

Measuring Trust Instead of Transactions: Optimizing Digital Content Experiences

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A DCG INSIGHT BRIEF

We See What We Expect to See

To build a valuable audience, we must understand and create a conversation with the people in it. This requires trust, willingly given and consistently earned.

January 7, 2007, was one of those cold, blustery days in Washington DC. At the L'Enfant Plaza downtown Metro stop, a nondescript man in a t-shirt and baseball cap removed his violin from its case and began busking at the entrance to the station.

When he played, the beautiful, complex melody of Bach's Chaconne filled the outside arcade. Of the hundreds of people who flowed by, only a few paused to listen. Two or three put coins in his case. When the violinist finally finished, no one had gathered. No one applauded. No one cared. No one knew that the violinist was the virtuoso Joshua Bell, who, two days earlier, had headlined a concert in Boston commanding \$100 a seat.

In our rushed world, we make snap judgements. Some are good; others, not so much. We see what we expect to see. In the case of the L'Enfant Plaza experiment, people failed to notice the brilliant musician right in front of them because they didn't expect excellence in that context. Any other day, an amateur juggler or singer or magician might have sat in that space. He or she may or may not have performed as wonderfully. But most don't. And so everyone sees what they expect to see.

Today, marketers are almost exclusively the musician in the train station. At their best, they deliver value, rise above the constraints of the media context to grasp the consumer's attention, and hold it just long enough to help the audience move forward in meeting their needs. But of course, for marketers, it's not just one train station on one morning. Marketers must deliver value in the train station, the office, the car, and the music hall. The job of digital marketers today is to help consumers see the excellence in context and to

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deliver contextual, personal value across any channel, so that trust in the brand evolves.

Trust Is an Emotion Built in the Right Context

A recent study published in the *Harvard Business Review* found, rather conclusively, that “when making decisions involving risk, such as an online purchase from a website, consumers tend to rely more on intuition than on deliberation.”¹ Further, researchers found not only that consumers made this judgement quickly, but also that higher perceived risk made them more likely to decide based on intuitive trust rather than deliberation.

In other words, creating trust with consumers is much more about quickly appealing to their emotional and intuitive needs than about ensuring that accurate information is delivered at the right time.

Providing this emotional dimension is at the heart of the “Jobs To Be Done” framework, made famous by Clayton Christensen, Scott Cook, and Taddy Hall in their seminal paper.² In addressing the definition of the “job” that should be fulfilled by the marketer, they say:

“With few exceptions, every job people need or want to do has a social, a functional, and an emotional dimension. If marketers understand each of these dimensions, then they can design a product that’s precisely targeted to the job.”³

However, fulfilling on the consumer’s job-to-be-done isn’t just about delivering the right emotion. Marketers must also deliver the emotion in the right context. Delivering a valuable content-driven experience out of context is akin to playing Bach in the middle of a subway station; it is highly unlikely to be noticed or valued. As research and consulting firm McKinsey & Company recently put it, “organizations that fail to appreciate the context of these situations and manage the cross-functional, end-to-end experiences that shape the customer’s view of the business can prompt a downpour of negative consequences.”⁴

In other words, the key to fostering consumer trust is not just delivering creative and valuable content-driven experiences, but doing so within the context of where and when consumers expect to see them.

Today’s Customer Experience Is Challenged by Lack of Trust

In modern marketing, the journey to becoming more relevant to the consumer is a well-worn path. Marketers may very well be asking themselves “what more do we have to do?” Are marketers not focused directly on the development of contextual customer experiences? Hasn’t the idea of delivering “the right message at the right time” been the mantra of marketing since digital began?

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How do we square the herculean effort enterprise marketers have put into using content, technology, and data to understand their customer and deliver the right message at the right time, with the increasingly frustrating challenge to do exactly that? By some estimates, two-thirds of senior marketers are using “dynamic content generation,” and 73% are using some form of “real-time chat.”⁵ Today, CMOs are increasing their analytics budgets by some 375% in order to improve their understanding of customer behavior.⁶

In our experience, both the progress and the frustration can simultaneously be true. It is very likely that investments in content experiences, technology, and data are providing value in pockets of the organization. A focus on content marketing experiences has created a lead generation engine. An effort to implement marketing automation has provided some segmentation capability and insight into content consumption. The tests of targeted content based on visitor behavior look promising.

These incremental improvements are, however, not keeping pace with the elements of both emotion and context to evolve the customer’s

trust. In most cases, at various steps along the consumer journey, marketers are highly skilled at doing one or the other. Companies have an inside-looking-out perspective on the customer’s journey and treat each step as a gate that all customers eventually pass through. Thus, these marketers either deliver a highly creative experience in the wrong context, or the wrong content in the right context.

Developing trust is as much about what experience the customer has just been through as what experience will be delivered next. It is a deepening conversation with consumers that takes place along their journey to solve a job-to-be-done.

Today, marketers may excel at optimizing one experience for trust only to see that trust broken in the next step, managed by another team and technology. In short: marketing manages the process in silos, and the technology is implemented only to meet the needs of each silo.

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The Unintended Consequences of Technology

The technological revolution of the last eighteen years has enabled marketers to create ever-more efficient processes and to automate more and more of the customer's experience. However, this technological revolution has also succeeded in putting this efficiency at the center of the strategy, instead of the customer.

The challenges from this stratification are threefold:

1. **Defining leads vs. audiences.** The myopic focus on marketing's efficiency of the funnel has, ironically, resulted in the delivery of exactly the wrong kind of experience to most people in the buying journey. Marketers strive to convert broadcast media audiences into visitors, visitors into leads, leads into buyers, and buyers into loyal advocates. Thus, anyone who remains at a previous stage is either forgotten about entirely or forever labeled and delivered content as if they remain at the stage where they last engaged. Brand teams continue to deliver the same experiences to those who visit the website. Demand generation teams send the same content to people left in the marketing automation database. Sales enablement teams throw more of the same content to the qualified

leads, who are still viewed as qualified.

The truth, in fact, is that these people's unwillingness, or inability, to move to the next stage means that they should get a completely different kind of experience than the one that failed to move them in the first place.

2. **Targeting technology challenges.** Marketing content technology vendors have mostly succumbed to the pressure of proving why their solution provides a return on investment. Most, if not all, of these solutions have enabled content to be created, managed, optimized, and measured. Thus, the integration and business rules for optimizing customer experiences lie squarely in those systems and must be duplicated, managed, and scaled accordingly. As a result, different teams/groups create and manage content-driven experiences based on the metrics to which they're held accountable. This, predictably, has encouraged technology vendors to continue to add more features designed to help marketers expand the channels they manage and personalize and target content for more relevance.

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3. **Data silo challenges.** As marketing management technology has stratified over as many digital experiences, so has the data itself. Ad-tech oriented technologies now provide for capturing visitor information to help better target advertising. Marketing automation systems capture email addresses and content consumption on websites. Some enterprise content management systems capture data on content consumption behavior and can theoretically personalize the web or e-commerce catalog experience. Web analytics capture the aggregate content consumption. Then, the CRM system captures the purchase and management of customer information and the products/services they have purchased. The result is that audience data across the entire journey is siloed in many different systems. This means that marketers don't truly understand where any one customer is on his or her particular journey. And while integration between these systems is theoretically possible, few companies actually go to the trouble of attempting the inordinately complex project of doing so. Companies that do make the effort spend a huge amount of time in software configuration and implementation figuring out how to build a singular pool of data, instead of how to orchestrate the actual delivery.

Measuring Trust Instead of Transactions

The approach, then, is to put customers at the center of the process and see them as audiences looking for excellence in context. They will engage in a deepening conversation with the brand. To do that, marketers must begin to look at buyers and customers not just as potential transactions that might be persuaded in the moment, but rather as individual audience members moving through a conversation that can be improved by delivering specific and relevant value. There are three opportunities for businesses to make moves in this direction.

1. **Audiences first, opportunities second.**

Marketers can utilize technology and processes that look at audiences as assets to marketing. Marketers can ask how to leverage and deliver value not only to those who progress from level to level, but also to those who remain at a previous step along their journey. Utilizing the data gleaned by continuing to deliver value to those who remain behind can provide a number of benefits. For example, Kraft Foods looks at the audience of its KraftRecipes.com site as a valuable asset. From more than 100 million unique monthly visits, it collects more than 22,000 individual attributes, including flavor and product affinities. The company uses this data to optimize its ad impressions and create custom segmentation for more relevant and targeted advertising to both audiences and lookalikes.⁷



2. Content targeting from a central point.

Almost a decade ago, Geoffrey Moore, author of the book *Crossing The Chasm*, encouraged businesses to look beyond the “system of record” and begin developing “systems of engagement.”⁸ It is time for enterprise marketers to begin wringing some sanity out of their technology acquisition binge. Marketers should look to simplify and centralize their methods for creating and managing optimization strategies for content-driven experiences. This is certainly a people, process, and technology challenge – but marketers must get out of the business of constant software implementation and configuration. A wonderful example is what *The Economist* accomplished in its transition from an advertising model to a subscription model. In looking at a unified audience across the journey, the publication’s team understood that there were specific segments that “didn’t need to be sold” (they would buy anyway), others that “would never buy” (they would continue to just look at free content), and those that “might be willing to buy.” They created content conversations across multiple channels for the latter and quadrupled subscription profits in four years.⁹

3. The rise of emotional data.

Data, and how quickly it can be acquired, has become the “gold standard” as well as a buzzword for many businesses. Every day, it seems new technology solutions promise to help marketers understand how to intelligently use all the data at their disposal. But the one attribute that technology cannot solve is the customer’s motivation for handing over data. The emotion behind data may be the strongest determinant of its value. Emotion in data lies in how and why it was gathered. The key power of trustworthy content, delivered in context, is that it provides valuable experiences where the audience *willingly provides* the company with insightful information. In exchange for entertainment, engagement, or true utility (supporting a job-to-be-done), consumers are trustingly providing accurate data in exchange for something they perceive as valuable. When one compares this to gating an asset behind a registration firewall or scraping it from an ad that the consumer had no choice but to see, one begins to understand where the value in that data starts to increase. Emotional data is simply more valuable than data gathered through surveillance or a restrictive-based approach.

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The successful businesses of tomorrow are creating connected networks of highly specific, interactive content experiences across paid, owned, and earned media. These businesses are measuring their ability to create trust with audiences rather than transactions with buyers. They are creating content-driven experiences focused on what customers care about based on their passions, questions, needs, and wants.

Marketers should first see the entirety of marketing as building trust upon the preferences of people who make up their audience – and then begin using that affinity to develop better and more personalized experiences for the individuals in that audience. Then, and only then, will customers see what they expect to see – more value from the marketer’s brand than from the competitor.

Endnotes

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Digital Clarity Group serves clients across the ecosystem for customer experience solutions. DCG helps enterprise buyers of services and technologies engage with the optimal set of partners for their digital transformation and customer experience initiatives. DCG helps digital agencies and integrators align their client portfolios with their strongest capabilities and competencies, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction, repeat business, and performance-based differentiation. DCG helps technology vendors optimize their channel partner programs for successful implementations that deliver sustainable value to customers.

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