

the start conspiracy

7 B2B MARKETING TRENDS THAT EVERY HR TECHNOLOGY BRAND NEEDS TO KNOW IN 2014

BY STEVE SMITH





FIRST THINGS FIRST

Here's the reality: The buyer is completely in charge in 2014. Forrester estimates that anywhere from two-thirds to 90 percent of a buyer's decision-making process is over before your sales team gets involved. And you probably feel like you're going down the freeway at 70 mph and someone just threw the steering wheel out the window.



DON'T FIGHT THIS REALITY. EMBRACE IT.

This year, you're going to need to do things differently, reach prospects earlier in the process, or fall behind. If you're wondering where to begin, start by focusing on these seven things.



NO. 1:

OFFER GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND SIMPLICITY IN PRICING AND PRODUCT OFFERINGS

Here's a test. Go to the website of any consumer technology solution – TurboTax, Norton AntiVirus, Dropbox ... you name it. It's always easy to compare different levels of pricing, features, and everything else you need to make a purchase decision. There's a basic, medium, and premium option. Maybe even a free trial. That's not the case for most HR technology solutions. And that's a big problem.

You know buyers expect a consumer-like user experience from the technology. You may not be aware that they also expect a simpler, easier, consumer-like buying process as well.





NO. 2:

SELLING TO SMBs MEANS TECHNOLOGY MUST BE TURNKEY AND TRANSACTIONAL

Because winning enterprise-class, Fortune 500 deals usually means displacing an incumbent or an RFP or a hand-to-hand sales process, more HR technology brands are turning to greener pastures: SMB and midmarket deals. Many times there's no incumbent, so it's a far less competitive sales process. However, it's also a far different approach.

*The strategies and tactics that work with enterprise-class buyers won't work here. These buyers want it to be easy, and they want turnkey solutions. The real race for this market is the transactional sale. **Can a buyer do the research on their own, get a trial version, and make a purchase without talking to someone at your company? This trend is the future.***



MESSAGE 1

MESSAGE 2

MESSAGE 3

NO. 3:

BET BIG ON BEHAVIORAL DATA

Traditionally, reaching HR technology buyers meant going through industry publications or professional organizations. Today, the cacophony of messages has made these channels less effective. Buyers are tuning out. Now, there's another way.

Using behavioral data, you can zero in on the specific buyers you want to reach and tailor messages for specific stakeholders (HR executive, CFO, CIO, CEO) and even specific stages of the funnel. Spooky? Yep. Effective? It remains to be seen, but early returns seem promising. Necessary? Yes.

By 2016, IDC says that digital marketing investments such as these will exceed 50 percent of total program budgets.





NO. 4:

MAKE MESSAGING PERSONAL AND CONTEXTUAL

Remember the old saying: "All politics is local?" And just as voters want to know what's in it for them, buyers want to know the same thing. Now with behavioral data and new technology, it's possible to deliver laser-focused, highly targeted messaging to the different stakeholders in the sales process.

Marketing automation is also getting into the game with smart content. For example, HubSpot's CMS, which Hubspot calls a Content Optimization System (COS), makes it easier to serve up dynamic persona-based content on your website and landing pages. For example, you could serve different messages and offers to an HR buyer, a CIO, and a line-of-business manager.

The technology is there. Get your messaging ready. And be aware that persona development for all of your stakeholders is all the more imperative.





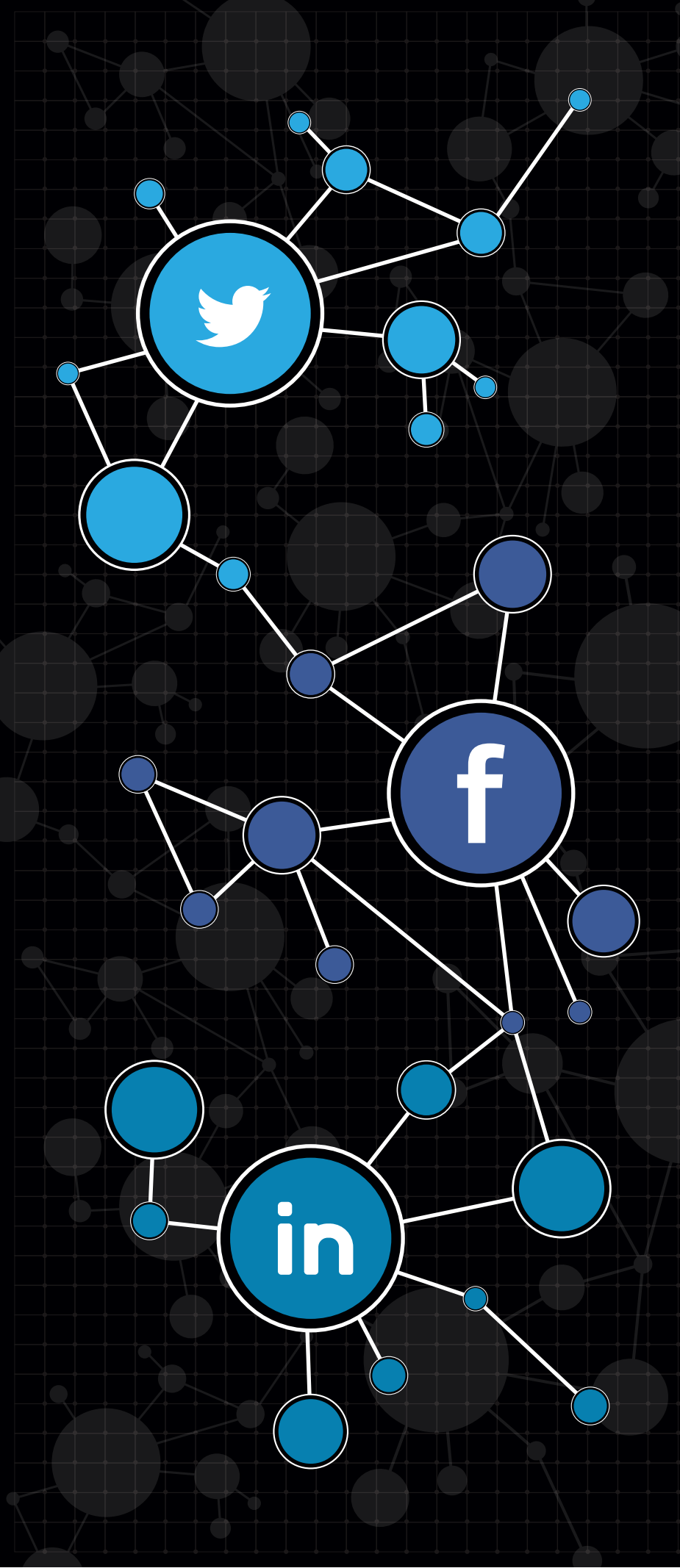
NO. 5:

TREAT MOBILE AS THE NEW DESKTOP

Have you looked at where your Web traffic is coming from? If it looks like most companies, more than half of it is coming from mobile. And that's only going to grow.

*Forget everything you've heard about responsive design. It's just design now. Mobile is implied, and it's the only thing that matters. Your audience wants short copy and video. They're ready to scroll down and across. **Your landing pages and your offers must be actionable on tablets and smartphones. And location-based marketing is coming on fast.***





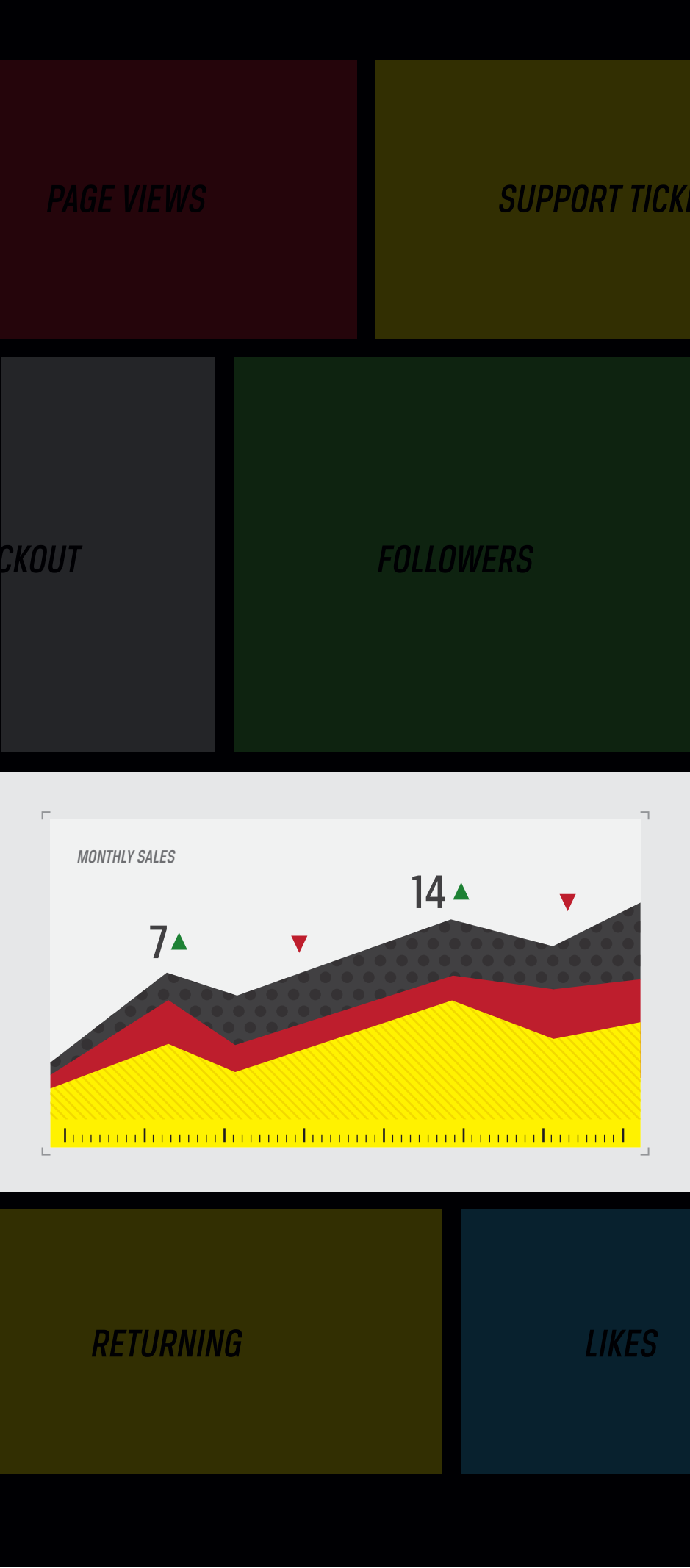
NO. 6:

GET ROLLING WITH CUSTOMER ADVOCACY

In the past few years, you put in the time engaging prospects and customers on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and other channels. However, you may not feel like you're getting anything out of your effort. But here's the point: You have built an essential foundation for customer advocacy.

*In 2014, turn your attention to engaging your communities. Think about when you buy just about any product these days – you go online and see what people are saying. **Whether you do it on your own or use a tool such as Influitive, you must actively transform your online communities into knowledgeable advocates for your brand and your products.***





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NO. 7:

ADD BRAND AWARENESS KPIs TO YOUR DASHBOARD

It's tough sledding to get demand-generation results and hit your sales goals without brand awareness support. Most CMOs understand this, but they don't know how to sell the CFO on paying for it. Here's a hint from McKinsey & Company: You need to sell it as long-term value creation, and you've got to make it measurable.

*There are lots of ways to make brand awareness measurable. Start with a baseline measurement; then follow up after major campaigns or annually at the very least. **Brand equity is built over time. It requires commitment and consistency. Stay on top of it.***



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WRAPPING UP: Change is never easy, but times of change are when leaders slip up and secondary brands step up. 2014 will be an opportunity for some companies in HR technology. If you want to know more about any of these trends and what they might mean for your company, please contact me at steve@thestarrconspiracy.com.



About Steve Smith

Steve Smith is a partner at The Starr Conspiracy and executive managing editor for The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit, an experienced team of thought leadership and research experts who deliver the strategic guidance and big ideas you need to improve marketing results and truly connect with buyers. Steve has developed industry-leading brand and message positions for many category leaders in enterprise software and authored hundreds of white papers and research reports on HR technology and human capital management topics. He's also a former newspaper journalist and HR communications consultant for enterprise-class companies.

About The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit

There's a new era of enterprise technology that can finally unleash the full promise of human potential. If you're on board, we're ready to get you there.

The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit (TSCIU) delivers growth-oriented strategy, research, and advisory services, providing the guidance and key insights you need to grow market share and increase profitability. Let's face it: The protectors of the status quo in marketing fall back on outdated formulas that won't deliver growth and aren't sustainable. We've seen it before and that approach to marketing is dead.

TSCIU takes your business as personally as you do and we will challenge you to shift your perspective. Most importantly, though, we deliver marketing clarity so you can make decisions with confidence.

