

Omnichannel Automation: Bridging Print and Digital, and Enriching the Customer Experience

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Abstract

This paper will examine what is omnichannel marketing; what are the challenges faced by marketers who are creating communications campaigns that span multiple print and digital channels; and how omnichannel marketing automation can solve many of the challenges faced by marketers and enterprises, both in terms of campaign production and execution as well as optimizing the customer experience.

Omnichannel Automation:

Omnichannel marketing is a strategic and targeted approach to communications. It aims to build a stronger customer-brand relationship over time. With this tactic, the brand will offer an integrated, personalized journey to ensure a single and consistent experience over a variety of channels.

For the customer during an omnichannel campaign, each interaction is a seamless extension of a previous interaction, no matter which channel he or she is on now or was previously. All context and history will continue to the next channel on the journey. The channel itself isn't important anymore. What's important? Delivering the best customer experience.

And even though the omnichannel campaign might be delivered on a massive scale to thousands or even millions of recipients, each customer will still feel that they are the single recipient of the campaign.

Organizations face many challenges getting their personalized omnichannel campaigns off the ground. According to InfoTrends, coordinating campaigns across multiple channels, dept., and brands is a challenge for a quarter of all enterprises¹,

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and they need solutions which provide the critical bridge between print and digital touch points that is needed for the entire customer experience to be a success.

Omnichannel Production Challenges:

- **Reducing a siloed organizational structure;** bringing different teams together so they can share information, goals, tools, and processes.
- **Managing the customer journey;** minimizing customer effort at every campaign stage to offer a seamless experience every time.
- **Accessing Data Across Channels;** connecting online data to offline actions, which is critical to understanding customer behavior.
- **Communicating omnichannel capabilities;** enabling print providers to win new clients by demonstrating capabilities quickly.
- **Creating personalized cross-channel content;** adapting to different production workflows for each channel.
- **Recognizing a customer on different channels or devices;** tracking interactions from each customer across a variety of devices.
- **Customer Privacy;** protecting sensitive personal information given by customers in the course of everyday transactions.
- **Keeping Print IN THE MIX;** to give omnichannel campaigns a higher ROI.

The Customer Experience (CX)

Omnichannel customer experiences (CX) are highly desired by brands and are a great way to expand into new and lucrative services with existing customers. According to PwC, 73% of all people point to customer experience as an important factor in their purchasing decisions, just behind price and product quality.²

Service providers can engage customers with a value proposition around omnichannel campaigns, marketing automation, and integrated customer journeys, rather than just print or email or landing sites alone.

Research³ continues to find that multichannel or omnichannel communications are more effective than single-channel communications, leading to higher response rates and greater ROMI. Adding print in particular - personalized, relevant and creatively-compelling - has also been found to increase the effectiveness of omnichannel communications significantly. Print can be a bridge to the digital world, enhance the customer experience, and tie into marketing strategies in much the same way that a digital touchpoint can. As digital printing technology advances, capabilities like QR codes, Near Field Communication (NFC) and Augmented Reality (AR) are opening up new opportunities for marketers to make print interactive and coexist cohesively with digital initiatives to optimize the customer experience.

However, the adoption rate of omnichannel communications does not reflect an appreciation of these research findings nor a desire or aptitude to move into the omnichannel space to reap the rewards.

Visualization and Collaboration

One challenge faced by users creating and executing omnichannel campaigns is that it takes a multi-skilled team of marketers, writers, graphic designers and developers to deploy them. These professionals often work separately in siloed teams. Another challenge is getting all the stakeholders to understand often complex non-linear campaigns, that are responsive to the consumer's interaction. Customer journey diagrams should articulate the flow of the customer experience, including all touchpoints, filters, and design specifications, to allow service providers, agencies, designers and clients to visualize, communicate and collaborate on the joint project based on the campaign diagram. This diagram should be referred to for all phases of the campaign, from conceptualization through to execution and results analytics.

Automation

Marketing automation tools should be utilized for all stages- design, deployment, and results analysis, with a single integrated view of the customer. All the outbound touchpoints, both print and digital, should be automated across the entire campaign.

The process for creating the print touchpoints must be as easy as the process for creating the digital touchpoints, and the same logic and real-time data should be shared across all touchpoints and driven by specific conditions so that consumers see consistent messages, and brand content, regardless of the channel delivering the communication.

Setting automation to respond to the consumer's interaction with the campaign gives service providers greater flexibility to create all the touchpoints and response scenarios before even launching the campaign. A higher value also stems from scheduling activities to selected audiences that are defined by CRM data and by individuals' behavior in a specific campaign or even in previous campaigns. For example, automatically sending an email to individuals who have not visited their Personalized URL (PURL) within three days of receiving a printed postcard, and for whom there is a valid email address. Such conditional scheduling allows service providers to offer omnichannel campaigns of much higher value and create much improved and committed business relationships with their clients.

Activities can also be launched outside of normal working hours, and staff can use their time to work on more higher value tasks.

Integration

The marketer should always reach the consumer using his or her preferred media channels, so omnichannel campaigns need to include connections to multiple systems such as CRM systems using APIs or connect with digital touchpoints such as email and personalized webpages.

Campaign Reusability

Great omnichannel campaigns are the ones that bring in an ongoing revenue stream both for the service provider and client. An omnichannel campaign is costly to set up, but once ready service providers can replicate the campaign for other purposes or clients, thus duplicating the return many times over, using the same initial investment.

Marketing campaigns can also be placed onto web-to-print storefronts and be repeated or quickly configured by the end-users. This is a self-service kiosk approach whereby with a few user selections the multi-touchpoint, automated, and lasting campaign can be launched. Campaign flows can be fully automated to execute touchpoints at different times for different recipients.

Using a self-serve process end-users can customize and personalize each campaign; define the targeted list of recipients; preview and validate touchpoints for media during the customization process; enter the site and easily make campaign changes in a few minutes; order the final campaign; view real-time analytics and download up-to-date customer data.

Automation can also be defined in a flexible way using customizable project parameters, such as a wedding date (e.g., send a reminder email on the wedding date, feeding the wedding date parameter later when it is known), or other drip campaigns which need to be scheduled in relation to preset parameters.

Evaluation

During omnichannel campaigns, results should be measured so that users can understand trends and track how each recipient is interacting with different marketing initiatives and channels over time. Print touchpoint results can also be measured if digital elements have been added, such as QR codes, AR, and more. This insight is critical to understanding how marketing initiatives are actually contributing to the bottom line.

Conclusion

Too many marketers are focusing on the digital realm and lack a holistic approach to understanding and communicating with their customers. Yet, print service providers are in a unique position to extend their services to add omnichannel marketing services and take advantage of this lucrative business development opportunity. They already have customers for their print services, an understanding of personalization and campaign logic, and advanced data capabilities. Moreover, adding digital touchpoints to an existing physical campaign is easier than adding print to an existing digital campaign.

Consumers' feelings towards the physicality of print is clear; it's considered more trustful, powerful and meaningful than digital and therefore print should be added to the mix. It is a permanent and tangible item with keepsake value that projects a sense of high-value and trust and evokes a physical interaction; it can be touched, carried and endures even when the internet network is down. Unlike digital touchpoints, a single print touchpoint can engage audiences over time, rather than in fleeting moments, and blends maximum individualized relevancy with compelling creative design and quality.

There is a significant lack of brands and vendors who are engaging with print in the same way as they engage with digital channels and many omnichannel vendors do not have a print capability at all. This is not because the technology does not exist, rather it is because digital is considered 'easier,' 'cheap,' and 'simple to deploy' – and in many ways this is correct. However, a true omnichannel customer experience should include print wherever possible, to maximize the opportunity of the campaign. This is easily possible with today's technology, but only to those that are not blinded by the digital sunlight.

Automated omnichannel marketing with print across the full customer journey is a proven tactic that drives more business, reinvigorates customer trust, and assists in escaping price pressure; it is what consumers want, and marketers need to step up and give it to them.

References

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2. pwc.com/future-of-cx
3. Source: InfoTrends - Marketing Communications: Strategies for Differentiation (April 2019): "InfoTrends' research has consistently shown that communicating across a wider range of channels will generate better results, and enterprises seem to be getting the message."