



Keeping up with all in-house goals and tasks as well as failures and vulnerabilities has never been an easy task. But with some professional help, they can usually be effortlessly maintained.

Whether it's maintaining a cohesive marketing strategy or dealing with employee turnover, all of that can be automated. This move eliminates repetitive tasks and allows enterprises to run marketing campaigns more efficiently.

Today's interviewee, Mark LeVell, CEO of [4Thought Marketing](#), offers valuable advice on how to ensure companies' compliance, and choose the best marketing tools and cybersecurity measures, apart from using strong passwords or [installing VPNs](#).

Tell us about your journey throughout the years. How did the idea of 4Thought Marketing originate?

I was a leader and innovator in the CRM space and was doing my best to ride the wave. But I knew I could do more. When I learned about the relatively new (at the time) field of [marketing automation](#), I saw the potential for delivering data-driven, personalized offers, and increasing revenue. It was the industry's latest big trend.

Then in 2008, several strong contenders established themselves in the marketing automation scene. So, I had a choice. Did I want to start from scratch and try competing with these well-established companies? Or did I want to get on board with whichever turned out to be the long-term market leader?

I eventually decided to take the less risky decision and join up with the one that seemed the most promising: Eloqua. My business partner Tom and I established [4Thought Marketing](#) in 2009 as an [Eloqua Partner Company](#). It's been a very rewarding experience for us.

Can you tell us a little about what you do? What are the main challenges you help navigate?

We help companies navigate several challenges we've observed over the years: [using marketing automation software to its full potential](#), maintaining a cohesive marketing strategy, and dealing with employee turnover within their marketing operations teams.

I've always believed that regardless of how good the market leader (in this case Eloqua) is, there are always opportunities for huge improvements. In this case, those improvements come in the form of add-ons that boost strategy and best practices. We saw an opportunity to partner with Eloqua while also making the product substantially better than it already was. Building these enhancements (like [cloud apps](#)) largely led us to where we are today.

Another huge part of successful marketing is a coherent plan that is flexible enough to evolve as needed and stable enough that its overall structure stays in place over time. Software gets updated. Companies hire new team members. We help our clients develop long-term marketing strategies that adapt to changes without collapsing.

Finally, employee turnover. The average CMO leaves their job after two years and often takes several fellow marketing employees with them. Their newly hired replacements have entirely different goals for the company, and that can disrupt the marketing strategy. We strive to give organizations an institutional memory, so to speak, to remind them why they made certain choices and how they worked.

We help the newcomers understand the logic behind the original employees' choices and help them pick what they want to keep or update. Finally, we come alongside the team until they're able to handle everything on their own, and then we pass the baton back.

What risks can customers be exposed to if a company they trust struggles to ensure compliance?

Any number of things can result from poor [privacy compliance](#). I could tell you stories of people having their identities stolen, losing their jobs over leaked information, getting stalked or harassed, or worse. Even seemingly anonymous data can be dangerous in the wrong hands.

Unfortunately, companies tend to overlook customer privacy too often. Customers that are acutely aware of their privacy risks view these companies with suspicion, and rightly so. And in a world where customers are more aware than ever of the sheer amount of data they share, this poor company behavior leads to a loss of customer trust. But companies don't always pick up on this. Customers tend to provide feedback when they encounter a problem, like an unreasonably priced product or a feature that wasn't provided. But when customers leave over privacy concerns, they tend to ghost companies. Marketing's leads just go dark. Why? Because customers have lost trust in the company and prefer to just drop off the map than to go through the hassle of contacting them about privacy concerns.

Trust used to be the default setting. But in recent years, corporations and organizations have had to fight to earn people's trust. We believe that you must be upfront about your trustworthiness and privacy compliance from the very beginning. You must display it prominently on your website and in your regular communications. Ultimately, if you can't earn a customer's trust right off the bat, chances are you never will.

How have recent global events affected your field of work?

As we all know, COVID-19 forced many aspects of the business to go remote. This of course led to a drastic increase in using technology to communicate for work purposes, like emails and Zoom meetings. Marketers needed to be able to communicate and generate effective campaigns more than ever.

When the pandemic started, we at 4Thought Marketing were concerned that it would dramatically impact our revenue and business. But just the opposite happened. With all the events and trade shows

canceled and everything moving online, clients suddenly needed our privacy compliance software more than ever.

Data exchange skyrocketed, as did customer awareness of how much data is collected and where it goes. It became critical to display privacy compliance as prominently as possible. We've observed this beginning to taper off more recently, but I don't think business will ever return to the pre-2020 status quo.

What are some of the most common issues new online business owners face nowadays?

Being heard. Our world is noisier than it's ever been. You can follow 20 different people on Twitter in 20 minutes and just have a fire hose of information in your feed constantly. New businesses without an established brand have to fight to be heard over all the noise.

Trust also plays into this. As I said earlier, one big issue facing corporations today is a lack of [customer trust](#). New businesses feel this in a different way. Most customers will start from the assumption that you're a scammer or, at best, exaggerating what you have to offer. Breaking through the noise and rising above to establish a trustworthy brand can take you far.

Out of all company processes, which areas do you think would greatly improve by implementing automation?

I'm not sure that that's the right question. While making automation as universal as possible might have been helpful 20-30 years ago, I think today's world is very different.

I think a better question to ask is, which area of your business can and should be improved next? Automation can certainly help, but it isn't a magic bullet. Case in point: improving AirBnB or Uber is very different from improving an online store.

I think every company should examine its processes and see which ones can realistically be automated. Which ones have the biggest impact on customer behavior? Which ones consume the most employee time? It deserves to be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Besides keeping up with compliance and other privacy requirements, what other marketing tools do you believe can greatly enhance one's operations?

While it again depends on the organization, most individuals today communicate through email. [Marketing automation systems that leverage email](#) provide a huge advantage. Not only does it allow you to run nurture campaigns and guide customers down the sales funnel, but it also allows you to save time by keeping as much of the process automatic as possible.

Talking about cybersecurity, what would you consider to be the best practices organizations should follow nowadays?

Preemptive measures. Companies should regularly check in with the cybersecurity marketplace and see what the most prominent current threat is: phishing software, a certain type of server being hacked, or what have you.

Next, they should improve security on their systems to block attacks. Finally, the employees need thorough training on all of this and the company should pursue a philosophy of continuous improvement. Keep learning the best practices from the industry experts.

What is next for 4Thought Marketing?

Right now, the issue of trust is huge in the marketplace. We believe complying with privacy laws is just

the bare minimum of what needs to happen. Beyond simple legal compliance, companies need to build customer trust. And that goal needs to be built into your processes, legal documents, marketing campaigns, and everything else. You need to prove your trustworthiness on an ongoing basis, and you can't just talk about a good game. Broken trust is hard to repair.

So, 4Thought Marketing is going to continue helping clients build trust with their customers, and to maintain a standard of looking forward to the future. This goal is reflected in our company name: "forethought". We believe that by helping companies run marketing campaigns with attention to the future, we can help them build trust and improve their business. That's where we're going.

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