HLT would increase their presence to better capitalize on organic and referral acquisitions, to be supplemented by paid efforts. In creating specific incentives for web-purchases for site visitors, potential customers would be more likely to purchase via web rather than mobile, aiding to the second priority of prioritizing web purchases, and the third goal of subscriber retention to increase LTV.

This strategy was derived by seeing the opportunity for HLT to be the leader in specific verticals for e-learning prep courses, as no other company owned that distinction. With a limited budget, an emphasis would be placed on email, content and organic social efforts to build the brand engagement. As the nursing and dental verticals drove the highest revenue for the company, a combined 95%, these two concentrations would be the primary focus to absorb more market share. Five additional courses such as ASVAB were included in the overall strategy as when combined with Nursing and Dental, nearly 98% of the total revenue base would be included with the combined 7 product group.

For paid efforts, paid search would be allocated the highest proportion of the budget to ensure that all potential customers specifically searching for the HLT products would have the opportunity to engage with the HLT brands when SEO efforts were not able to position the product at the top of the search results.

Paid social efforts were used primarily to promote content marketing efforts and promotions.

Audiences:
Audiences were highly segmented across all marketing channels:

Email:
- Each product had a unique list for the program concentration
- List included solely those users who subscribed to the specific product
- Lists were further segmented by current subscribers versus prospecting leads
- Emails were scheduled weekly, prioritizing relevant content to current customers to keep them engaged while prospecting emails included the relevant content along with promotional discount offerings
- Email existing subscriber audience targeted with non-upsell content to aid retention efforts

Organic Social:
- Nursing product: daily posts with the audience with relevant nursing trends and data and social memes to increase engagement and organic page growth and exposure.

Paid Social:
- Audience targeting was very precise to reach those in the specific verticals such as nursing and dental
- Nursing vertical was prioritized on social, so the Facebook/Instagram "nursing" audience was the top target
- Social prospecting strategies used for initial touchpoint into the funnel
- Retargeting was utilized with targeted messaging based on where the user was in the sales cycle (prospecting or sign-up conversion, with converted sales audience excluded)

Paid Search:
- Campaigns were created for each product
- Adgroups used to highlight specific features or courses within each product vertical
- Adgroups created with keywords and ad copy maintaining a 100% relevant tie, to ensure all ads appearing for a given query are highly targeted, sending the user to a relevant landing page
- Campaigns established with A/B testing of different CTAs and CTA location on tested landing pages
- Retargeting was utilized with targeted messaging based on where the user was in the sales cycle (prospecting or sign-up conversion, with converted sales audience excluded)

Content Marketing:
- Audience segmented into aware and unaware categories
  - Unaware audience targeted with content aimed at introducing the HLT services per product as the majority of the overall audience do not know the elearning board preparation courses existed
  - Aware audience targeted with distinctions about the HTL products as to why HLT was an industry leader

SEO:
- General audience targeting based on top-targeted search terms

As the overall plan required utilizing audience segmentation for the goals of prospecting leads, conversion and retention, it became clear that retention efforts could be minimalized. The quality of the product performed the heavy-lifting as no paid efforts were needed for subscriber retention as LTV increased over time. The "retention" audience was that which could be de-prioritized.

Team Alignment:

Due to the nature of HLT being a startup and my role being in charge of all marketing strategies, the team was broken down into specific segments based on channel assignment. Each person had to work as a strategist but also handled some execution.

We were a tight-knit group with regular Slack and Meet meetings, including a week standup on Monday mornings and 1:1's scheduled every other week. At the end of each week, each member of the marketing team was assigned with submitting a PPP email (Progress, Plans, Problems) to make sure there was alignment across the team. Strategies were aligned during these sessions, responsibilities understood, and actions taken.

Team was structured with the following personnel:

- Marketing strategies: my role in guiding all growth strategies
- Financial projections: my role in establishing revenue projections, budget allocations based on data-driven decisions by channel performance
- Content writer: individual who wrote copy for email, content marketing and landing pages
- Email executions: individual who worked with the content writer to plan all product emails
- Social manager: individual who maintained the social community pages and executed my paid social strategies
- Paid Search and Mobile Search (Apple Search, Google UAC): executions of my strategies, implemented by myself or additional junior level marketing assistants.
- Design and Analytics liaison, a former member of the development team who was moved to marketing to ensure all tracking across web and mobile (GA, Localytics, Appsflyer, PowerBI) ran properly and as the project manager for site and app asset development.
- Data transparency: my role of creating company-wide dashboards for C-level visibility of all channel performance

For the planning of this overall strategy, each person was included for their feedback. There were many moving parts, so the importance was ensuring everyone was onboard with not just the strategy, but the process of it. Each step would involve many different tests. The idea was that just because someone had tried something in the past and it did not work, it did not take that idea off of the table. Testing was integral to the strategy. With the team aligned, we were ready to strategize and execute.

The key to supporting the overall strategy was in ensuring that the executions were consistent. In order to generate the sales figures desired, HLT needed to be a part of the conversation for all topics related to our top-performing products in the nursing and dental space.

Execution:

Implementation of the marketing initiatives was seamless. The team all owned their channels to ensure all the most important elements were taken care of. Emails were crafted to the ideal targeting audience, with sends on a regular schedule with well-prepared domains. The social community was well managed with daily engagements. Content was created and shared socially and via emails. Paid social campaigns launched with precision targeting, increasing both leads and direct subscriptions. Paid Search excelled as the top performing channel, driving the bulk of subscriptions. Retargeting on paid search and social served users unique messaging depending on where they were in the funnel, either a repeat visitor, or a signed-in account that had yet to convert to a sale.

The marketing team handled the majority of all efforts. With our liaison to the development team on staff, we had direct access to the team of designers and developers for both site and mobile app enhancements to aid in conversion optimization. The HLT content team, responsible for the online courses, assisted in providing relevant content to be used on a bi-weekly cadence.

The entire process existed without nearly a hiccup…with the exception of an unforeseen issue: when the Head of Finance forgets to update the credit cards being used for the paid media and the channels went dark for a few days. Startup growing pains.

Results:

Success at HLT came down to just one primary number: subscriptions. As the driver of revenue for a company looking to become profitable, getting new paid subscribers was key. With the introduction of secondary sites like MyNursingMastery, there was the opportunity for a longer term engagement with the customers for additional future products.

With the execution and dedication to nurturing leads throughout the entire funnel, having company-wide transparency with the data (dashboards and PowerBI), every person involved in the process from the marketing team to the CEO, COO and CFO were able to follow along every day, week and month to see how the company was performing financially from our efforts.
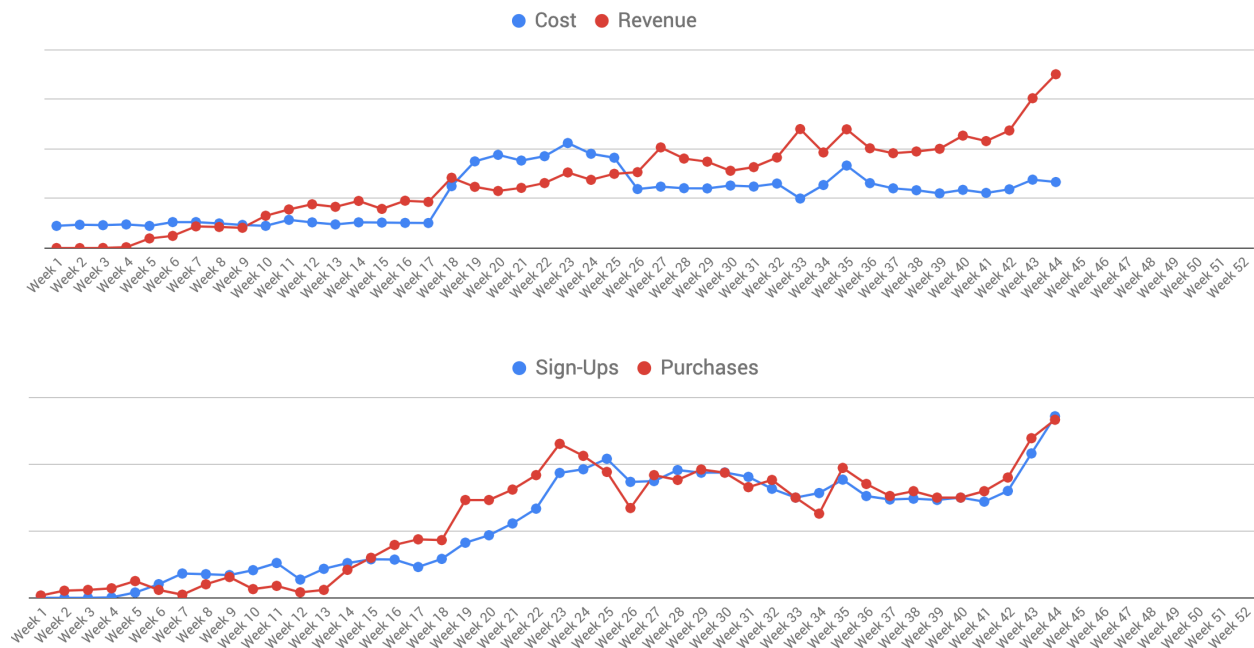
Highlights included

- 200% increase in marketing ROI Y/Y
- 760% growth in organic Facebook followers to over 700,000
- Increase in number of web subscribers versus mobile subscribers (lower profit due to Apple and Google UAC fees) from 5% to 25%

In summation, the 2019 digital marketing campaign at HLT was a success. There are very few areas that I would have changed. In hindsight, I would have implemented even more content marketing to position the company even more as a thought leader in the e-learning space. I learned from this endeavour that the key to a successful marketing strategy is to rely on data to make decisions, be open to feedback in the strategizing process, and be confident in the abilities of yourself and your team: when you work together, you can make great things happen.