OPINION

Woolley Marketing: Personalising, mass marketing or both?

In his regular column for Mumbrella, Trinity P3 founder and global CEO Darren Woolley looks at and of personalised marketing.

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by **DARREN WOOLLEY**

Dear <first_name>,

This must be the lowest common denominator in personalised marketing. Sending an email to an existing or potential customer and you cannot either address the person by name or get their name right.

For all the talk about the ability of data to make marketing more personalised, and the technology to enable this personalised marketing at scale, the evidence is that many are struggling.

Most disappointing personally, is the number of agencies, particularly SEO specialists, who email-market addressing their emails to trinityp3.com. To think they are positioning themselves as marketing specialists and yet cannot be bothered to do the most basic of research to find a name to which address their marketing.

Yes, this is entry level and basic. But even many of the larger marketers find themselves making these basic mistakes. I remember working on a project for an insurance company and in the data field for <address_line_1> it read "DO NOT MAIL" on quite a few of the customer records. Lack of and incorrect data is just part of the problem.

Given that we are facing a "cookie apocalypse", then the requirement for targeting using first party data means that that data needs to be immaculate. Otherwise the old idiom applies – "Garbage in. Garbage out".

The moment Insta, Facebook and Google finds out that you
gained weight, stopped sports and changed eating habits.

Cartoon by Dennis Flad, with permission (2021)

Once we're able to identify a customer and get their name right, we can move to actually getting to know a customer. There are lots of ways to do this. Anyone who has studied Lester Wunderman's approach knows it was to ask customers questions and provide options for customers to make choices, so as to learn more about them and therefore understand them better.

Today, it appears that what is often euphemistically called 'Big Data' actually means merely looking at behavioural and demographic information and making predictions about what customers need and want. I am sure this is the approach that meant when reaching a landmark birthday and having just survived my second divorce, I was inundated with offers on my social media platforms for erectile disfunction treatments and foreign bridal services, in equal measure. Neither of which I was in the market for, particularly.

But of course, we have also heard about the New York Times story in 2012, where Target USA was so good at analysing customer data that they sent coupons for maternity and baby products to the household of a teenage girl whose parents were unaware she was pregnant. Apocryphal or not, the story both inflames the imagination of what could be possible and shows the pitfalls of success.

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Similar, but much greater, was the outrage over the work of Cambridge Analytica and its use of Facebook user data to create psychographic profiles for serving advertising to generate a political response. I wonder if the outrage was because it was done without the user's consent, or because it was used to influence a democratic election. Or both. I am sure many marketers could only dream of having this kind of persuasive impact on their audience. But that is the promise that is offered by those pedalling personalised marketing solutions at scale.

Here is an opportunity for marketers to persuade their customers and influence their behaviour by delivering the right message or offer at the right time in the right format or channel for the customer to engage and respond.

The flaw in this scenario is that as an industry we have done nothing to persuade the public and their government representatives that we can be trusted with this kind of cosmic commercial power. (Clearly politicians, who share the trust ranking at the bottom end with advertising executives, cannot be trusted with it.)

So, what is the alternative? Well if you go back and read Byron Sharp's book on How Brands Grow, you cannot fail using mass media channels to provide mental availability. If you fall into the Mark Ritson camp, customer data provides you with an understanding to be able to better target and engage your segment. While Gary Vee will be telling you to use all of the data and segmentations that Facebook and the like offers to target and convert your audience into customers.

Who is right? The fact is they all are to some extent. But who is right for you and your category, market and segment? Well that depends and is up to you to work out. That is why you get paid the big bucks, after all.

Darren Woolley is the founder and global CEO at Trinity P3. Woolley Marketing is a regular Mumbrella column.
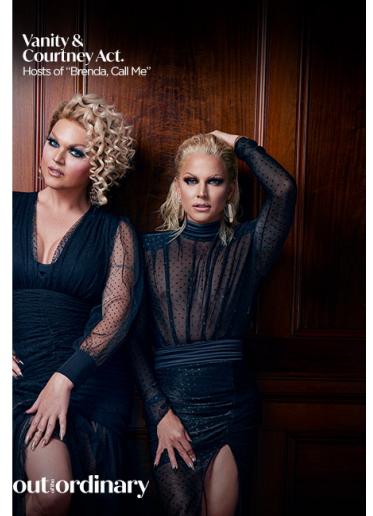
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