

RETAIL

## New calendared approach to customer engagement

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"Sales!" are not going anywhere, folks. Nor are "events" or "promotions" or any of the obligatory retail tactics that have been in practice since Sears met Roebuck.

Calendared events bring focus and discipline to retail, enabling operational excellence, maximizing buying power and enhancing cross-departmental collaboration.

Time for every season

The "event" itself is the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

No corner of the office can remain on the sidelines during an event.

Merchants make "special buys," legal approves terms, finance makes sure the numbers add up, store ops prep the sales floor for the onslaught, marketing promotes. It takes a village to have a "Dads and Grads" sale, funny as that sounds.

So, let us assume that calendared events will survive us all. Even Amazon does them, and it lives to flout convention.

Those events can be personalized, where some of the messaging and imagery is tailored to past purchases, known gender, geography, and a handful of other factors. But more often than not, everybody gets the same campaign with the same starbursts and exclamation points.

Think of that general population campaign going left to right across your mind, from January to December with Spring Sales and Summer Clearances, transitioning into "holiday" activities sequentially.

Now imagine activities popping up above this equator of calendar events. These are proactive events that are triggered by a customer's individual positive action. An offer is redeemed. A purchase is made. A product is shared on social. An achievement was reached. All good things.

Each of these good things begets other retail motion.

Right fit

You bought a pair of pants, may we suggest a sweater that would look great with it?

You have spent \$90? Spend ten more and get exclusive perks such as free shipping. They are tailored to the specific customer action and are only triggered by each customer individually. They are designed to up-level already positive relationships and dynamics from good to great, great to greater, and so on.

Now imagine the mirror opposite of this falling below the calendar line.

Emails go unopened. A return is made. A complaint is lodged. All the telltale signs of churn are present: notably the absence of signals the dreaded customer data "flatline."

These stimuli initiate retail motion designed to turn negatives into positives and keep each customer "above the line."

*"We've missed you. Here's an offer to get you to give us a(nother) try."*

*"We're sorry you had a bad experience, please accept this replacement product as a sign of how much we value your business."*

*"Because you're a Gold Status customer, we've prioritized your service call to the top of our queue."*

Each of these negatives can be turned into positives with a trial-and-error escalation strategy, starting at the least expensive engagement to get to desired positive impact up to the most expensive offer you are willing to make to save or activate the customer.

Heard, not herd

So you have got your baseline calendar of events that everyone shares in playing a galvanizing approach. This is flanked by a sequence of events designed to accelerate each individual customer's travels along the customer journey toward optimal value.

You also have a series of re-mediations designed to satisfy a potentially dissatisfied customer's needs, putting her back on the path to loyalty and satisfaction.

These are not "segments" per se. They are not static. There is no herd mentality at play.

Each individual exists in a state where they like and respond to some things while rejecting others.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning have greatly accelerated the speed at which those variances can be anticipated and mitigated, but they will always exist in some part. People lose jobs, move, outgrow brands and things there is constant evolution.

It is critical to never feel like you have arrived and it is all easy from this point forward with a customer.

It is also critical that you never feel any customer is beyond reach.

Each customer could and probably will cross above and below "the line" from time to time.

A customer who is seemingly eating up everything you throw at him will go dark on you and require defensive engagement to reactivate.

By the same token, a customer who has steadfastly ignored your every entreaty will suddenly bite and move on to progressively more productive engagements from there.

SO DO NOT rest on your laurels, assuming a customer for now is a customer for life.

Equally, do not give up on a customer even when all evidence is to the contrary. Things change. Often.

With proper systems in place and a process for personalized engagement, you can make each customer's ups and downs into an up and to the right situation for your business.

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