

Keeping up with the connected customer

 By [Suren Govender](#)

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At this late stage in our technological evolution we are facing yet another digital divide - this time between consumers and the companies that supposedly serve their interests. And it's time the latter caught up.

Call to action

Issuing this surprising call to action at Social Media Week, Accenture's Digital Consumer Survey 2014 reveals a rising level of 'digital intensity' among local consumers, who are consuming ever more technology in self-directed configurations that shatter existing vendor-led ecosystems. Hyper-connected and always on, they leave data trails all over the cyberverses, and are quite happy-within reason-for ISPs, retailers and banks to track, mine and use it to build personalised engagement strategies that will enhance their online experience.

But instead of using the opportunity and all the technology at their disposal to reimagine marketing and engagement strategies, many enterprises still only make crudely one-sided and self-serving 'You might also like' offers that frequently miss the mark.

From irritant to relevant

So what can companies do to move on from being an irritant to becoming relevant? In his book "*The Power to Predict Who Will Click, Buy, Lie, or Die*", Eric Siegel reveals how predictive analytics gives us insights like:

- Early retirement decreases your life expectancy
- Rihanna's US fans are mostly Democrats
- Vegetarians miss fewer flights and
- Local crime increases after public sporting events

The opportunity is for banking, telco, retail and other industries to become more astute about obtaining and using customer insights.

The twain shall meet

So what do digitally-empowered enterprises do to bridge the chasm separating providers from consumers? In short, they know their customers, show them that they know them, delight them, value them and enable them. The consumer demands it.

More specifically, this entails the following broad strategies:

- Allowing unimpeded movement between devices and channels
- Offering products that cut through the clutter with relevance rather than popularity
- Enabling participative interactions, not one-way brand communications or generic product push
- Delivering personalised recommendations based on a data-driven understanding of customers' history, behaviours, reviews and personalised attributes

Become empowered too

The challenge is considerable. But if the consumer is digitally empowered, so is the modern enterprise. Technologies like mobile, social, analytics, big data, the cloud, sensor networks and the like have been 'coming online' over the last five years and are now reaching a critical mass. They are forces of change for business, creating opportunities that were either impossible or uneconomical before.

Creating new value

Companies that get digital marketing right use these technologies to create new product and brand value at the points where mobile, social, cloud, apps, the 'Internet of things', gaming and analytics intersect, and not simply to wrap existing offerings and push them down new marketing funnels.

Leveraging multiple digital channels, winning strategies deliver a consistent customer experience across all of them with omni-channel architectures. The companies that manage this are the disruptors that change everything.

Early winners

Microsoft's recently launched X-Box One is to many just a gaming console, but its unassailable value is its potential to be the centre of the smart home of the future, if Microsoft's multiple partnerships with home automation players pay off. New peer-to-peer-based disintermediations that are encroaching on traditional commerce. AirBnB, for example, uses P2P technology to offer private holiday bookings that bypass hotel administration. In six years it has grown into the fifth-largest hotel chain in the world. Uber does the same connecting people with cabs. In fact, P2P models are cropping up everywhere-in money lending, Wi-Fi sharing, ride sharing and even bicycle sharing.

And beyond sharing things, people can also share their talent. TaskRabbit is an online and mobile marketplace that allows users to outsource micro-jobs and tasks to others in their neighbourhood. In South Africa, we have Money4Jam, which uses WeChat as its platform.

Transform, disrupt

These are opportunities for companies that embrace digital realities and use them to adapt in ways that drive customer relevancy. Adapting requires an "outside-in" lens, starting with assessing the company's customer-facing touch points with a view to attaining enduring customer relevance; translating it into changes required in internal operations; and evaluating the technology infrastructure requirement to support this.

Making a complete digital transformation can result in breakthrough performance, whether that means accelerating the effectiveness and efficiency of the business, or differentiating it by launching new products or services that delight customers. The ultimate reward is becoming a digital disruptor that 'gets it'-the customer, the prevailing zeitgeist and the first slice of the pie.

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