



Retail – From Awareness to Advocacy

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Customers have changed – How much have you?

Marketing has traditionally played an important role in creating brand perceptions. But that role of marketing is being enhanced. In addition, marketing must align itself to changing customer journeys. The New-Age customer is smart, omnipresent, and expects to be serviced in real-time. The good news is that technology is enabling a number of new customer touch points that stimulate and enhance customer interactions. It is now possible to remain in touch with the customer at each stage of the buying journey – and impact potential sales while moving the customer to a stage of advocacy. *This paper looks at how technology can enable brands to connect with customers and create delightful experiences at each touch-point.*



Collaboration between the CTO and the CMO – Critical to marketing success

Today, a buyer has several media and social channels to depend on for guidance and advice. The buyer can interact with current users and seek their honest opinions, even interact with users of competitive products, get better pricing options for the same products from different retailers and gain control over their buying decisions.

Active evaluation of a product happens at several stages; before and after exposure to advertising. Technology has evolved to show products, manuals, use cases, testimonials, etc., in many ways at each of the touch points. These touch points could be spread over stores, malls, airports, events, online and a variety of displays and devices.

Technology has also evolved to capture and measure customer activity at each of these touch points. It can create highly granular profiles of customers using data from multiple sources.¹ The data can help craft messages that present the best possibility of conversion and, in addition, of building continued loyalty and advocacy.

The use of data and devices at the growing number of touch points spell superior outcomes for marketing. Technology also ensures that the outcomes are measurable, providing accurate evidence of ROI. But, to extract more bangs for marketing dollars, marketing must shift the focus from traditional advertising and brand building to using data and technology.

For retailers, the challenge around this transformation is to ensure collaboration between the CTO and the CMO. With technology becoming a growing component of marketing, the CTO becomes the pivot for success. What should the CTO do to ensure a CMO's success in the goal of taking a customer from awareness to advocacy?



Data and devices – Taking customers from awareness to advocacy

The IT organization under the wings of the CTO has the data. The marketing organization has to build a program on this canvas of data. Are the two working together to ensure that there is convergence of customer data at the back-end with a convergence of messaging at the front-end with customer empowerment in between? Notice how major retailers such as Amazon and services such as Tripadvisor have successfully managed to capture and leverage customer data. Typically, products, messaging and offers are customized and targeted at the potential buyers across online sites.

In an online-only world, using the best practices set up by leading internet streaming media companies would have sufficed. But there is growing evidence that the customer is continuing to rely on retail stores to examine products and seek the guidance and expertise of store associates. Once the customer is in the store, why does the retailer stop leveraging data as it does online? Why does the retailer not use the power of digital displays, m-POS, tablets, the mobile devices that customers carry and other clienteling solutions to link customer data to inventory and messaging? What prevents the retailer from using customer data to generate interest, orders and save sales as a consequence of show rooming? Why does the retailer leave everything to universal displays, discounts and generic bundled offers?

It is imperative to leverage customer data, known purchase patterns and assess nascent needs based on established behavior. This is the key to sending personalized and customized messages to customers within the store. To achieve this, it is necessary to have real-time data and analytical systems that are integrated with customer-facing front-end displays. These systems can use widely prevalent technologies such as Wi-Fi, RFID and Bluetooth or even combine them with sophisticated video-based facial recognition systems. These technologies provide retailers the capability to identify customers within their aisles, note their behavior and take the next best action in real time.

¹ These include public data bases, purchase history/ credit card records, loyalty card information, partner records, call center interactions (email, IM and voice call interactions), CRM data, warranty information, data exhaust of online and mobile activity, social media comments/ sentiments and geography

The below illustration (Figure 1) depicts the typical customer journey from awareness to advocacy



Figure 1: Retail Customer Journey - Awareness to Advocacy

Imagine for a moment that you are in a store looking for a fitness supplement. Using iBeacons² or Wi-Fi, the store can recognize you through your smartphone application. Based on the time spent by you at various aisles, targeted promotion/product content/suggestions can be delivered to you through a smartphone application. If you are unable to find the right product, the application can trigger a notification to a store associate who can then help you find a product that fits your needs.

One of the upsides of these solutions is that they put existing IT infrastructure into further use. The focus is on identifying the devices – smart TVs, digital displays, interactive kiosks -- that can be leveraged to target customers and integrating them at the back-end with data sources and analytical engines.

These displays don't waste the customer's time by showing generic advertising. Instead, using data, they deliver messages that fit the stage of the customer's purchase cycle.

The accurate messaging can elevate engagement by several notches. The outcomes are typically magnitudes higher than advertising. The systems meet the customer's needs, ensure customer's delight, build loyalty and grow advocacy.



New marketing firepower – The future in retail

The journey from customer awareness to customer advocacy requires collaboration between marketing and technology organizations, similarly between the retailer and the brand. Customer data must be shared by the two – to increase the probability of the desired outcomes.

Retailers are handicapped by the fact that the data brands share with them is in different formats and in a variety of locations. Accessing the data and making it usable by the retailer's IT systems can prove to be a barrier. This is where a competent technology partner with retail domain expertise can become an invaluable asset. With the right technology partner, retailers can:

- » Leverage data and their investment in in-store IT infrastructure/ devices to create more effective marketing plans
- » Extract more value from investments in marketing through customized messaging
- » Create customer delight, thereby improving customer advocacy
- » Understand customer needs and adjust inventory, store displays and pricing accordingly
- » Reduce the impact of show rooming

Brand advocacy has a major long-term impact on business sustainability and profitability. It easily falls within the list of the top goals of every retailer. These goals can be achieved with the right mix of technology and effective collaboration between the marketing and the IT organization. However, advocacy is not the end of a customer journey. It is the beginning of several new customer journeys that create an impact over time that provides invaluable support to marketing techniques and strategies.

² Apple technology that allows low-cost transmitters to notify proximal iOS 7 or 8 devices and can also be deployed as an indoor positioning system

About the Author

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