

Marketers' tactics are turning customers against them

By [Joan Osterloh](#)

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Marketers need to be aware of the "creep factor" when deploying strategies of personalisation and individualisation in their marketing efforts, Forrester's Brendan Witcher, VP and principal analyst serving eBusiness and channel strategy professionals, warned as early as December 2017.



Image credit: Sebastian Pociacha on Unsplash.

Six months later, Forrester senior analyst Susan Bidel was even more direct in her message: "Marketers, you need to take control of your advertising strategies and adtech stacks now to better address today's consumers." She cautioned that those who didn't were at a high risk of annoying and creeping out the very customers needed for business growth.



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Lost loyalty

In its latest research, "Marketers Versus Customers: Opposing Forces Erupt", Forrester now finds that even though marketers set out with the best intentions to implement customer-obsessed marketing and customer experience strategies, they still end up alienating and 'creeping out' customers, resulting in lost loyalty.

Marketers use personalisation to make their marketing more relevant and to help it stand out, Forrester says in a blog on the study. The irony is that with all the customer data that marketers use to personalise, the one thing they seem to have forgotten to find out from consumers is whether they even want personalised communication at all, the firm writes.

Combined with identity resolution and increased automation, companies have created adtech and martech stacks that are creeping people out. We think our phones are listening to us. And then Facebook admits it is doing this. So, what's gone wrong?



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The report by Melissa Parrish, Forrester's VP and group director serving marketing professionals, highlights that marketers are ignoring their customers' desire for anonymity, by assuming that they all want personalised experiences. They are foregoing the authenticity of their own brands by "giving lip service to brand values they think resonate with customers."

There's an overt focus on martech at the expense of human creativity. Lastly, they're profiling customers on precarious connections and getting it wrong, sometimes with harmful and even traumatic results, she explains.

The solution is to return to true customer-centricity by going back to basics by looking at the following, Parrish writes in the report:

1. Remember that customers are different. Here it's not about customer segments or personas, but rather the extent to which they expect you to know them. Treat customers and prospects differently – prospects "want value, not a background check"
2. Customers are tired of lookalike ads and direct mail that is poorly personalised, trying to get them to buy things for which they're not even in the market. Choose your target audience, focus on them and then let go of the others
3. Programmatic marketing has its upsides and downsides. Avoid the two extremes of advertising at scale across multiple channels on the one hand and limiting advertising to channels where everyone seems to be at once, such as Facebook, on the other. Instead, target your audience with responsible content and choose platforms on which you can reach them online and offline
4. Consider whether you should be using cookie, key-stroke and audience data at all for your brand. Intent-based target marketing through search optimisation might be a smarter choice
5. Don't assume that personalisation will make customer experiences more relevant. Rather interview your customers and test different variations of personalised content to find the right balance between information, recommendations, simplicity and empathy
6. Don't ignore the 20% who don't want any personalisation at all – use your customer insights data to identify them and then meet their expectation of no personalisation



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Parrish offers important recommendations for the winning marketers of the future. Since the success of marketing is measured by the bottom line of revenue generation, truly customer-obsessed marketers need KPIs that are "fine-tuned" to understand what customers value, not what's valuable to the brand, she writes.

What customers want and value should be defined in terms of four dimensions along the axes of functional-experiential and economic-symbolic. Then, measure the dimensions along the entire customer life cycle, she explains.



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What this requires is the following:

- Firstly, marketing and customer experience (CX) teams need to unify and leverage one another's unique skills to deliver best-in-class customer experiences that drive loyalty, customer retention and growth. Truly customer-obsessed brands will bring CX and marketing together to harness the best that both have to offer
- Secondly, brands need to rebuild trust. As consumers become more privacy-savvy, they will become more selective about the brands with which they are willing to share their data. Marketers need to develop 'privacy personas' as a new marketing segment to ensure that they deliver experiences their customers are comfortable with
- Thirdly, refocus on creative excellence. In Parrish's words "new prospecting strategies will centre on great creative – making an emotional impact and contextual targeting driving relevance"
- Lastly, marketers need to find ways to extend customer obsession throughout the enterprise. Employees need to be empowered to deliver on the brand promise, which must align to and be in harmony with CX

The companies that thrive will be those whose CX truly reflects brand values, Parrish concludes.

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