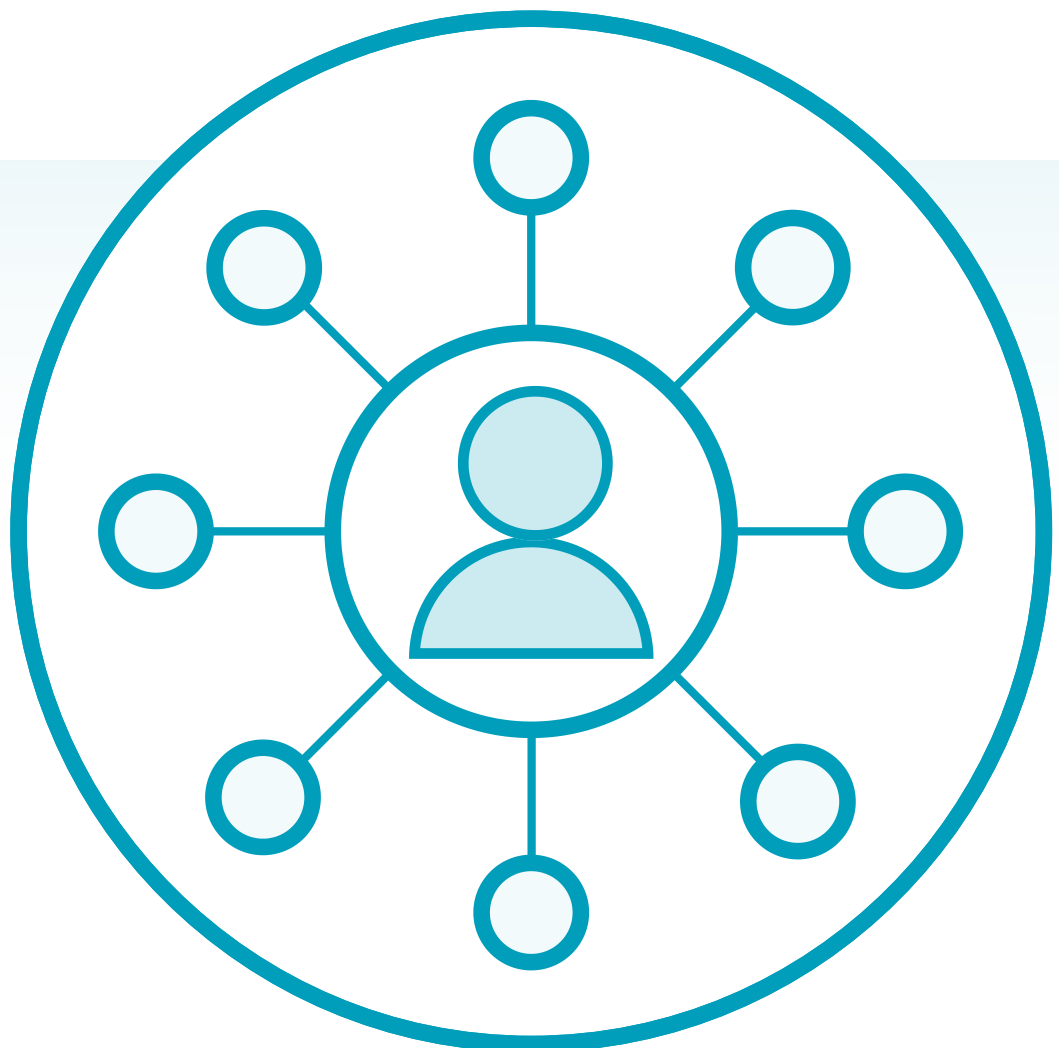A B2B MARKETER'S GUIDE TO

CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

A B2B Marketer's Guide to Customer Insights:

The Emerging Role of 360-Degree Customer Data in B2B Marketing

Today's B2B marketing teams have access to more data and advanced marketing technologies than ever before. But smart B2B marketers know that data and technology are only a winning combination when actionable insights drive their usage and lead to awesome customer experiences.

Forrester recently reported that B2B companies are being forced to rethink customer engagement strategies in order to stay competitive. In the very near future, customer experience will become the crucible that forges the next generation of market leaders.

There's no reason why your business can't be one of those market leaders if your B2B marketing team embraces a modern approach to customer experience based on the emerging 360-degree customer data strategies in this document.

The Big Data Problem with B2B Customer Insights

B2B marketing technology and the strategies behind them have been under the influence of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) since just after the turn of the millennium, when the dust had settled from the dot com implosion. B2B marketers hoped that CRM and marketing automation systems would offer tighter alignment with sales and push-button relationships with prospects and customers. But an underlying data quality problem made it impossible for advancing technologies and software features to turn those dreams into reality.

To truly achieve a high level of customer collaboration and engagement, B2B marketers and the technologies they depend on need to be working with the most complete, accurate, and relevant prospect and customer data available. Bad and incomplete data - not lack of advanced features - has been the Achilles' heel of CRM and marketing automation all along.

Today, those same platforms are moving to the cloud, which is great in terms of mobility and storage, but doesn't solve the essential problem of bad data. It should be no surprise that moving the same data to a new infrastructure doesn't fix the underlying issue.

Charting a Strategic Course to Customer Insights

B2B marketing strategies are adapting from a technology centered approach to a customer centered approach in order to overcome data quality challenges and derive customer insights from customer data. There are three driving forces colliding today that are shaping these new B2B marketing strategies and the technologies that support them:

1. **The realization that customer experiences need to drive technology and not the other way around.** Knowing as much as possible about each prospect or customer journey now precedes technology and feature implementations. The CRM and marketing automation systems of the future will need to manage and automate various customer journeys in addition to tasks and campaigns.

2. **The increasing accessibility of public information about target prospects and customers.** B2B marketers are no longer limited to acquiring data through data brokers, using siloed information provided by social media sites, or relying on the bits of information provided by prospects and customers in the course of prospecting and advertising. New sources of insightful public and contextual information are available from a variety of emerging data aggregators and value added data service providers.

3. **Integration of prospect and customer data at the intersection of cross-functional technologies and strategies.** Sales, marketing, customer support, and IT teams often operate with siloed fragments of customer and prospect information scattered between different technologies. In order to compete on customer experience, business teams are beginning to collaborate and share customer and prospect information between systems and strategies. That way, each team can work with a complete contextual view of their customers or prospects at every touchpoint.

B2B marketers are now at a strategic crossroads. CRM and marketing automation systems do a great job managing and tracking tasks and campaigns,

which tend to be relatively stable entities over time. But all systems used in the context of a customer experience need to be fueled by a flow of actionable data about prospects and customers. This is especially important given the increasing organizational demands on the the flow of customer insights through the organization, from sales to marketing to customer service and often into the C-Suite.

The Foundation of Customer Insights: 360-Degree Customer Data

No matter how your marketing team has handled the flow of prospect and customer data in the past, you are now entering new territory. Before your B2B marketing strategy can leverage customer insights, you need to map out a strategy that reaches beyond the limitations of your existing customer data and gives you a more holistic view of the people who matter most to your business.

A more holistic view of the customer is the foundation that leads to customer insights, and that holistic view is gained by utilizing 360-degree customer data. 360-degree customer data is defined as the combination of the following information.

- **Private customer information**. This is the information your prospects or customers share with you with permission through the course of your interactions. Examples include email addresses, mobile phone numbers, and physical addresses.

- **Public and social profile information.** This is the permission-based information people share publicly through social media and other public profiles. Examples include job titles, profile photos, bios, and social interests.

- **Contextual customer information.** This is the information about a person that has meaning to the customer at a particular moment in the customer journey. Examples include past customer service interactions, whether someone is a new customer or loyal customer, or how influential the person is in specific social media communities.

The combination of private, public, and contextual customer data not only forms a 360-degree view of each customer, it also provides a basis for applying technology to different customer journeys based on actual customer profiles instead of personas or groups of contacts with a limited number of known characteristics.

Leveraging 360-degree customer data and the resulting customer insights is a three step process as follows. Although this process will probably be led by the marketing team in pursuit of customer experience, the shift in strategy will greatly benefit other parts of the business and may require cooperation in multiple teams from sales, to operations to IT.

Step I: Building 360-Degree Customer Profiles

When it comes to customer insights, the company with the most complete view of the customer wins. B2B marketers often prefer to focus on user actions such as online engagement with content, time on site, number of pages visited, downloads, form submissions, or the number of clicks on an email. Yet, all of these activities are limited in terms of customer insights for two reasons.

1. Interactions are typically linked to partial information such as an email address or a website cookie. Tying activities back to partial information about a person can't reliably inform a customer journey.

2. Activities tracked by marketing automation systems are limited to interactions between the brand and the customer. For example, the customer may have clicked on an email or filled out an online form, but those interactions provide little insight into what else a particular customer is interested in during majority of their time spent outside those short interactions with the brand.

In order to start forming more complete 360-degree customer profiles, information about your customers outside the context of direct interactions with your brand must be included and tied back to each customer. That way, you can create customer journeys based what you know about each person's interactions with your brand and beyond your brand. In addition, partial customer information should be enriched with publicly available profile information and contextual information to fill in the gaps in each 360-degree customer profile.

The goal of any 360-degree customer profile is to be more awesome with people on a consistent basis. The benefit of building complete 360-degree customer profiles is the ability to quickly or automatically identify who any contact is and how to communicate with that contact at any moment in the individual's journey.

Step II: Unifying 360-Degree Customer Profiles

It's a competitive advantage to have complete 360-degree customer profiles, but it's not easy. People are digitally connected to a lot of information about themselves including multiple email addresses, social profiles, phone numbers, and interactions. To make matters worse for a business, different departments and teams inside a company often have access to only small bits of customer profile information over the course of a customer journey. For example, your social media team interacts with a lot of Twitter handles and your email marketing team interacts with a lot of email addresses. This confuses software systems and customer-facing personnel greatly. Some of these people are the same people but they aren't treated as if they are the same person over the course of several customer experiences. Even more troubling is the fact that customer information changes often, or is inaccurately entered, which causes systems to become cluttered with inaccurate and incomplete information that is utterly useless.

360-degree customer profiles can resolve part of this dysfunction, but you must also be sure that all 360-degree customer profiles are unified and tied together between systems that typically contain partial contact information. Unifying customer profiles is simply a matter of tying individual pieces of customer information to the correct person or company each piece belongs to. For example, when a person tweets about your company, you can use a unification process to match the person's twitter handle from your social media system to the email address or customer data in your account management system. That way, your social media team can respond to the person with more insight about the relationship between your company and the person sending the tweet. Is this a customer with an unresolved issue that could be handled right there on Twitter in the moment? Is this a strong influencer in the industry who could be a powerful brand advocate with the proper support? You might already have answers to these questions, if only you could bring all your customer profile information together.

Companies can also use customer profile unification to identify and utilize the best communication flow for interactions. Companies across all industries will earn top marks in customer experience when they communicate through the customer's preferred channels. For example, a particular customer may prefer one email address for account statements and another email address for promotions. Your company needs to know that both versions of that person's email address are in fact the same person asking to communicate on their terms. That level of personalized communication is not only possible but necessary to

remain competitive. Fortunately, the next generation of 360-degree customer data management and unification can deliver those experiences for your customers.

Step III: Collaborating with 360-Degree Customer Profiles

Whoever invented version control deserves a medal. Version control in software development and document management allows many people to be involved on a project and make contributions without creating thousands of different versions of the project. Different versions create general confusion and waste vast amounts of system resources.

Version control is coming to the world of customer data. Just as with any collaborative project, customer data is used by many people in distinct work groups simultaneously, usually in geographically remote locations. Employees need the most updated customer data to be centrally available, not limited to any specific device and not wasting a great deal of resources spent fighting through duplicate records. Customer-facing employees also need a secure way to correct errors on the spot so customers aren't driven off in disdain or frustration when other departments fail to make the same corrections in their systems.

People don't have much tolerance for a company communications that feel like they are coming from a bunch of uncoordinated departments. When people receive an email, log onto a website, walk into a brick and mortar store, comment on a social media page, or contact customer support, every interaction must feel like it's coming from a unified source that fits the context.

To keep your customer experience working seamlessly, you must have a streamlined pathway to synchronize and control the flow of unified 360-degree customer data among sales, marketing, customer experience, and IT departments and systems. You also need to ensure employees can collaborate on creating, amending, and using customer information.

The next generation of customer centered strategy utilizes APIs to control the sharing and access to data between systems to make sure everyone has access to just the right amount of contact data at just the right time in any workflow. Marketers need to stay in an active dialog with CIOs, CTOs, and CSIOs to make sure every customer data management system controls and shares customer data within the context of your company's IT infrastructure.

Customer data management combined with unified 360-degree customer profiles can provide the freedom to access accurate, updated data across any platform. This works best when there is an interactive data layer that sits on top of whatever system the employee is on at the moment: email, customer service platform, CRM, social media profile, calendar, and so on. You should never have to leave the system you are in to pull in customer data from somewhere else. That process wipes out the benefits of having version controlled customer data in the first place.
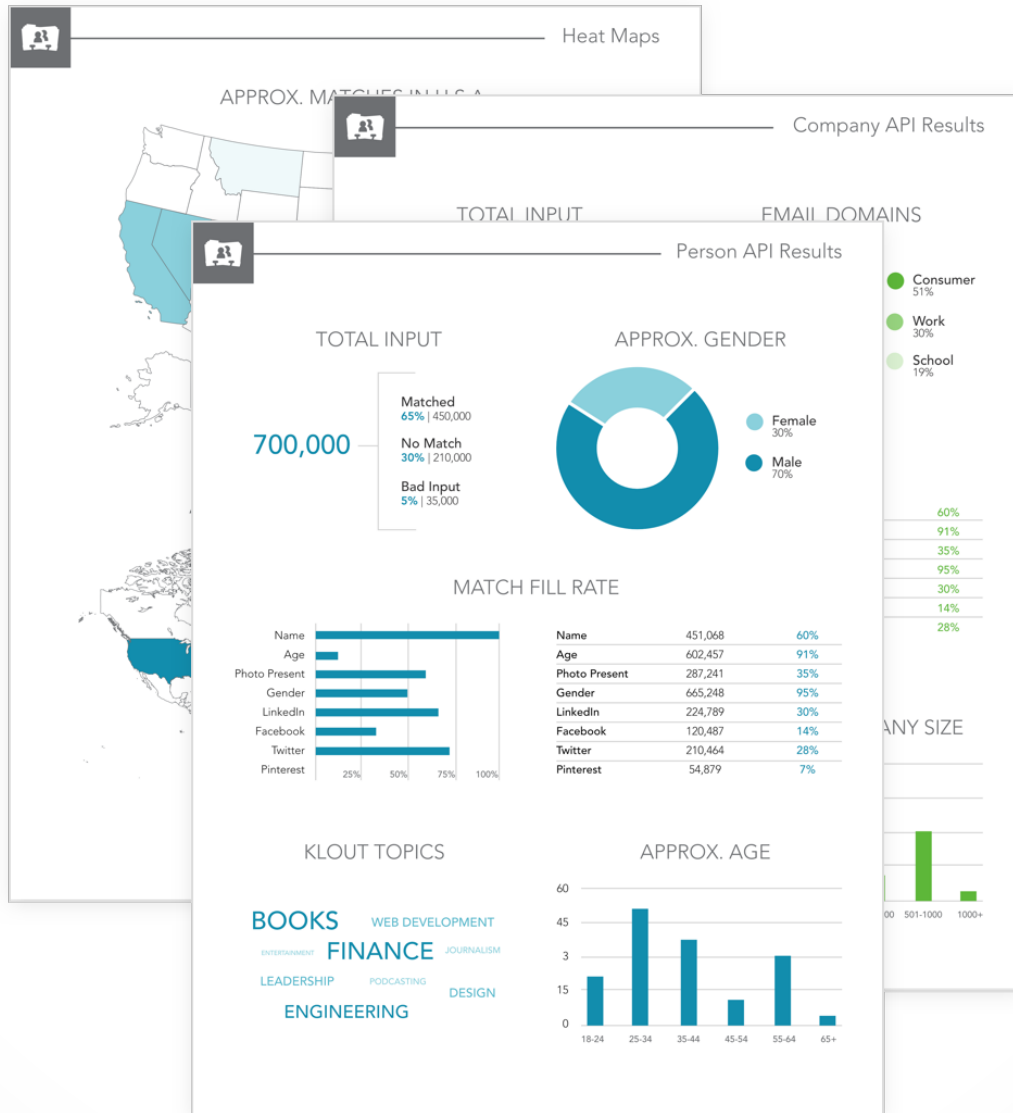
Conclusion

There's a popular adage that says that success in life is all about people. When it comes to customer experience, success for a company means being awesome with people. Although that's been proven time and again on the battlefield of business, changing old habits -- especially at the enterprise level -- can take a vast amount of energy. Fortunately, the next generation of B2B marketing strategies focused on customer insights and 360-degree contact data will be able to supply that energy by letting technology do more of the heavy lifting so company employees can focus on relationships instead of data problems. Freeing up more time and resources throughout the organization also creates focus and efficiency: from the C-Suite to sales teams to the front lines of customer service.

These new strategies for using customer data set the stage for customer insights and better customer experiences. That's also why 360-degree customer data has won a seat at the strategic table for any company that wants to compete on customer experience. With the right amount of focus and technology to support your customer journeys, your new customer insight strategy will form the essential foundation of your customer-focused business.

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