

Why marketers must get to know Mark and Susan from Randburg

 By Jacques van Wyk

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South African marketers need to get to know Mark and Susan. Mark and Susan get home at around 18:30 each day from work when their abilities to concentrate are at a low. They live in Randburg so they have to fight their way through the traffic, Mark from his office in Sandton where he's a project manager for a financial services company and Susan from her office in Edenvale where she leads the supply chain portion of a SAP implementation.

Oddly enough they have a postbox stuffed to capacity most days. Oddly because, as we all know, the South African public postal system is unfortunate. Mark and Susan find a wad of promotional magazines, flyers, direct letters and the local newspaper either pressed determinedly into the little letter box or scattered about the verge lawn when they get home. It's normally Mark's job to clear it out. And lately he keeps some of the post, which he uses to mask the windows because he and Susan are re-varnishing their wooden window frames on weekends. Normally it takes a quick trip to the black, flip-top wheelie bin tucked around the garden wall behind the gate.

Do they ever read the post? Mark sometimes flips through it, seldom reading any of the words beyond determining it's irrelevant junk he'd rather not get. Occasionally it inspires a mild fit of fantasy where he goes postal. His shrink says it's quite normal and doesn't think he's about to become front page news.



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Mark and Susan don't spend energy going through the pile of junk in their letterbox because they're tired. They've concentrated on work all day, the traffic, dealing with personal admin like renewing car licences, utility bills, gathering FICA documents to port their cell number and the flood of text messages and e-mails they mostly delete without more than a quick scan. And they've been bombarded with marketing from radio, TV, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and while Googling.

So how are you, a marketer, supposed to communicate with people? Here's another oddity – people like Mark and Susan actually tell you. Every time your company has contact with the Marks and Susans of our world you can learn a little something extra about them, what's important to them, and construct a little puzzle of what makes Mark and Susan tick. Did you know that Susan has a 16 handicap? You do now. Or that Mark likes to “get away from it all” sailing the dinghy at Hartebeespoort Dam one weekend a month? You do now. Maybe you don't know that he likes to take Timber, their dog that falls asleep standing up, with him when he sails.

Wrap some intelligence around the small details you learn about your customers (all of the above from their Twitter and Facebook accounts, by the way, handles they gave you permission to peruse) and you can map it back to your product and service portfolios. Now when you contact Susan about those biodegradable golf tees (she recycles) you'll know that a SMS at 8:50am on a Sunday is the best time (her credit card records golf goods purchases at around 8:55am) before her regular 9:15am tee-off. Perhaps that sounds a little Minority Report, even in this day and age of ubiquitous social and transactional information, but judicious application of succinct data gathering versus wholesale database purchases, cloaked in a fog of intelligence, makes Susan a happy, profitable customer. It costs a lot more to get that kind of intelligence together but Susan becomes a customer for life. What's that worth? And let's not get started on Mark's wasteful (according to Susan) splurges on top-notch sailing gear.

What's the marketing process you need to follow to approach this level of customer service sophistication?

Whether you opt to use an in-house programme or seek the consultancy and expertise of an experienced provider, using a customer communication management tool, businesses must make sure they address three critical elements of customer relationship management:

Fill in the gaps - As companies grow, customer data can become highly siloed. This can cause significant difficulty in building an accurate image of who you're trying to target. It is imperative businesses work to connect critical data sources so all customer information is stored in a single, easily accessible and coherent base. Over time, as new data continues to emerge from every touch-point, this hub must be added to in order to create a richer profile and understanding of the customer.

Re-engineer and make relevant - Customer data needs to be integrated with the content most appropriate to their individual circumstances. Organisations should create documents to ensure critical information can be easily re-engineered to make it personalised and relevant. In a financial services organisation, for example, different mortgage products can be mapped against data to identify who an offer would be most relevant to. This specific information can then be communicated to the right people using an easily modifiable standard template.

Right person, right format - Nearly half of consumers prefer a combination of both paper and online communications, and 6-in-10 consumers also claim the quality of printed communications directly impacts their perception of the business. Armed with the knowledge as to what format a customer likes to receive information, outputs and workflows can be directed to either a print room or digital system as appropriate.

Research we conducted in Europe, reflected here in South Africa, divulges that 25% of people miss payment deadlines and 39% miss offers and discounts because of junk mail information overload. Nearly 70% are frustrated by the sheer

volume of junk they get in the mail.

Seven-out-of-10 people say they're less loyal to brands that send them irrelevant junk. Six-out-of-10 spend less with those brands.

The good news? 80% of people are willing to share more of their personal information with brands that prove they're trustworthy and reliable in communicating relevant information frequently enough to be useful but not so often it's overwhelming.

And the upshot is that you'll either get to know Mark and Susan or your competitors will.

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