



Effective Customer Analytics Call for Data Integration, Culture Shifts

by **Mindy Charski** (<http://data-informed.com/author/mindy-charski/>) | November 13, 2013 5:00 am | 1 Comments

Today, many marketing organizations are finally exploiting the vast potential of their data to better listen to customers and strengthen relationships by creating offers and experiences that are more relevant and engaging. It's all part of a quest to win customers' loyalty and dollars. But, as was made clear in presentations during the 2013 Engagement & Experience Expo, held in Dallas November 5 to 7, organizations are moving at different paces toward their goals and confronting similar internal challenges on the trek.

Still, there was a celebratory feel at the conference organized by Loyalty 360 – [The Loyalty Marketer's Association](http://loyalty360.org/) that marketers have won C-suite support for their data-driven efforts. That spirit was best articulated by presenter Stan Lucas, assistant vice president, customer intelligence and insights at [Ascena Retail Group](http://www.ascenaretail.com/).

"I know for a while a lot of us felt like we had the right idea, but we couldn't quite get it across to the people who were used to looking at finance reports and transaction reports because all they wanted to do was see those hard numbers," he said. "But a lot of us persevered and pushed and found partners . . . to really make sure this type of data becomes more important and changes the cultures within our industries."

Lucas described how in 2009, his small customer insights department at Charming Shoppes – which Ascena would acquire in 2012 – was fielding public relations requests for fun facts about customers for the website or presentations. "We really felt that's not what we were about," he said. "We had data that could really influence what we could do in our stores, in our buying departments and in our marketing departments. What we really didn't know about was if we could convince people to take this data and combine it with the transactional stuff and the finance stuff."

Lucas's department wanted to consolidate all areas of customer feedback for its Lane Bryant brand and do the same for its Catherines brand. The voice of the customer efforts would help it understand not only what the customer did, but why she did it and how she felt about it, too, Lucas said. Today Ascena is able to funnel information gathered from emails, blogs, surveys, Facebook and other sources into a customer experience hub for the brands; transactional data sits outside of it but can often be matched back to customer feedback.

But moving from vision to reality took time. In 2010 Lucas's team began working with software company Clarabridge to build the hub and started showing executives what it was learning from its data. Lucas said the next year the group "continued the buy-in journey" at the grassroots level.

"We needed to make sure everyone understood this and start showing our buyers and users and internal partners how they could use this data and it would be valuable for their time," he said. "We had to explain to [our stakeholders] sentiment scoring and statistical significance of comments and how we were moving away from the focus groups of one and the one-off comments they would be hearing in the store."

Retailer's Customer Engagement Hub

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[Luxottica Retail North America](http://www.luxottica.com/en/about-us/worldwide-presence/north-america) (<http://www.luxottica.com/en/about-us/worldwide-presence/north-america>) is also making a shift to embrace data and analytics in an effort to better serve customers.

But the unit of the global Luxottica organization, which owns brands including Ray-Ban, Sunglass Hut and Oakley, has had to deal with challenges that are familiar to many retailers. The company had lots of data from multiple brands, and because the data was outsourced, accessing the marketing or finance databases was not easy, said Maya May, senior director, retail optical CRM and loyalty at Luxottica Retail. There were also multiple vendors across brands and units and a “clear gap” of analytics talent. “We realized the vision of knowing our customers better needed a solid foundation,” she said.

Luxottica began working with the customer intelligence company Aginity about nine months ago to create a customer engagement hub that will provide a single view of customers and help it understand what are some next-best actions to take with marketing, for instance, and who’s at risk of churning. The hub is getting feeds from Luxottica’s data sources like Epsilon for data cleaning, SAS for predictive modeling, SAP for inventory management and Adobe for Web analytics.

There’s also a lot of change management going on in the company, May said. It’s hired many analysts and leaders with backgrounds in analytics, for example, and there’s an effort underway to alter how the organization thinks about data. For instance, May said, “We’re doing a lot of teaching to say, ‘Here’s what it means when something is predictive.’”

Though the company is now in what May described as “stage one” of its data-driven efforts, she said the vision is for North America to be a “center of excellence for retail” that can be exportable to other locations around the globe. The ultimate end game, May said, is to be able to create a personalized experience across every touch point.

The Data Integration Behind a Customer Loyalty Program

That’s a familiar notion to video game retailer [GameStop](http://www.gamestop.com/) (<http://www.gamestop.com/>), which has experienced its own shifting mindset as it’s improved the ways it uses data to strengthen omnichannel customer engagement. One of the core reasons GameStop built a formalized loyalty program about three years ago was to tie together vast amounts of Web analytics, transactional data and other kinds of information to specific individuals, according to presenter Ashley Sheetz, GameStop’s chief marketing officer.

Its PowerUp Rewards program now has 25 million members, which account for 20 percent of GameStop’s customers. “What [the program] has enabled us to do is identify now 75 percent of all our sales come from those 25 million customers, so we’re able to be personal and relevant to those customers in ways we never could before now that we know who they are,” Sheetz said.

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As part of that effort, the company recognized it needed to offer the same personalized experiences on its website and mobile app that it offered in the stores, where associates ask patrons about the games they like and the consoles they have, for instance. “We have 12 million unique visitors to our website every month, but everyone who hit that website had

exactly the same experience,” she said.

Another pain point: GameStop was thinking about its channels in silos, Sheetz said. That was a problem, for instance, when consumers were frustrated that they couldn’t use online offers in the stores. “We were trying to think about objectives and initiatives based on what we wanted to do with our business, instead of putting the consumer in the driver’s seat and asking, ‘How is the customer using our website? How are they using their mobile devices to engage with us?’” she said. “As we’ve progressed, we’ve spent the past couple years completely blowing up all of our old strategies because they weren’t consumer centric.”

But to enable some of its new concepts, marketing needed IT’s help, and Sheetz admitted she initially didn’t do a good job communicating with her IT organization about what she was looking for. “We weren’t speaking each other’s languages,” she said. “And on top of that our IT department just wasn’t structured in a way to do some of the things we wanted to do . . . It wasn’t as easy as, ‘Oh we have these amazing strategies on a piece of paper. Here, take it and please go build this.’”

Communicating the Value of Customer Analytics

Meanwhile, attendees learned a different kind of language is necessary to sell data projects internally. Michael Hooper, director of customer research at [American Airlines](http://www.americanairlines.com) (<http://www.americanairlines.com>), suggested that marketers “find a way to tie your data to profitability so you can talk in terms the business leaders understand.” He candidly added, “I’m not claiming that we’ve successfully done that completely to the extent we want to.”

In his moderated discussion at the conference, Hooper described American’s ongoing efforts to transition into an easier-to-access, integrated platform for customer feedback derived from sources like internal studies and syndicated competitive data. One way the airline is using the data, he said, is to monitor the success of new flight meals in terms of customer perception.

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Hooper also advocated not only promoting one's own efforts, but also finding "champions" of the data who can assist as well. "Sometimes in our world we spend a lot of time trying to convince people they need something," he said. "Find the ones who know they need it, want it, and can't get enough of it, and help them be your evangelists."

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1. Alexandr Savinov

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