Personalized and Targeted: Bringing the Humanization Back into Data

In the last decade, personalization has become one of the central standards in marketing strategy. The advancement of technology and data, coupled with accessibility, forever changed how we market and sell to each other. The space has opened up to engage in new, more intimate ways, creating a more personal and friendly environment. Consumers have more options than ever, and the customer service relationship has become a critical part of the sale.

84% of consumers say being treated like a person, not a number, is very important to winning their business. - Salesforce

Forming Relationships

Leonard Berry, professor of marketing at Texas A&M University, coined the term **"relationship marketing"** in an article he wrote for the American Marketing Association's Services Marketing Conference. The foundation of the concept was simple—start thinking beyond the sale and consider the brand's relationship with its audience. We could go back to the golden rule philosophy that most of us learned at some point, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." On the surface, it seems incredibly straightforward. However, when we start to look at the art of the sale, the golden rule can often get lost. Whether that be from quotas, deadlines, personality, or type of product, the act of selling still holds some contention for some.

As the decades moved forward, the everyday person was able to generate and share in a myriad of new ways. In 2006, Time magazine named "you" as its Person of the Year, which was an acknowledgment of how user-generated content was not only being created by independent individuals but was also now available to a much wider audience. Social and community-based platforms began to emerge. In addition, the 2007 release of the smartphone brought about the ability to create content and conduct business on the go. This inundation into the market was starting to change the commercial world.

At the same time, the traditional corporate world was fluctuating. The global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007-2008 altered the course of many businesses and individual lives. The resulting recession brought an overwhelming number of bankruptcies, closures, lost jobs, and doubled **unemployment numbers**. However, all of these factors brought about something else—entrepreneurship.

Over the past decade, we have seen a new start-up boom. People began to see the potential opportunities from opening a new business outweighed the "corporate America" alternatives. In 2009, the rate was 17 percent higher than it had been three years before. A lot of people wanted to do things their way, and the public wanted to be heard. This entrepreneurial culture also brought about a new way to market and sell. Marketers had to strategize how to approach these new small businesses, as well as rethink how to approach large corporations that were struggling. The art of customer service came back to the forefront, and personalization began to take center stage.

To <whom> It May Concern

Personalization is one of many new marketing buzzwords and is often lumped into the same sentence with big data, segmenting, and predictive analytics. However, personalization should not be just a word. Too often in marketing a good idea gets lost in sales quotas and the hustle of every day. There is a fine but instrumental line between personalization and humanization. The intent and action behind the personalization is where that difference lies.

Instead of "To Whom It May Concern", we can now easily find and address our correspondence to the right person. Thanks to CRM technology, we can use data in the way data was meant to be used. If you are using your CRM properly, you aren't just storing your customer and prospect information; you are tagging, segmenting, pulling, and grouping vital data on a consistent basis. The CRM is the picture window into the world of each customer, and the shades are not drawn. So, now, we can code our email to pull first names off our list so that if you are sending an email to Barbra, it can read, Dear Barbara.

It, of course, can do far more than that as well. I may have a spreadsheet of 10,000 names to send my email, and it may pull your name to read Dear Barbara, but the novelty of seeing our names can wear out quickly. In comes targeting. If Barbara is searching for the perfect pen, we can target her email to read about our unique, one-of-a-kind, new-fangled pen, and now it's 20% off! An overwhelming **72% of consumers** say they only engage with personalized messaging, which is why personalization has taken center stage in so many email strategies.

Conversely, the In Moment CX Trends study found that **75 percent of consumers** find most forms of personalization creepy, and 22 percent would take their business elsewhere. We are currently entering into an interesting era of marketing. And even though **87% of users** will opt for a 'Do Not Track' data option, a lot of consumers are often willing to trade data for deals and discounts. The bottom line—we cherish our privacy, but we also want a good deal. This balance of consumer wants versus needs is where marketers begin to have an obligation in how they use that data.

Marketers must have a very clear understanding of targeting versus personalization. While personalization can be effective, creating a connection with the consumer by understanding their needs and preferences, targeting could be seen as a more intrusive collection of our private searching. This is why targeted ads are often referred to as "creepy" and people have expressed they feel like they are "being stalked" when they see those targeted ads pop up. Even the New York Times used the word stalking in a **2018 article** about the new tactic. Yet, search for jeans and less than 30 seconds later, up pops an ad for jeans. This cookie based targeted ads are a relatively new tactic and while there isn't enough research to say yay or nay, it is becoming very evident that how you use these ads, and that data, is the key. Interestingly enough, **Dutch publisher** NPOrecently found that sales increased after targeted ads were removed.

Marketers must go beyond the technological capabilities of their CRM, and the ability to track searches, and begin to think about the humans they are targeting. This new way of looking at marketing is where personalization is the technology, and humanization becomes the intent. Moving forward, we must not just think about all the things technology can do but what we are actually sending into the world. Conscientiously using the data we are given becomes the humanization aspect of marketing. We must now shift our focus from the possibilities of data to the strategy of the human experience. The heart of marketing is the customers. When marketing plans and strategy prioritize the human first, we are all winners. When it comes down to it, marketing is customer service. It is the service of letting a customer know that you have a product or deal they need to make their lives better.