Stop driving customers away with poor marketing automation

By Nick Orton   20 Jan 2017

Marketing practitioners have long known that if their brands continue to deliver outdated, irrelevant or untimely digital experiences, they are insulting their customer's intelligence and wasting their time, driving defection and abandonment.

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The commercial imperative to deliver a relevant digital experience or offer to the right customer at the right time, has never been more important to brands - depending on the product, between 56% and 85% of a consumer's purchase cycle occurs digitally, prior to their first interaction with a live sales person.

Technology is also allowing consumers to apply their own preferences to their purchase choices in near-real time, making the need for brands to engage at speed and scale on a mass personalised basis critical to a brand's success.

Exploiting opportunities within the purchase cycle by offering targeted information based on accurate customer profiles, at speed and scale, is the foundation of effective marketing automation.

Yet so many brands are still getting this wrong. Why is this, in the face of so much available technology?

Poor marketing automation efforts are generally a result of one of three common practices:

- **Over-messaging**, where brands continue to message customers about a specific product or offering even after they have completed their purchase, creating brand separation and a disconnect with the customer.
- **Under-messaging**, where a consumer may be involved in a purchasing cycle but the marketing campaign simply isn't creating enough moments that matter by showing up on the consumer's mobile screen or in-store, which undermines the campaign's ability to influence the consumer's decision.
- **Poorly targeted messaging**, which relates to the type of special deal you offer your customer. For example, it's not a bad idea to encourage purchasing behaviour by offering consumers a voucher that gives them a discount for completing their basket purchase. But if you don't manage this properly you may soon find people simply filling their baskets and waiting for a discount.

To do the above well without the use of technology is simply impossible. There are too many variables and the response time is so quick that even the best marketer will be unable to respond to opportunities at speed and scale.

The modern marketer's job is a tricky one

A key challenge for modern marketers is creating a realtime database of accurate customer profiles that can be segmented at a micro level for highly targeted, focused marketing campaigns. With the closing of the gap between marketing and sales, the ability to develop quality leads faster and cross-sell and upsell to existing customers has become a standard requirement of most marketing departments.

The infusion of technology within the marketing function has enabled brands to solve many of these problems and take advantage of opportunities at speed and scale. Marketing automation technologies can offer comprehensive cloud based and scalable databases that can accommodate a variety of preferences, interactions, automations, behavioural analysis, coupons, and rewards to allow brands to categorise, remarket, target, embed, track and guide people to the point of purchase - whether online or offline.

Brands don't necessarily need expert technical skills to manage marketing automation campaigns. All they need to know is what the technology can do, and what is practical and possible. Managing the technology can be left to external providers, who can assist with setting up the required automations. The technology provider's job is to shield and insulate the brand from these complexities and to provide a reasonable safety net against getting IP addresses blacklisted, or getting cut off from certain ISPs.

The business case for marketing automation

Despite the ease of implementation and availability of market-leading marketing automation tech, full-scale adoption is surprisingly slow. Many brands have not yet taken a decision to invest in marketing automation, seeing this as an expensive capital expenditure that will put serious strain on their budgets.

This is counter-intuitive: in most businesses, the operational expenditure linked to sales and marketing is often the largest expense outside of salaries. Ensuring this business function operates at an optimal level is critical. And with cloud-based marketing automation services, there is no massive capital expenditure, making the tech more accessible than ever.

Companies that spend a lot of money on flashy above-the-line activities can optimise campaign investment by integrating a layer of marketing automation. This can reinforce campaign messages to customers and track the effectiveness of different parts of the marketing mix. Even if a brand, for example, doesn't convert a customer to a sale during a big event such as Black Friday, there are still longer-term benefits resident in the accurate customer profile that you start creating by interacting with customers, as long as such data is captured accurately and stored in an easily accessible place.

Outsource the right problem

Many marketers are under the impression that they've got marketing automation under control, implementing simple "batch and blast" programmes with vanilla calls to action. Another panacea seems to be "If we can't do it ourselves let's just hand it all over to our digital agency." However, a lot of brands are not outsourcing the right problem, and they end up building digital silos instead of digital brand assets. They're not building the ability to reach out at speed and scale, or to address large groups of people on a micro-segmental basis. Digital agencies of course have their place in the value-chain in terms of strategy, creative and production, but at the end of the day the brand needs to commit to a marketing automation technology infrastructure (in the cloud) that will provide ongoing returns, leaving agencies to provide their specific value-add to individual campaigns and activations.

Brands and consumer businesses that don't invest in marketing automation technology will quickly find themselves unable to compete for share of market or share of wallet in a highly competitive and challenging digitised consumer market. Finding an experienced marketing automation technology partner that provides massively scalable technology in the cloud, underpinned by omnichannel delivery at a price point that is relevant to the cost of acquiring your customer, is an important consideration in jumpstarting the process.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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