

By BARTON GOLDENBERG

## Contextual Relevance Is Critical to Capturing Customers

*They want information relevant to them, served up their way, not yours*

**M**ORE THAN 70 percent of today's customers make their buying decision without speaking to anyone from a company's sales or customer service departments. So securing a sale increasingly means serving up relevant information to the right person at the right time—their way, not yours—during their buying window. It's no easy task in our digital world, where a customer's attention span is minimal and competition is but a click away.

This requires you to transmit contextually relevant information at each customer touch point, whether they're researching products on your website; visiting your social media pages or communities; connecting with your contact center; or showing up at your store.

In a recent G2 Crowd study, 71 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that sales reps should engage buyers earlier in the purchase process with relevant information, and 72 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement: "I appreciate vendors who contact me with relevant and contextual information."

How do you deliver contextual relevance?

- **Step 1: Study buyer behavior.** Understand your customers' buying process—where, how, and when—and then create behavioral models that mimic this behavior.

- **Step 2: Perform relevant data analytics.** Analyze your customer behavioral models to determine which customer segments are buying which products via which channels.

- **Step 3: Create and implement relevant messaging.** Leverage a commercially available message delivery system to send contextually relevant messages to your customers via their desired channel as they move through their buying cycles. This includes real-time next-best offers on the web, emails that get modified on the fly as the customer interacts with your company in real time, and so on.

And here are tools and techniques that can help:

- **Third-party data overlays.** Most financial services companies use third-party data to help determine when their customers are preparing for predictable life events: requesting a credit card, paying for university studies, buying a home. These companies purchase credit bureau and lifestyle/demographic data to predict, for example, when customers will seek a home mortgage. They then place relevant messages in the channels—Google searches, websites, mobile apps—their customers use to learn about mortgages.

- **Look-alike models.** A company starts by documenting


the buyer profiles of their best customers. They review the content and messaging used to reach these customers and the channels used to convey it. Using those insights, they create look-alike models with the goal of identifying prospects or existing customers with the potential to buy more. Giorgio Armani uses look-alike models brilliantly to secure new business among underserved customer segments.

- **Customer journey maps.** Companies observe which channels customers visit, which content customers view, and how long they spend and whether they make a purchase in a particular channel. Customer journey maps help secure contextual relevance by providing insight into appropriate content and messaging.

Best-in-class companies like Marriott and AAA use customer journey mapping extensively.

- **Digital retargeting.** When customers make digital inquiries, companies can retarget those customers with digital messaging such as digital ads, via customers' preferred channels. For example, a company observes a customer's click behavior, search behavior, or abandoned shopping cart behavior and quickly reaches out to that customer with a special offer to help close the deal (e.g., complimentary shipping for a customer who abandons a shopping cart after viewing shipping rates). Amazon is the gold standard here.

- **People marketing.** In its simplest form, a company observes which Google search words are hot and then bids on these words to capture interest from buyers keen on purchasing their product or service. Offerings from Google (Customer Match), Facebook (Custom Audience), and LiveRamp (IdentityLink) have taken people marketing to an entirely new level. Companies can now target specific audiences with highly contextual and relevant content.

Companies that thrive in the digital deluge listen very carefully as their customers scream: "Find, know, and delight me!" They know that contextual relevance is critical to making this happen. 



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