GUIDE

Trust, Relevance, and Timing

Within The Marketing Helix, three forces shape whether a marketing message the customer has noticed is drawn closer or passes by. They are conditions, not laws: a message tends to be drawn closer when trust, relevance, and timing all hold at the same moment, and they do not have to be perfectly aligned.

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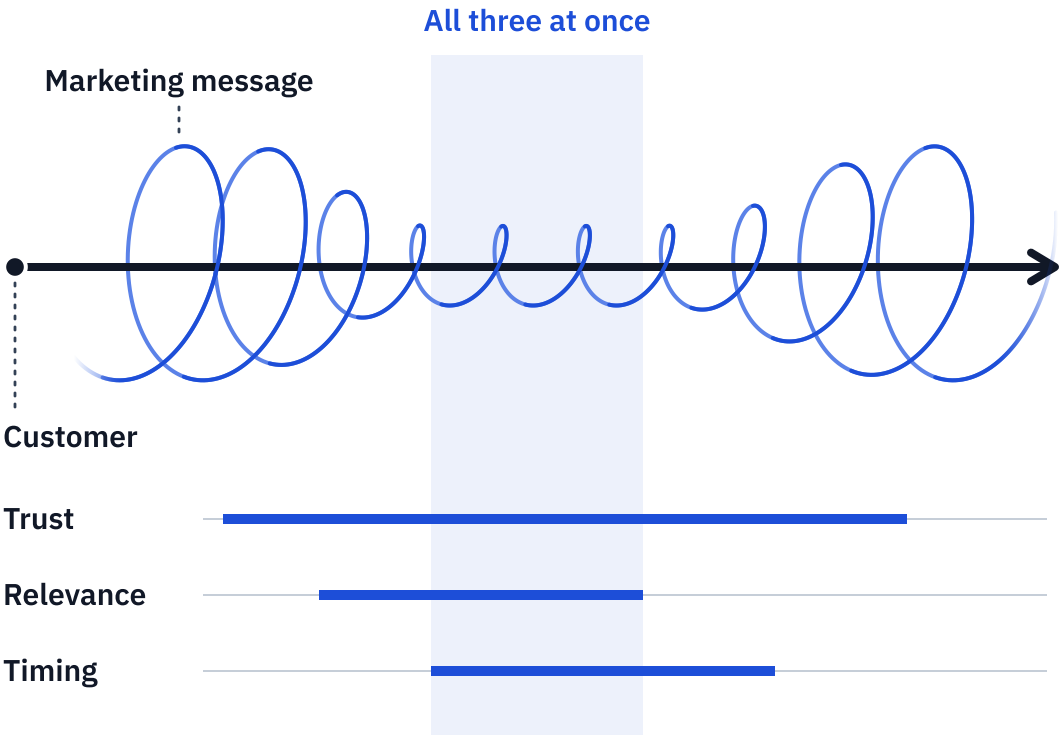
Overview

Three independent conditions. One simultaneous requirement.

The Marketing Helix identifies three conditions (trust, relevance, and timing) that all hold at the same moment when a marketing message reaches *alignment* with a customer in motion. When enough of each holds at once, the message can be drawn closer: the customer evaluates it, engages with it, and may move toward selection. When one of the three is missing, the message tends to pass by, whatever its quality or the resources behind its distribution.

The three forces are independent variables. A message can carry high trust but poor relevance. It can be both relevant and timely but arrive from a source the customer does not yet trust sufficiently to permit into consideration. It can have trust and relevance but reach the customer before or after their readiness window opens. Understanding which force is absent or insufficient in a given context is the primary diagnostic question the model enables. Each force, and the conditions under which it is built or degraded, is examined in detail in its dedicated section.

The three forces act on a message the customer has noticed. Being there is not being noticed: a message the customer never notices cannot earn trust, prove relevant, or arrive on time. Attention is Principle 06 of the model and is not a fourth force. It is what has to happen before these three can matter.



Each comes and goes on its own.
In this example the message is closest while all three hold.

The Three Forces

Trust, relevance, and timing each come and go on their own schedule. The marketing message is closest to the customer only while all three hold at the same moment. They rarely align by accident, and the alignment does not last.

The Forces

Trust, Relevance, and Timing: each examined.

Each force operates on its own logic. Trust accumulates through compounding interactions and tightens the orbit toward selection. Relevance is a state-match between message and customer context: the overlap is dynamic, not fixed. Timing is the readiness window: only what arrives within it makes contact.

Trust: The Permission Condition

Trust is the condition under which a customer permits a marketing signal into active consideration. It is the first test a noticed message has to pass (Principle 07): when the customer does not find the source credible, the message tends to be set aside before its relevance or timing is weighed.

Trust is not a property of a single message or campaign. It is accumulated across interactions over time: prior direct experience with the brand, third-party assessments and independent reviews, peer recommendations, content quality encountered passively, and category signals that position the brand within a recognized credibility tier. A brand that has not accumulated enough trust across these inputs can find its messages set aside even when they are relevant and well timed.

Read: Trust in depth →

Relevance: The State-Match Condition

Relevance is the degree to which a marketing message matches a customer's current decision state. A customer in the earliest stage of category awareness requires categorically different content than a customer actively comparing specific options. A message optimized for one state reaches customers in other states as misaligned, regardless of its accuracy or quality of execution.

Relevance is dynamic rather than fixed. What is relevant to the same customer changes at different points in their consideration process. A message that achieves alignment in one month, because the customer is actively comparing providers, may produce no response several months earlier or later if the customer is not in an active decision state at those moments. Relevance cannot be engineered to be universal; it is always a relational property of the message and the customer's current position in a consideration process the brand does not control.

Read: Relevance in depth →

Timing: The Convergence Condition

Timing determines whether trust and relevance converge at the moment the customer is ready to act. Alignment that occurs before customer readiness accumulates marginally but produces no conversion event. Alignment that occurs after the customer has already acted produces no opportunity: the decision window has closed and the customer has already committed elsewhere.

Timing is the most difficult of the three forces to control directly, because readiness is internal to the customer and largely opaque to the brand. The primary strategic implication of the timing force is distributional: a brand that maintains consistent, credible presence across the environments where its potential customers conduct consideration increases the probability that an aligned message reaches the customer during a moment of active readiness, without requiring the brand to predict exactly when that moment will occur.

Read: Timing in depth →

Force Interactions

The forces do not add up. They hold at the same moment.

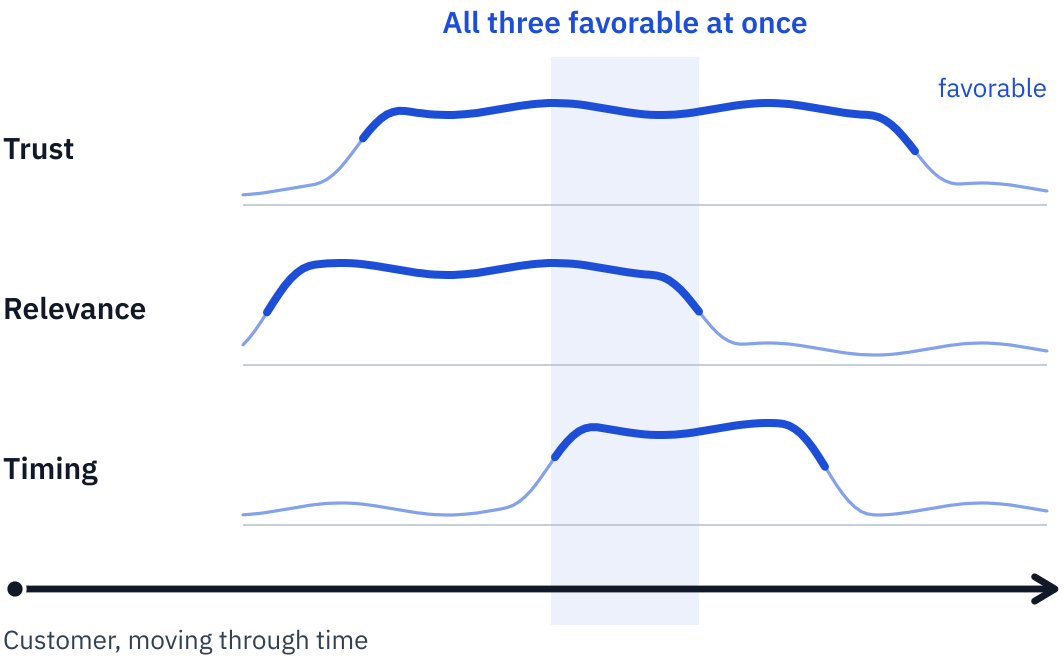
The three forces are not additive in the way that scoring dimensions are. Strength in two tends not to make up for the absence of the third: a message that is highly trusted and highly relevant but reaches the customer outside a window of active readiness is unlikely to produce selection. The forces are better understood as conditions that all hold at the same moment: enough of each, at the same time, is what makes a selection possible. They do not have to be perfectly aligned.

> The absence of any single force is sufficient to prevent selection from occurring, regardless of the strength of the other two.

This structure has precise diagnostic implications. High engagement with low conversion suggests the timing force is missing: messages are reaching customers who trust the source and find the content relevant, but who are not yet in an active decision-readiness state. Strong conversion within a narrow existing segment with failure to grow beyond it suggests a trust gap for a broader population: relevance and timing are aligned for a specific audience, but a wider set of customers does not yet trust the brand enough. Each diagnosis points to a different structural intervention.

None of the three holds still. Trust can strengthen or decay. Relevance can be lost without the message changing, because the customer's question moved or the category's language did. Timing depends on readiness the brand cannot see and does not set. This is why the model treats a diagnosis as a reading of a moment rather than a settled finding: the force that is missing today is not necessarily the one that was missing last quarter. See Alignment Is Temporary.

Read: The Full Model →



Each condition has its own scale. The thick stretch is when it is favorable.
Stylized, not measured. It does not last: all three keep changing.

Three Forces Aligning

Each condition has its own track and its own scale. What matters is the stretch of time in which trust, relevance, and timing are all favorable at once, not a point where three values are equal. It is rarely engineered. It is recognized and acted on, and because all three keep changing, it does not last.

marketing helix

marketinghelix.com

A customer behavior model describing how a customer in motion gives a message attention, and how trust, relevance, and timing then shape whether it draws closer, drifts away, or returns.