

How to personalise your marketing at scale

 By [Farren Roper](#)

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A lot has been said about customer experience and its importance cannot be over emphasised in creating customer loyalty...

The competition landscape has changed.

Companies are competing to be the service differentiator with their customers for a few reasons, including the fact that product differentiation as an advantage can often only last as long as your legal protection allows and price differentiation as an advantage is even harder to achieve, especially for small to mid-sized businesses.



Customer delight © Sonya Etchison – [123RF.com](#)

Customers as collaborators in their own experiences

It is a mind shift to think less about your customers as being managed and more about your customers as your most important collaborator. For marketers, it is less push marketing and more pull marketing, as tech-savvy customers in the mobile-first world are more demanding and informed about what they want and when they want it. Customers are in fact now determining the terms of their own experiences.

Marketing and engineering collaboration on customer experiences

Customer experience is no longer just a function of engineering, but a function of marketing as well. We don't just build products anymore, launch them by telling people about our unique selling points, but we think about things like customer journey and usability.

As marketers we need to be experts on the customer journey and as the increasingly direct interface to the customer (especially on social) and we need to provide feedback to the product team. So neither sales nor product or marketing can afford to work in isolation anymore, the process should be iterative. To reference Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, the real growth-hacking opportunities come when engineering and marketing work together in tandem.

Take the example of Microsoft Windows 10 working with a group of "insiders" across the globe, including South Africa. They were all given preview builds of the product to evaluate and provide feedback. Using technology, the feedback was collated and used to make product enhancements that assisted in making the product launch a resounding success.

Customer experience implies customer knowledge

But in order to collaborate with your customers, a level of understanding of our customers is implicit. I understand all too well the challenges that come from wanting to give your customers a good, personalised experience, but wanting to do it to scale and cost-effectively to boot.

Technology offers you the ability and agility to provide these experiences. On digital platforms, through programmatic buying, we can now offer customers information that appeals to their interests and not just on the random website they find themselves accidentally clicking through to.

On social media, though customer relationship management tools, we can do broadcast 1: many as well as more intimate 1:1 messaging to customers. In addition, we can target customers according to a number of things, like location and even interests. And as our customers go about living their digitised and social lives, they leave behind a digital footprint. It is this footprint and data that allows us to market to them in a manner more personalised than ever before.

Here is an example of a company leveraging technology to create a great customer experience... Dutch airline KLM had an initiative called "[KLM surprise](#)", where they analysed social media data in order to assess which of their passengers were merely passing time waiting to board their flight. They had an insight that they wanted to turn customer boredom into happiness. So based on their customer social data, they surprised them with small gifts like vouchers or things which are relevant to the countries their customers were travelling to. They handed out these gifts to their customers before boarding as carry-on luggage. Instead of putting a smiley face emoticon on their posts to their customers, they put a real smile on their faces. The net result was that their customers told more than one million people about the experience on social media.

Not every company has the bandwidth and budget to surprise and delight at scale as KLM did, but there is certainly an opportunity to at least do marketing based on customer knowledge of interests.

What does this all mean for companies and for marketers?

This greater level of customer intimacy means that businesses are shifting from product businesses to service businesses. It means that marketers need to be less focused on the product and more on what the product can do for the user, based on their needs and preferences. To make an analogy: We are not selling the drill, we are in fact selling the hole to someone who needs to use a drill. And in the absence of face-to-face engagement with our customers, we are more reliant on technology than ever before to put the smile on our customers' faces.

ABOUT FARREN ROPER

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