

MARKETING

Personalization should straddle line of creepy versus helpful

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Collective Hotels & Retreats looks to personalization without being overly intrusive. Image credit: Collective Hotels & Retreats

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NEW YORK A panel of executives in luxury fields revealed how to carefully balance the line between helpful and creepy when it comes to personalization in marketing through the use of data.

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During the panel, "Turning Numbers Into Identities For True Brand Relationships" at Luxury Interactive 2017, executives from Collective Retreats and Frette explained how data is important to connect with consumers, but it is a humanized touch that makes the impact. While too much personalization can turn off the consumer with an intrusive and creepy feel, the right balance can really make a difference.

"Being thoughtful is very important," said Vivienne So, ecommerce manager of Frette. "It cannot be personalization just for the sake of personalization.

"It has to benefit the customer," she said. "How does it make it better for them? How does it make their lives easier?"

"Online is interesting because a lot of our online shoppers do not care for the super personalized touch. The customers find it creepy. We just try to make it as easy as possible for them to shop."

Beneficial versus creepy

The key to making sure marketing personalization keeps away from feeling creepy, marketers must think about whether or not they are being helpful.

While every customer has a different range on what feels intrusive to them, a good rule of thumb for marketers is to make sure that a brand experience is beneficial to them.

It is vital that brands do not adopt a personalization strategy just for the sake of personalization. Customers should feel that the initiative helps them not just with the brand but also in their lives.

For instance, Italian department store Luisa Via Roma's ecommerce personalization tactics have boosted the retailer's sales, showing the potential applications for the broader luxury industry.

Bringing upselling to the online channel, the retailer worked with personalization provider Dynamic Yield to serve

up tailored recommendations at various points in the purchase path. Beyond providing a customized experience for shoppers, this initiative yielded an uptick in both conversions and order value ([see more](#)).



Luisa Via Roma is personalizing the retail experience for shoppers. Image credit: Luisa Via Roma

Time-poor consumers are increasingly seeing the value in personalization, but even with this greater acceptance of the use of their data, retailers still need to be careful not to cross the line into "creepy" targeting.

A report from Oracle finds that while consumers are excited about certain technological advances in retail, other inventions leave them uneasy. As retailers look to adapt to the increasingly digital landscape, they should take into account consumers' comfort levels with automation and artificial intelligence ([see more](#)).

Data and human touch

The founder of Collective Hotels & Retreats explained that he believes that the special branded moments that happen when interacting with Collective Hotels & Retreats comes from a human touch.

The travel brand uses an excessive amount of data, but uses human ideas and execution to leverage this data in a helpful way that makes a special experience for the customer.

Collective Hotels & Retreats works to make sure that each guest is more than just a number. The brand uses personalization techniques that are vastly different and have more depth than standard hotel practice.



Collective's retreat in Hudson Valley. Image credit: Collective Hotels & Retreats

For instance, when onboarding a customer into its digital interface, Collective uses a questionnaire that is much deeper. In a social media-like questionnaire, Collective asks guests questions such as "What animal do you identify with the most," and "Where is your favorite destination?"

In this manner, Collective is able to discern if the guest is an extrovert or if they would rather read in a quiet space alone.

"I think where we excel is that making sure our data is unified," said Peter Mack, founder and CEO of [Collective Hotels & Retreats](#). "But what becomes very important to us is how we use it.

"Retargeting with that data is something that I think will always be for us," he said. "Our whole platform is about storytelling and connecting. I don't see a time in the next 10 years when that isn't human driven.

"How do we take this data and put the human touch on it in a way that isn't creepy but is special?"

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