

COLUMNS

How should a true CRM program work?

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Brands must increasingly demonstrate their loyalty to customers in a reversal of the traditional paradigm.

This new dynamic means that brands must demonstrate a commitment to earn a customer's business across every touch point along the path to purchase and beyond.

Customers' rising expectations of brands mean that it is time to toss out the old rulebook for customer relationship management (CRM).

Now is the time to disrupt the outdated understanding of CRM as a bland, generic, linear journey, devoid of delight or USP.

Brands must move to a model that serves customers more effectively, sending the right customer the right message, on the right channel at the right time. They need to create unique, personal and impactful experiences through every customer's journey. But what does that look like in practice?

What is the difference between basic and advanced CRM?

It is no secret that customers prefer to interact with brands they like, especially when the experience is smooth and straightforward.

Standard CRM approaches power basic features such as personalized welcome pages and offers, the ability for customers to leave reviews, and automatic follow-up if they abandon their basket.

Some include features designed to reach out to customers that have grown distant and attempt to entice them back with offers. These are certainly effective, but they do not represent the full potential of CRM.

More advanced CRM is all about using data to surprise and delight the customer before driving the next action.

For instance, Uber leverages pre-emptive problem solving such as sending emails out when there is a transit strike to make things easy for customers.

Netflix leverages personal data in a non-intrusive way, using behaviorally driven recommendations to offer customers personalized suggestions on what to watch next.

Urban Outfitters' earns customer loyalty by rewarding total behavior and offering shopping bonuses for the completion of certain tasks, such as connecting a social media account to the app or attending an in-store event.

Advanced CRM may also involve VIP communication strategies, geolocation or gamification, and personalized shopping experiences distinct from personalized offers to drive greater loyalty and create a more fulfilling customer experience.

What does that look like in practice?

When evolving your CRM, every decision should be based on improving the customer experience.

For example, while many businesses still rely heavily and, in many cases, solely on email for customer communications, a modern CRM approach would be shifting to omnichannel. This means meeting the customer wherever they are most comfortable, be that SMS, social, voice, mobile, WhatsApp or email.

Improvements in communication form the foundation of a stronger, more loyal customer base, allowing brands to demonstrate their understanding of every customer's personal wants and needs.

Better CRM communications should be real-time and trigger-based, rather than relying on a traditional fixed cadence.

Messages should focus on personally relevant information and offer the customer an identifiable benefit, ideally tied to a larger loyalty program, rather than sending out a mass email update where the customization is limited to the customer's name.

Continually improving a business's CRM depends on using data to hone the customer experience, keep existing customers engaged and attract new prospects.

Businesses must move away from single-source data capture and various versions of the truth.

A world-class CRM means input from multiple data sources combined into a unified version of the truth.

Every interaction with a customer should be automatically reviewed and refined, meaning that the business's CRM approach is constantly evolving based on the latest data.

Structurally, it means lifting customer communications and planning from their respective siloes to focus instead on unified customer experience planning.

IN A COMPETITIVE and ever-evolving landscape, brands strive to provide the best customer experience and behind the curtains, that means brands are competing based on CRM.

Businesses must refocus their communications efforts with a renewed commitment to creating brilliant experiences and building customer loyalty through meaningful interactions in the right channels.

A true CRM program is the key to improving customer satisfaction and delivering business growth.

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