

MARKETING

Brands must contextualize consumer journeys: Thunderhead exec

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Brands should reevaluate how they track consumer journeys. Image credit: IWC.

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Despite brands continuing to invest billions in technology to improve the consumer journey, customers still have to navigate different experiences across channels, leading to frustration.

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During the "Orchestration Not Personalization: The Journey to Engagement-Led Marketing" breakout session at the Forrester Consumer Marketing Forum on April 3, an executive encouraged marketers to gather as much customer information as possible across all available channels. This information about shopping behavior can help retailers better optimize consumer journeys.

"Customers are more engaged when they are in control and their journeys are more intent-driven," said Ray Gerber, chief solutions officer at **Thunderhead**, Boston, MA. "Engagement across more channels equals more value."

Craving consistency

About \$56 billion is spent annually on technology meant to improve the customer experience, such as customer-relationship management software and campaign management platforms. Other investment areas include analytics and journey mapping.

While this investment is vital in the retail industry, 58 percent of brands still give consumers disjointed experiences across channels, according to Mr. Gerber.



Lamborghini has partnered with Salesforce on CRM solutions. Image credit: Lamborghini

An overwhelming majority of consumers, 94 percent, are frustrated by these instances. As Mr. Gerber explained, they must try different avenues to achieve the best value or experience.

Due to an abundance of options in today's marketplace, most consumers will only tolerate two negative experiences before switching to a different brand.

Consistent customer experiences lead to better, more valuable engagement from consumers.

Courting omnichannel consumers is beneficial to luxury brands in particular. According to Forrester Analytics' Luxury Retail Forecast, U.S. and European consumers who buy luxury goods in both physical and digital stores spend up to four times more than consumers who shop exclusively on or offline ([see story](#)).

Because of mixed messaging across channels, Mr. Gerber encourages brands to capture all possible data points across channels. These more in-depth insights will also help brands avoid blind spots, such as not offering information in a language spoken by a valuable portion of consumers.

Going a step further, more analytics can help brands contextualize shopping behavior and optimize the journey.



Omnichannel shoppers are among the most valuable, but face disjointed experiences. Image credit: John Varvatos

"Brands need to understand in-the-moment contexts," Mr. Gerber said. "What is the customer's intent? Where are they in the journey, consideration or awareness?"

For instance, email marketing has a reputation of being broad and impersonal for both the brand and the consumer. It is more valuable for a retailer to know why a consumer is making a particular purchase.

"Individual channels don't tell the whole story," Mr. Gerber said. "Journey-based orchestration tells a better story and offers more analytics."

Personal tech touches

Premium direct-to-consumer brands are setting the tone on how to update customer journeys for today's shoppers.

A report from IAB outlines seven attributes of direct-to-consumer companies who are disrupting their respective fields, such as focusing on the customer relationship.

Instead of focusing on customers as a whole for the shopping experience, these direct-to-consumer brands center on the individual shopper connection. They use individual user data to make a personalized experience for each

customer ([see story](#)).

To keep up, luxury brands continue to invest in technology that provides more consumer insights, as well as building teams to better understand the breadth of information.

Luxury group Kering is strengthening its focus on omnichannel tools including 360 client views, as the group pivots towards digital in an effort to keep up with luxury consumer demand.

Pilot projects are working towards delivering personalized messages and experiences to customers, based on their profile and purchasing history. In addition to having centralized client service teams, Kering aims to provide representatives with a 360 view of each client in order to deliver a fully personalized experience ([see story](#)).

"What really impacts the customer is the experience," Thunderhead's Mr. Gerber said.

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