Harnessing real-time customer insights:
The key to digital transformation

Rapid time to market is not enough anymore. Not only do today's customers expect brands to engage deeply with them, they also expect that engagement to be contextual and related to what they are doing right at that moment. Such a view goes far beyond 360 degrees. Products and services need to be personalized and contextual to be competitive in the global marketplace. Enabling the business agility required to support these delivery models requires fusing customer analytics and customer experience together.

Siddharth Gaikwad, Global Head of Digital Experience for Dell Digital Business Services, shares how the explosion of customer data is driving the need for – and path to – digital transformation in the enterprise.

Q&A with Siddarth Gaikwad
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? What customer aspects should we capture to improve engagement?

SG: Customers buy differently today. The reasons they buy, where they buy and how they buy has been completely transformed. But that's just one part of the spectrum. It is as important to follow customers after a buy to gauge what they do with their purchase as it is to track what they have purchased. Demographic data (e.g. age, gender and income) and psychographic patterns (e.g. interests, attitudes and opinions) should be captured during pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases.

In terms of what customer aspects to capture, that really depends on the particular product or service under consideration. For example, data captured for holiday travel planning will be vastly different from that of a chronic patient preparing for surgery.

We encourage organizations to look for opportunities to combine traditional purchase information with real-time, personal information when formulating customer engagement plans. Our Single Score solution combines internal business information with external, real-time social data to help generate actionable insights.

These real-time sources can include:

- Engagement data generated from digital interactions such as purchases, research, inspiration, employment and education.

- Psychographic data generated from social media activity, including personal expression, likes, needs, affinity and clout.

- Physiological data generated from wearables such as smart clothing and accessories.

- Consumption data generated by internet-enabled consumer devices such as mobile phones, automobiles and home entertainment systems.

What role do customer journey maps play in this?

SG: Customer journey maps help organizations visualize customer experiences and target relevant touch points. These maps provide the canvas on which to render the future state experiences that digital channels and technologies can enable or improve upon.

It's paramount to identify all channels through which a customer might engage with a product or service. Our journey maps help predict the best possible opportunity to meet customer expectations during this process and the emotional impact and value-add each interaction might result in.

What technologies do we use in customer journey mapping?

SG: We use analytics, mobile, social media, cloud and Internet of Things technologies to get customer feedback and provide necessary offerings to enhance the customer experience.

One exercise to do after customer journey maps are created is to enlist reprioritized touch-points or channels based on identified pain points. This includes emails, advertisements and marketing, call-center interaction design, campaign design, web, mobile-web, mobile, Internet of Things, etc., and supported technologies that enable experiences across these channels.

What are the biggest barriers to the adoption of customer analytics?

SG: We often hear initially from customers that cost is a barrier. This can be especially true when an organization is seeking to go full length in understanding their customers or is considering updating its entire existing infrastructure to handle modern digital processing. It may be best in such a case to start with a handful of targeted customer analytics solutions in a few departments. Getting some quick wins that demonstrate how harnessing customer analytics can improve the bottom line and aid in decision-making may help address cost concerns.

Data privacy and increasing the awareness of it is also a barrier—along with lack of experience and knowledge on how to leverage aggregated information. However, I don't see any permanent barriers to adoption.

Customer analytics is the next big wave that organizations need to embrace. What worries me more is the abandonment of a program at an immature stage because program benefits have not been captured or fully communicated.

Should all companies hire data scientists to help with this process?

SG: Yes, including accurate and relevant data insight is critical to customer engagement, and data scientists can help ensure that the right information is incorporated into plans from the start.

Collaboration tools, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, mobile applications, sales suites and social media platforms now generate more information than most organizations know what to do with. Much of that information may sit in silos or be irrelevant to the task at hand, and the data may not be quickly accessible or integrated.

Data scientists bring the machine learning, data visualization and communication skills needed to capture and understand big data, establish a comprehensive data strategy and build out the data architecture necessary to underpin customer engagement and complete digital transformation.

How can organizations forge closer integration and enable customer analytics to shape customer engagement effectively?

SG: Organizations need to take a business-first approach to digital transformation that focuses on the goals and objectives that will grow revenue and enable innovation, instead of specific technologies.

For customer analytics to shape customer engagement effectively, an organization must be willing to make rapid changes to its product or service line-up moving forward. The underlying IT environment needs to be simplified, modernized and enabled with high speed technologies to support ongoing change moving forward as well.

The availability of real-time customer insights is transforming the way we do business. How customers buy, where they buy and the way they buy is changing — but that's just part of the story. Understanding what customers do after a purchase is just as important.

Who is talking about it:
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