

6 Steps to creating a Cross Channel Communications Roadmap



Identifying the Road Ahead to Cross Channel Marketing Success



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6 Steps to Creating a Successful Cross Channel Communications Plan

Customers today expect you to be available 24/7 and they expect they will get a high level of services from your call center, retail store, catalog, mobile phone, kiosk, web site (marketing channels) etc. Not only do they expect good service but they also expect to be able to use the channel which is most convenient for them when they want to communicate with you. Customers want to be able to purchase from one channel and return goods through another channel. They want to be able to make inquiries or get help 24/7. In order to meet their needs you will need to use multiple channels to connect.

The multi-channel shoppers are becoming more common. According to Accenture these multi-channel shoppers spend on average almost 3 times as much per month as single channel customers. Multi-channel shoppers who purchase from drug stores, apparel , sporting goods and leisure items show similar patterns. Buyers of women's clothing and shoes also spent more if they used multiple channels to interact.

So how do you get started with establishing a cross channel marketing plan that will enable you to leverage your brand successfully? Answer: Build a Roadmap. A Roadmap is a plan for how you will get from where you are now to where you want to go. It is a bit like building a house, you need to start with some understanding of what you need (build a blueprint). As you gain more understanding you can begin to create a comprehensive plan that will enable you to communicate more effectively with customers and drive real business growth. The plan is called a roadmap as it is a series of steps needed to guarantee you have all the pieces in place to complete the plan.

Intro Summary

Multi-channel Customers are more valuable by almost 300%. In order to engage these customers you will need a 6 step comprehensive plan that covers customer understanding, reputation management, customer experience, marketing tools and a communications plan. This comprehensive plan is called a Roadmap.

6 step Plan for Building a Cross Channel Communications Roadmap



Step One: Customer Understanding

The first step to truly understanding your customers is to get out of your office and meet your customers. This process can be called a “Day in the Life” of a customer. Spend some time with customers to understand why they use your products, how it enriches their lives, what they wish they had that is missing, and what frustrations are occurring. You might also consider asking your customers to videotape the experience to understand the situation in more detail. Ask customers about what alternatives they are using if your product is not available. They may not be using a competitive product but be doing something completely different. Observe customers in your store and in their home. How do they use your products/services? What frustrations are they experiencing?

Consider hiring an outside expert (aka Social Anthropologist) with limited experience in your industry to get a more unvarnished look at what your customers are going through and ask them if there are better alternatives. Another method of understanding the customer experience is to actually become an undercover customer of your firm so you can experience the ordering and return process first hand.

Step One Summary

Understand your business from a customer point of view using observation, video and personal experience. Ask customer’s why they buy, how they use your products and services, and what they consider the alternatives.



Step Two: Monitor your reputation on line

On line, many customers and prospects will be happy to report what they like and don't like about what products you offer and how you deliver them. Use a variety of tools to get a more complete picture. You may already use a products ratings and review service such as Bazaarvoice or BizRate. Collect the data to understand what customers are saying.

In addition to reviews, you need to understand what customers are saying about your company/brand on the web. You may want to focus on the larger community sites such as Twitter and Facebook. For Twitter you can use a tool like TweetDeck or Twitter Advanced Search Operators Notifications that alert you when something important happens. These searches generate alerts whenever someone posts something new on Twitter that matches your search criteria. The searches are similar to what you would find on Twitter search but enable you to follow more keywords at once. Check Facebook to see if there are “official” and “unofficial “ fan pages and review the comments to understand the key themes.

You may also wish to monitor the Blogs. The most common tool is Technorati for blog monitoring. The tool needs to be integrated with an RSS (Real simple syndication feed) which will send you automatic updates on the search terms you are looking for.

A simple way to get started with social media monitoring is to use Google Alerts. You type in your company or product name and have a daily email sent to you with blogs, news clipping and other articles that pertain to your company or product. You should also set up a Google Alert for your key competitors.

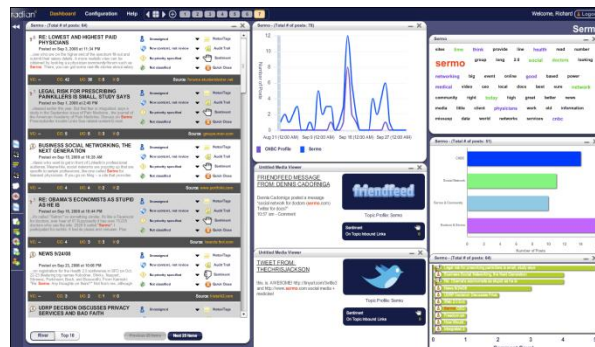
Another method of learning about your industry is to review the Google Keyword and Google Insights to understand what words customers and prospects are using to find you and your competitors on the internet. This is especially useful for helping you manage search engine optimization.

In addition to the free tools there are a variety of third party tools such as Radian 6 or Buzz Metrics to help you monitor the situation. These tools are more expensive but cover a broad variety of platforms. Your media partner or ad agency should be able to help you if you don't have the time or resources to do this yourself.

In general, you should listen/monitor for at least 30-60 days before coming to any conclusions. There is a lot of noise at first. It is important to understand the key trends and the key influencers as opposed to the random comments or a single conversation thread.

Step 2 Summary : Reputation Monitoring

Time needs to be spent reviewing your company reputation on line. There are a variety of tools to help you do this. The importance of “listening” is to understand what people are saying about your company and your competitors.



Step 3: Analyze your customer data by segment

You probably have a customer database, but have you integrated your email, direct mail, and call center data into a single repository? In order to be able to understand your customers it is necessary to collect as much data as possible in one place and analyze it to figure out why each segment is unique and what they expect from the brand. This requires capturing customer response data, ordering data market research data, and attitudinal data from customers. This data needs to be integrated, and updated with current or real time information. In addition, you need to be business rules to help keep the data clean, match the information to the right person, and maintain quality standards.

You can use the database to understand which customers are most profitable, which channels customer's use now, and over time you will begin to understand what their ongoing channel preferences are. Never assume you know what the customer wants. Ask! Let customers change their communications interests and channel choices as often as they want so you are up-to-date. Developing a customer channel preference initiative is now becoming more important as customers get more bombarded with media and feel they are being spammed.

The new economy has meant a considerable change in how customers evaluate the brand value. In order to take advantage of the changing times it is necessary to use the customer insights to be sure the offers are designed, priced and delivered in a way that engages the customer and provides differentiation.

Step 3 Summary: Analyze customer data

Collect your customer data from across the organization and consolidate it into one place in order to be analyze the information and find out more about your customer segments. Then leverage the information to create more targeted offers and customer engagement. Be sure to keep the data current and get the customers to inform you of their changing preferences.



Step 4: Map the Customer Experience and Identify the gaps

You already use multiple channels but is the right customer data available in all the channels? Customers expect that they can purchase through any channel, return through any channel and it should be easy. However this is rarely the case.

Take the time to create a customer experience map (also known as a Customer Journey Map) which will show you how your prospects and customers view your organization. When a customer calls what do they experience? When they make a purchase, what information, support and follow-up do they get? When they have a problem, how do they get it resolved to their satisfaction? Does this leave them wanting to recommend you or vowing never to buy from you again?

Tactically a Customer Map is a way to help you improve customer service processes and resolve recurring customer complaints. Strategically, it helps you build a better product, service or brand, thereby helping you win repeat business. The customer mapping process will help you to understand how customer's perceive your organization at each interaction and what they would really like the customer experience to be. It helps you identify which departments need to work more closely together, what customer data is held in the organizational silos, what processes are broken or take too long, etc. The purpose is to gain the knowledge needed to design an optimal experience that meets the needs and expectations of the major customer groups and achieves a competitive advantage.

Step 4 Summary: Map the Customer Experience

Understand which channels your customers use for ordering, gathering information, comparison shopping, and returning. Then be sure that customer's are able to use the channels when they wish and how they wish to meet their personal objectives. Look at the channels from the customer's point of view.



Step 5: identify the system and tool gaps

In order to execute against cross channel objectives you need a series of tools and technology to help you automate the process and keep track of the results. These tools can be managed in- house or using SaaS (software as a service). The advantages of the SaaS are usually a lower up- front cost to get started and therefore a shorter time for ROI. The advantages of an in-house model are more flexibility and once the program scales it usually costs less to maintain. Depending on your needs you may select different models for different tools. The minimum tools needed are:

Relational Customer database-a single data repository for all your customer data.

Cleaning and matching tools to keep the data clean and improve the quality.

Campaign management tools to help you send out the right communications to the right customer groups and measure the response. This tool should enable you to plan a series of communications and to respond instantly to “trigger” activities such as new orders, returns, etc.

Reporting and Analytics tools to help you understand how customers are responding to the various communications from each channel. Analytic tools need to be able to measure the activity at each channel and then compare the channels to each other. Usually there is a combination of general tools such as SAS and channel specific tools such as (Omniture or Google analytics). Ultimately there will be a need for more cross platform tools to be able to compare the different channels such as video, web, TV, print etc.

Content Management software to help manage the web content to be sure it is up to date, accurate and improves the visitor experience. It enhances your ability to maintain consistent branding across sites by allowing users to manage content from one source. The content management software enables automated workflow and approval process for fresh content and the ability to manage all the digital assets.

In addition to having the proper tools, you will also need skilled employees to use these tools. If the right resources are not available you can partner with your ad agency, marketing service provider or external consultant to provide these services until you can hire and train your own staff.

Step 5 Summary: Identity the system and tool gaps

Review the systems and tools you currently have to be sure you have what is needed to be successful. If tools are missing determine how you will acquire them and what resources are needed to be sure the tools can be utilized to help you reach your business objectives.

Step 6: Define the communications plans

Now that you understand your customers and have insight to understand what marketing communications are driving behavior, it is time to build your communications plan. The plan needs to cover all your channels (e.g. web, email, direct mail, catalog, banner ads, social media, mobile, call center etc.) Your brand should have a consistent image and voice in all channels to enable the customers to interact with you when and where they prefer.

A communications plan should be developed for each customer segment where the communication channels (web, print, email etc.) are selected based on customer preference, and models are used to determine the most relevant messages for that segment. The data can be input into a marketing calendar to be sure that messages are coordinated across channels and don't conflict. You may have to address some internal issues of organizational structure and compensation in order to get your staff to work together effectively. In addition you may need to do some training to be sure all employees have access to the right data, and have the decision making authority to create a successful outcome. Time will need to be spent defining those outcomes and reinforcing the desired behavior.

Your customers will interact with you through a variety of communications channels. They may do their research on line before shopping in your store. They will still use word of mouth to ask their friends for recommendations before responding to marketing messages. They will use your call center when shopping via catalog. Focus on creating an integrated strategy that facilitates communications across channels and highlights the unique benefits of your brand to your customers.

Establish your success metrics and reinforce the metrics through incentives, and recognition. The metrics will enable you to understand what is working and what is not. The data can be leveraged to create continuous improvement and should result in real customer growth.

Step 6 Summary : Define Communications Plan

Develop a comprehensive communications plan that involves multiple channels (web, print, email, call center, etc.) to communicate with customers. Create consistency of communications across channels to ensure an enhanced customer experience. Define and measure your results to guarantee your success.



Summary

Creating a cross channel marketing roadmap will take some time and effort but the results will be worth it. Follow the 6 steps to be sure you have a comprehensive plan. If you are unable to make the investments needed, you can find low cost alternatives or use external resources to supplement the activities before they are fully automated.

By getting your plans in place now, you can be confident that you can leverage marketing to become a growth engine for your company. Customer demands will continue to increase, which makes learning how to communicate without spamming a critical skill.



About us:

We are a consulting company which specializes in finding, linking and understanding your customer data. We take a comprehensive approach to collecting customer data in order to find the unique nuggets that make your customers special. We consider ourselves to be customer detectives. We find the data, read the customer story, and enable you to take action on what you have learned. We utilize this insight to help you drive business transformation and growth. We look forward to getting to know you and helping you reach your business objectives.