

The four ways data changes business forever



By [Abey Mokgwatsane](#)

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If anything is about to transform the way marketing works, it's that four-letter word: data. Technological advancements that have made it possible for any brand and business to have authentic, meaningful relationships with consumers makes data all the more powerful and relevant.

The following words by Mark Pritchard P&G's global marketing officer speak to a vision all businesses strive for: "Our vision is to build brands through lifelong, one-to-one relationships in real time... It means shifting from mass broadcasting, to creating more personal one-to-one conversations with individuals and the communities in which they're active."

This vision can now be realised with data's newfound power.

Data's potential no secret

Data's potential to build individual relationships, which has been the case even before Aaron Montgomery Ward invented the mail order catalogue in 1872, is no secret.

Businesses have always had a fair idea of who its customers are, what they bought and why. In modern times, whole industries have been spawned out of data use. Don Peppers and Marther Rogers became the thought leaders of modern CRM and Frederick Reicheld from Bain, the father of Loyalty.

Billions have been spent using data to develop effective one-to-one relationships; however, today's technological advancements make this dream a reality.

Fundamental changes

Technology has created two fundamental changes that alter the way we generate, access and leverage data. Firstly, by exponentially increasing the volume of data generated, and secondly, by making the analysis of this data stream more feasible and accessible to many more businesses.

The world data volume doubles every 24 months. Every second, Google posts two million searches; 48 hours of video content is posted onto YouTube, and over 100,000 tweets are sent.

Social media, mobile phones and other data tools mean that billions of people on the planet leave mile-wide data trails, making for much richer data sources than ever before.

This data explosion is coupled with our ever-increasing ability to slice and dice data. Computers are now better able to analyse the non-structured data surge, such as words, images, tweets, blogs and text messages. Whole industries are forming that help dissect this data into actionable insights.

These two technologically-fuelled data tsunamis have forever altered marketing in four ways:

Mass customisation becomes real

Every business in the world has access to data today in a way that enables mass customisation. In some ways, data has become a "bottom of the pyramid" application.

An excellent report by IBM's "Leading through connections CEO study" states that technology has now made "mass customisation" possible. Businesses now have the means to understand customers, based on actual, real-time behaviour, and engage them as individuals.

Emergence of new careers

A science is being built out of foraging through vast amounts of data and turning that into useful predictive consumer insights. The Data Scientist is the new, advanced geek, who combines analytics with investigative zeal. This has resulted in a new breed of tech-savvy, socially plugged in hackers who determine what data to track and how to find meaning in it.

The network manager works closely with the data scientist. This is someone who curates and facilitates the consumer network of a business, observing, learning and influencing conversation and thus building long-term relationships.

These roles become even more critical in a world where building dialogue with consumers is a critical success factor.

Campaigns stop being one-hit wonders

Most campaigns peak consumers' interest in a brand only for it to wane once the campaign is done. Data changes that. Campaigns will be interventions in the building of ongoing consumer relationships. They will not only be used to pique interest, but to drive data too. The days of running an incredible campaign with no useful data at the end of the rainbow are gone.

Here is the really crazy thought: It's only a matter of time before the reach of your campaign through mass media is less than that of your one-to-one channels. As a case in point, one million unique users registered and participated in the latest Carling Black Label Be the Coach campaign. That's half the number of its core user base.

This changes the nature of classical marketing interventions. Data makes real the virtuous cycle of consumer communications and thus will change the way that marketing teams and communications agencies configure themselves to deliver their expert services.

Data makes marketing Return On Investment trackable

Want to know the good news? Data demystifies marketing ROI. The real-time nature of the new data streams means that the impact of any marketing investment becomes instantly available for measurement and refinement.

The words from P&G's global marketing officer are bold and brave. They usher in a new marketing era where data unlocks real-time value. Like all new eras, the implications are both exciting and daunting, but there is one thing for sure: There has never been a better time to be doing what we do than now.

ABOUT ABEY MOKGWATSANE

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