Personalization is all about delivering unique experiences to customers based on their individual preferences, behaviors and history. Doing this well is driven by the quality of a marketer’s consumer data and their ability to use it effectively.

Technology solutions focused on helping marketers get personal with consumers are designed to sort through those data silos and get relevant, personalized messages in front of the right people at the right time.

Whether it’s connecting with consumers via digital channels or mobile devices, or gauging their interests via social and reacting to data in real time, personalization is evolving quickly. Smart marketers need to keep on top of the trends or risk being left behind.

“Personalization doesn’t happen magically—it’s a craft, it’s a lot of hard work and it needs to be driven from the top down,” says Stefan Koenig, CEO/cofounder, Hull.

**CONNECTING WITH INDIVIDUALS**

Personalized marketing efforts need to provide consumers with relevant content and messaging tailored specifically to their needs, and many campaigns don’t hit the mark.

“Personalization is leaving customers numb, and that’s what we’re hearing from marketers—that they’re not connecting with customers through many of the more recent uses of personalization and customized experiences, because it’s still very much segment focused, and doesn’t really take into account the individual’s needs,” Jenne Barbour, solutions strategist with Teradata.

Marketers who want to achieve success need to look beyond mere personalization and custom-

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LOCATION & PERSONALIZATION

The mobile boom has brought a whole new data set into marketing based on location, location patterns and the behaviors that marketers are able to identify based on location. Delivering personalized messages to consumers based in their location is the next step for marketers looking to maximize the impact of this data.

“As marketers, we really haven’t had that data to work with before. Now that we are able to see consumers on the move and are able to have a seamless dialog with consumers while they’re on the move, we have the power to increase the relevancy of communication with consumers,” says Michael Collins, CEO, Adelphic.

This location-based data combined with traditional data makes mobile very interesting for marketers looking to deliver personalized messages to customers.

“We can see users who are exhibiting certain behavior patterns that can tell us a lot about a user. We can use it as a targeting parameter but also start to unlock a lot of behaviors that we haven’t had access to in the past,” Collins says.

Marketers today need to take context of consumer interaction with the brand into account, and how variables such as location may play into these interactions and respond appropriately.

“Now that marketers have a more cohesive view of their customers, they are more focused on how to act on these deep insights and how to impact the individual everywhere they interact,” says Jenne Barbour, solutions strategist with Teradata.

There is a good amount of targeting that is based on location right now: If marketers want to communicate with business travelers they can target airports, or if they want sports fans they can target stadiums and.

“You can personalize messages to these groups based on these locations. We’re just at the tip of the iceberg with what can be done and with taking advantage of what behavior tells us. It’s being used quite widely, but I think there’s a lot more that will be and can be done with the relevance that location data provides in the future,” Collins says. —PG

MOBILE PERSONALIZATION

Mobile devices are the most immediate way to communicate with customers as individuals, and finding their preferred method of mobile engagement is key for marketers moving forward.

“A mobile app might not be the right thing. Simply ensuring you’re your website is mobile friendly could bringing it together into the digital ecosystem and understanding the individual and her other interests when she’s out across other properties, because that informs the individual level of relevance as well,” Barbour says.

“Marketers want to break down the silos of the different touch points of the multichannel experience,” agrees Clint Poole, vice president, marketing for Lionbridge.

The biggest challenge is that there are different systems for all of these touchpoints, which can mean different providers, agencies and internal teams to operate them.

“You have this highly complex, fragmented ecosystem of providers and platforms, so what has evolved is custom systems integration. A lot of people are creating ad-hoc, customized workflows between systems,” Poole says.

While new cloud platforms from Oracle and Adobe can break down silos and connect multiple digital channels within one platform, most marketing teams are dealing with a number of tech solutions to manage their customer data and information.

“Personalized experiences used to be delivered in one channel and were based on data from that channel—like displaying personalized product recommendations on a website based on a customer’s prior purchases on that site. Now we’re seeing personalization increasingly becoming multichannel and multi device based,” says Kim Smith, senior vice president of product, HelloWorld.

Marketers are now taking web browsing data from one place, social media activities from another, purchase data from their POS system and location-based information and using a combination of the data to create richer and much more personalized experiences than before, Smith says.

These is changing the way marketers do business.

“I think personalization has created the need for a new type of marketer—one who has the skills to bridge IT, data science and digital marketing. It needs to be driven down from the CMO to teach marketers to become more data scientists,” Smith says.

There is technology out there to help brands cover these areas but the problem is that a lot of them don’t have the skillset in house to use those tools to the max,” Koenig says.

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make more sense. Mobile is truly where everything is shifting, and marketers have a rich opportunity to interact at an individual customer through mobile," Barbour says.

It’s important for marketers to ensure there is relevance, transparency and trust around the information customers are sharing with brands, including what information is being used and how it is being used.

"As long as you’re providing that relevance and an opportunity for customers to maintain control over what they’re sharing, the barrier to sharing more information is reduced," says Barbour. "People become uncomfortable when when marketers don’t provide the relevance that customers expect or when they abuse that privilege and sell the information."

MEASUREMENT & TESTING

There are ways to test and measure the success of various personalization tactics by gathering data and gauging what works best without making a significant upfront investment in technology. If a brand doesn’t have extensive consumer profiles, they can begin by collecting one or two data points to get started on personalization.

For example, simply collecting data on a customer’s gender and what ZIP code they reside in can be used in a variety of ways.

"They could be used to feature different products in marketing, promote different offers, highlight local store locations or tout different product benefits. Then A/B testing can allow the marketer to gauge the impact of personalization and really help them decide if investing in a more robust and thorough strategy makes sense for their business. They can start small, test, learn and grow from there," Smith says.

Marketers are also leveraging controlled group testing, measuring success with a group receiving personalized offers versus a group receiving standard offers and seeing how they perform, Poole says.

“I’ve yet to hear from anyone where the personalized offer didn’t have a higher return, but the challenge is that it requires analysis and planning that does reduce speed to market, so there is a balance between speed to market and personalization because the platforms aren’t quick and smart enough and we’re not agile enough as marketers yet to really nail both," Poole says.

The biggest challenge for attribution in B2C mobile personalization is that the large majority of value in mobile campaigns tends to take place outside of mobile, Collins says.

“When you engage customers on mobile, the transaction tends to happen in a store. So being able to do that attribution from mobile to point of sale is very important. Now we’re seeing some new technologies like Placed, Factual and NinthDecimal measure the increase in footfall to a retail location that’s being advertised from consumers who have been engaged through mobile. We are also seeing some great cross-channel attribution solutions, even from mobile to brick-and-mortar and from mobile to desktop. It’s far from perfect, but it’s getting to the point now where the data is credible," Collins says.

SOCIAL & REAL-TIME PERSONALIZATION

Marketing to consumers in real-time based on their actions within social media and other digital channels is not quite a reality just yet, but tech solutions are almost there. When marketers are able to integrate their legacy customer data with CRM and customer data tools with real-time data from social behavior and other digital platforms to the action platforms (the pushing of email, digital display and social response), that’s when real-time marketing personalization will be within reach.

“l think there are platforms that are very close to enabling that. Real-time personalization will start to

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PERSONALIZATION TRENDS

There are some challenges marketers must face when engaging consumers with personalized campaigns, content and communications.

“The most common mistake is using the wrong inputs to identify what to personalize. The biggest part of personalization is the analysis of the data. You’re taking the inputs on the specific buyer behavior and you’re making determinations based on macro analysis what offers and messaging you should give them, and when and where. So the biggest pitfall is a disconnection between the input and what marketers are developing for offers,” says Clint Poole, vice president marketing for Lionbridge.

For example, marketers may use social tools to collect data on behaviors and interests, but then they’ll use an email delivery system to deliver personalized messages, so they may not hit home.

“It’s not as simple as having the technology to deliver personalized offers—it’s the analysis of what to include in the personalized offer, and that’s all based in the data,” says Poole.

Delivering personalized messaging to global audiences presents its own set of challenges, as marketers don’t want their communication to get lost in translation.

“In B2C, the challenge is finding relevance to local markets. We leverage tools and technology that are centralized and give us speed and access to consumers, but sometimes they’re circumventing the local control on the offers. So they are putting in place an offer on price reduction or seasonality, when actually it doesn’t meet the buying behavior of that audience. It’s an unintended consequence of speed to market that the technology enables,” Poole says.

This can lead to less successful programs and spoil customer experience by putting irrelevant offers in front of buyers.

“In this day and age that’s what turns buyers off, because they’re so inundated that the second you get it wrong consumers turn off quickly,” Poole says.

A solution to this problem is having a layer of local control over the offers, with a local marketer who is tuned into the market’s needs checking out potential personalized offers to make sure they are relevant.

MOBILE CHALLENGES

In the mobile space, it has historically been very difficult to know users on mobile and create personalized messaging, says Michael Collins, CEO, Adelphic.

“It’s not a one-solution-fits all environment. In the online environment, cookies are used as a common user identifier for first and third parties. In mobile, first-party cookies are available but third party cookies are largely not accessible. There is no common identifier in the mobile space. In the desktop world, we would be able to place a cookie when we see a user click on a banner that someone else controls. In mobile, we don’t have that opportunity,” Collins says.

What’s the solution? Tech developers are hard at work on creating cookie-less user ID, so marketers can try to bring that personalized cookie-like experience into third party communications and mobile advertising world. —PG

It also helps marketers to be more precise in where they spend their marketing dollars, which social media channels make sense for them and which don’t. It comes back to the customer experience—it’s not just about the product that you’re offering, it has to be about how you’re serving the individual and how you’re improving their lives through the value exchange that you’re offering them,” Barbour says.

PERSONALIZATION MOVING FORWARD

Looking ahead, understanding the how individual customers fit within the digital ecosystem will be extremely important, and marketers will need to leverage tech solutions to see customers more clearly within that ecosystem in order to present relevant communications and offers.

“It’s a two-way exchange at an individual level,
and there’s a lot of power in that. Customers have more information about their options than ever before and the cost of switching is so low—it’s just a click away. The ability to be relevant at an individual level in a digital manner across all of the channels is where marketers need to focus now,” Barbour says.

Connecting the digital world to the physical will be a big challenge for B2C marketers looking to leverage personalized communication.

“The next [B2C] frontier will be connecting the digital personalization that marketers are doing and how we carry that over to physical experiences where transactions occur. We know about consumers online, but there is a lot of power in being recognized in-store and being treated differently,” Smith says.

And as personalization tech solutions continue to evolve, it’s up to marketers to find the right technology to help them sort through the data and deliver the right content to the right customer.

“There are so many platforms that are disconnected, but necessary. As we pull these together it makes the job easier and the results will be there and the investment in these technologies and the integration will pay for itself because consumers have made it very clear that they want this personalized, highly relevant experience,” Poole says.

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