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FOREWORD

Measuring marketing performance in channel and device silos is a compromise that many businesses have accepted. However, the 'buy wherever and whenever' behaviour of the modern shopper has magnified the concession and made 'single customer view' measurement an essential tool for success.

Although 'single customer view' is the most commonly used term, there's actually even more value in understanding how all users interact with your marketing, not just the ones who go on to make a purchase. For all brands, the number of people that don't buy vastly outweighs those that do, so only by analysing the data from all users can you truly understand the influence of your marketing efforts.

Once businesses decide to make the join the overwhelming desire is to do everything at once. However, realising value quickly is not about having a 100% accurate view of every user, it's about making sure you've got a good enough view of a big enough proportion of users to enable you to actually understand how they behave. There is a balance equation in terms of the effort it takes to join each channel and the benefit received. You must review your business and how it operates then make really practical decisions about what should be joined first.

Rest assured that the technology and service exists to make your single customer view a realistic goal. The number of companies leveraging the joined up view for a competitive advantage is growing all the time, so now is the time to make sure that you're one of these or risk being left behind.

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Bridging the High-Street Gap:

Is In-Store Proving a Key Barrier to the Seamless Customer Experience?

by Mark Jones

The average consumer is blissfully oblivious to digital marketing terminology. Labels like ‘multi-channel’ and ‘customer relationship management’ have no bearing on their everyday retail experience.

Consumers instead live by the code of convenience, where complexity means a lost sale. The distinctions between e-commerce and in-store may be blurring for marketers in the pursuit of a single customer view, but they are becoming irrelevant for the consumer.

In the era of omni-channel, heightened expectations adopted by consumers have never been more evident. As the trend of showrooming appears to be dwindling, a 2014 report by Forrester found that 71% of consumers expect to be able to view high-street stock online, and half expect functionality to buy products online and pick up in-store.

The same report found that only a third of ‘clicks-and-bricks’ have the basics in place, including store pick-up, cross-channel inventory visibility, and store-based fulfillment. In fact, one in every two shoppers are reluctant to drop into a physical outlet if they can’t research stock information online beforehand.

These statistics may put a lump in the throat of some retailers, or even cause a shrug of indifference from others in a false state of comfort. But the innovators among them are acting upon the cue to continue bridging this online-offline divide, as both a driver of sales and a key brand differentiator.

Where to start?

As head of affiliates at MediaCom, Nicola White recommends her retail clients have appropriate software positioned in-store that is linked to their customer relationship management (CRM) programs, complementing a regime of deep data analysis and more traditional market research methods.

“Econometrics modelling allows MediaCom as an agency to evaluate the impact of individual campaigns, as well as a multitude of research and survey-based tools that we have to gauge and measure consumer opinion.

“Customer loyalty and store cards are a great way to link personal data with product history information to start to build a summary of a consumer’s purchase behaviour.”

While loyalty cards have long been the go-to for providing a single data stream between online and in-store purchases, marketers are having to get more inventive in their approach to gaining in-store customer insights, according to Gill Makepeace, advertiser and network manager at loyalty program specialist Incentive Networks.

“I think linking up in-store and online is ultimately one of the most difficult pieces [of the process].

“I believe a lot of the ways of identifying the customer in store is linked to a payment or loyalty card. This isn’t completely robust as customers can have multiple payment cards and they will also expire and get new ones.”



Point of sale

Capturing a customer's email address at the till is another potential way to tie customer information together, says Makepeace, so long as the staff are trained on its importance.

"Additionally, publishers that have in-store vouchers and cashback enabled can also help to tie varied customer data together. It is all about how the retailer captures and manages the data."

Fashion retailer Accessorize demonstrated this approach over Christmas last year, emailing customer receipts from its in-store purchases, which account for around 90% of day-to-day sales. These include targeted recommendations based on individual sale history and online shopping baskets, distributed with the aim of boosting its e-commerce proposition.

As straightforward as it appears, campaign success relies less on implementation, according to Rakuten Attribution commercial director Lewis Lenssen, and more in thorough planning of targets throughout the initial stages of research.

"In our experience, retailers that enter into these projects with very general objectives have often struggled.

"One of the techniques for avoiding this is to have very precise short-term goals, such as determining the value of display advertising, for example, and we often start our relationship with businesses by delivering the answers to these specific questions in a set period of time.

This doesn't mean that all the value is short term, argues Lenssen, but it provides a focus for the project and ensures that businesses have a straightforward mechanism to assess the value of their investment.

"In general we're seeing that the people investing in this are getting a fast return, therefore should be investing more and faster. However, the judgement of the value and how much you should invest are specific to individual business, the channels they use and their priorities."

Increasingly, retailers need to use their data to provide customers with bespoke communications. They also need to know what products they might be interested in and when they are most likely to buy, as well as backing this tailored experience with personalised customer service.

Before marketers can make strides towards catering for this panoramic view of their customers, they are faced with the prospect of garnering the necessary insight on their customers' in-store behaviour, which unlike the reams available on your online users, poses a far greater challenge.

What this all means, inevitably, is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each retailer must forensically analyse the merits and return of addressing the disconnect between their online and offline presence before initiating a campaign, but the hard work will pay off. 

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Q&A: Dangers of Obtaining the Single Customer View

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What are the dangers of buying data to reel in new customers?

Lewis Lensen: When buying data, retailers must be wary of privacy issues. When collecting and building their own database, businesses can be sure that they have rigorously followed all privacy laws, but can never be as sure about how any bought data has been collected.

James Cartlidge: Credibility and trust. If you're not 100% transparent with customers it will only hurt your brand.

Is there an aspect of determinism manifested in analysing consumer data?

Nicola White: Fundamentally data should always form the basis of most if not all of consumer decisions and insight. Analysis should also be compiled by an independent, unbiased team who share the single goal of analysis for true reflection and results, as opposed to any individual purpose.

SCV is a goal shared amongst many marketers for many years. But is it right for all companies?

Luke Judge: No, there can be no one-size-fits-all solution for SCV that will work for all companies. Every company is unique in some way, and therefore requirements will differ. What is true is that every company will benefit from having a better understanding of their customer's journey across all the channels that they touch when interacting with the company in any way.

Nicola White: I think a level of customer insight and understanding is a must for all companies, if they want a chance of being successful in their market. Whether all companies require a fully-fledged system

to achieve SCV remains a question for the individual entities, however to ignore the value of customer behavioural analysis would be ill-advised.

We hear plenty about the pros of ramping up our efforts in personalisation, but what are the risks?

Luke Judge: When delivering a personalised message rather than a vanilla message, there is always going to be a chance of getting the personalisation wrong, and delivering a message that stands out as being incorrect for the viewer. This can have an adverse impact on the perception surrounding a brand.

Lewis Lensen: The risk is that if retailers aren't certain of the identity of the person using the device then they will show content that isn't right or designed for them. The most common example is when there are multiple people using a single device, where the website will display ads and content that's based on someone else's browsing behaviour.

Nicola White: There will always be users that resent high levels of personalisation and feel that their online behaviours should be kept private and not used for the purpose and benefit of the advertiser. There should always be an effort made to ensure transparency so that consumers can have more autonomy in deciding the level of personalisation to receive in their content.

Would better technology solve some of the issues with pursuing the SCV?

Luke Judge: Yes, but not all of them. Having a single view of the customer requires the stitching of data across many touch points using multiple devices; technology can help with this stitching, but it cannot solve every instance of inaccuracy. 📍

An underwater scene with a coral reef at the bottom. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is visible through the surface. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

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Is Single Customer View the Consumer Frankenstein's Monster?



In certain circles, don't be surprised to hear the single customer view being touted as the Holy Grail of marketing. With customer experience set to take centre stage in retail, brands and advertisers are appearing keener than ever to appease their consumers.

By analysing past behaviour, marketers hope to better target and personalise future interactions. The goal is to ultimately gain a unified view of the customer and, if successful, encourage loyalty to their brand.

Of course, in exploring this approach, there is a strong case for those who believe that by gaining this unobstructed view of the customer, brands come close to overstepping the mark of what is accepted. Over-personalised ads have the potential to appear invasive, which can lead to angering, frightening or unnerving a potential buyer.

But despite the concerns from consumers and privacy advocates fearing an Orwellian future in e-commerce, is there an argument to say that customers have inadvertently demanded this view with their high expectations of brands?

A list of demands

Communications and technology are evolving faster than ever before, while access to data has changed the way brands interact with and target customers.

However, this convenient access to information and advanced tech is also available to the consumer, who has become far savvier than ever before. In this environment, it is not uncommon to see consumers siding with the brand which best caters for their needs without invading their privacy.

In the digital age, where brands are falling over themselves to attract new customers, encourage loyalty and engage with their consumer base across channels and devices, customers simply won't stand for clunky comms.

Consumer expectations are high and according to Luke Judge, of digital marketing agency Net Media Planet, they expect continuity across channels.

"No one expects to have to tell their mobile phone company what their mobile phone

number is, when they are phoning them from the mobile phone that is stored on the system of the mobile phone company that is supplying them with that mobile phone," he says.

Nicola White, head of affiliates at global media company Medicom, states that if consumers aren't satisfied with the level of communication and relevancy of ads, they will simply move on.

"With the rise of loyalty and store cards delivering personalised, relevant offers I think customers have naturally started to heighten their expectations and start to dismiss advertisers who are unable to follow suit," she said.

"No longer will customers put up with generic communications which fail to deliver on relevancy, value and timing."

Big Brother

It is clear that, as a combined result of advanced tech and human nature, customers demand better communications, relevant



ads and a more personal brand experience, subconsciously or otherwise.

However, this personalised approach is not possible without marketers attaining a more unified view of them, which invites a certain amount of controversy.

Without question, marketers and brands must remain cautious when looking to obtain the single customer view. Those who seek a more in-depth vision of their consumers tread a fine line between effective engagement and successful targeting, and bearing resemblance to Orwell's Big Brother.

White believes there will always be resentment for high levels of personalisation. In light of a number of high-profile data breaches, consumers are more aware than ever of their online behaviour and, more importantly, their personal privacy.

Transparency is key here as, ultimately, consumers want a brand they can trust. Keeping the customer's needs at the heart of all marketing campaigns is essential to attaining loyalty and ensuring that brands aren't relegated to Room 101.

Net Media Planet's Judge advises marketers that to avoid looking creepy, they must use techniques such as frequency capping (limiting the number of times a tagged user will see an ads), and above all, being subtle in the level of personalisation.

Buying data to achieve the single customer view is another issue which should be approached with caution. Many consumers are uncomfortable with being targeted by third parties with whom they are yet to buy from or engage with. Furthermore, purchasing data from outside a business also leaves the brand vulnerable to other risks, such as the data being acquired illegally.

Enjoying the benefits

As to whether customers have inadvertently demanded the world that this unparalleled view exists in, Judge says that whether or not this is the case, they can certainly benefit from better marketing efforts

"They probably unknowingly enjoy the benefits of personalisation that they receive, even if they don't recognise it."

James Cartlidge, head of strategic partnerships at Quidco, echoes Judge's comments on the need for customers to be recognised and rewarded.

"I think it's a natural human want to have belonging and recognition," he says. "People like recognition. As a customer if you notice me and reward me for it, I'm going to value you and repeat more. Service is more powerful than price today."

To appease customers, marketers must tread carefully, ensuring that advertising and customer service remains relevant and works to the advantage of the consumer, without driving them away with seemingly intrusive marketing.

It's a difficult balance to maintain, but one that is essential to appeal to the people that matter. Because after all, the customer is always right. 

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The Single Customer View: Whose Responsibility is it (Anyway)?

The importance of being in touch with consumers, to the extent that actions are predicted and communications tailored, is slowly but surely filtering its way down the echelons of our enterprises.

Every marketer is now aware of just how paramount acting on customer insights is to improving the overall experience and loyalty to a brand, which means they're ready to start collecting and acting on the information at hand. Or at least that's what they've been led to believe.

Unfortunately, the single customer view is built a little sturdier than some of the buzzphrases it succeeds. Case studies for progress remain hard to come by, and so too does a solid answer to the question of 'Who takes charge?'

With this in mind, companies find themselves collecting and matching siloed and fragmented customer data on a completely blank slate; a situation which has been known to yield stories of long-term success and catastrophic failure in equal measure.

A problem to solve

In building their single customer views, brands do at least have the luxury of being able to create a plan which runs in tandem with available resources and expertise. Advocacy from the top down, namely from CMOs, CTOs and CEOs, is crucial to employee buy-in, but whether it's a project led by IT or marketing will vary massively between companies.

Gill Makepeace, advertiser and network manager at loyalty marketing platform

Incentive Networks, believes there is a case for involvement across a range of departments, although only the brand can decide who should take things forward.

A former affiliate marketing manager at Debenhams, Makepeace says: "It will depend on a number of things: what the end goal is, so having the right team to drive it forward in a company who are fully invested in what they want to achieve.

"Some large companies may have customer insights teams and it would probably sit well within their expertise, but it would need to have a number of stakeholders involved to make sure it covers all the business requirements."

That proportion of stakeholders may even come from parties outside of the enterprise.

The outsourced approach was explored by United Airlines during an analytics initiative conducted in light of a merger with Continental Airlines in 2012. The company recruited tag management firm Enshiten to unify customer data from both firms across their digital touchpoints in an effort to provide a "360-degree view" of the customer, with an "eight-digit" ROI coming within 10 months.

Closer to home

Even considering the success that outsourcing has produced, there are certainly elements of the single customer view that can be done in-house, and with resources that already exist.

"I think a number of publishers and merchants that have business models that require a

customer to be logged in have done very well," adds Makepeace, whose role at Incentive Networks involves direct contact with both advertisers and publishers.

"Not only by identifying a single customer, but their full shopping behaviour and demographic information too gives them a wide choice of ways of engaging with customers in an intelligent way, through proper targeting and segmentation."

If this proves to be true, there's no telling how many customer data conundrums brands can solve with their loyalty programmes. As for who has the say on what the data is used for, there is certainly an argument for the chief in charge of marketing efforts to captain this side of the operation.

Luke Judge, of digital agency Net Media Planet, says it should be the responsibility of the marketing director, or equivalent seniority, to develop the processes for capturing and analysing data around the single customer view.

"Ultimately the senior members of the company are also responsible for ensuring that it is built into everything the company does, aligning systems and incentives across the entire business," he adds.

The end goal

Moving beyond the in-house resources and into the territory of external assistance, brands have the decision of whether to trust certain aspects of their single customer view strategies with managers of individual channels.



Judge believes there is certainly a case for marketers to seek help from agencies and specialists in certain areas, providing they fit in-line with the objectives at hand.

“There is also the potential for agencies, particularly those who manage paid advertising channels who would be seeking to justify increased investment, to be involved in helping to develop these SCV processes,” he says.

“They have an inherent obligation to further justify the value of the channel they manage by supporting the implementation of a single customer view strategy.

“This being said, it is incumbent upon the marketing director to bring their agencies together in order to truly understand and drive the value of the single customer view.”

Where brands find themselves is in a situation which will reward the trailblazers. The expert’s consensus appears to be that single customer view efforts should be championed by the boardroom, led by the marketer and developed by the company. Judging by the lack of single customer view case studies, though, questions of whether this is working have to be asked.

Ultimately, brands are finding that development of the single customer view is a task destined for progress in stages, which means involvement should be dictated by the goals at hand.

When it comes to gathering data, on-the-floor staff can be used to encourage customers to enhance their connection to a brand with email sign-ups or similar. Once the customer is in view, it’ll be up to

the marketers to liaise with the relevant departments in order to find the best use for data from shopping carts, user profiles and everything in between.

This view of collaboration can only be seen as a positive, because given the challenges that technology has thrown at brands, there’s every chance the first batch of single customer view success stories will owe their billing to a stellar amount of teamwork. 

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Q&A Single Customer View: The Journey Ahead

Is SCV a reality for retailers and where do they begin?

Gill Makepeace: I think it is a reality, yes. They need to identify the data they already have and work on pulling this into one manageable system. Things like company store cards or mobile contract data will help to identify a customer's shopping and browsing behaviour across physical locations and online.

They also need to identify before starting what they want to achieve from having a SCV. This is hugely important for making sure the solution they build meets their requirements, plus thinking about potential future enhancements they may want, so they capture all the data required.

James Cartlidge: It might not be the reality right now but it will be expected in the near future, especially when leading retailer brands start investing heavily [in the single customer view]. Ultimately brands that can build a deeper relationship with their customers will win. I'd say start with the vision and work backwards to see how each aspect of that customer view needs to align.

Lewis Lenssen: It's unlikely that retailers will have a 100% joined-up and consistent view of every customer, but there are plenty of opportunities to create a rich view of the majority of customers.

It's not important what everyone else does – retailers should prioritise the marketing channels, sales channels and devices that are most important to their business and move ahead based on that. It won't be solved straightaway so there needs to be a roadmap to take them from where they are, to where they want to be, in stages.

From where we stand currently, what are the main challenges to achieving this goal?

Luke Judge: The biggest challenges are probably online to offline and across devices. Collating past transactions is not difficult based on contact email addresses/billing details etc.

However, when an email address or a unique identifier is not collected when someone is browsing the client's site (i.e. on their mobile, or online before they go on to purchase in store) means the client cannot easily connect the two customer interactions, and hence it is tricky to see a singular customer view.

Lewis Lenssen: The main challenge is to get brands to stop questioning if it's possible and start measuring and joining as much as they can. Just because every user can't be joined across every channel with 100% accuracy, it doesn't mean that there's no value in making the connections that are possible.

Nicola White: The extraction, communication and collection of key data sources around the company form some of the major challenges to achieving a SCV.

However it's important not to overlook the internal resourcing challenges which can also complicate the process; namely determining who is going to be responsible for driving and co-ordinating the project and also gaining c-level buy-in for investing in it.

As it can involve so many different functions across an organization and take such a long time to implement, it's vital that retailers gain the full backing and support from the top.

Are today's companies structured to take on the task?

Nicola White: Some forward-thinking companies have really embraced SCV and have re-structured or invested in additional resource in order to take on and excel in this area. In these cases it's investment in 'data analysts' or 'data scientists' who understand the importance of gathering the required data and how it should be used to treat customers as individuals.

Companies tend to struggle where their online systems have had no historic need or ability to communicate with their offline stores, which then forms a major challenge in itself.

Lewis Lenssen: In general, most companies aren't structured in the optimum way to take this on. Businesses don't necessarily have to change, but if we look at the structure of the most successful multi-channel business

we're starting to see the creation of new roles with responsibility across online and offline channels.

It's now more likely to have people with cross-channel expertise, so rather than teams structured around the traditional channels (search, email, display etc.), these businesses are structuring them around product types (menswear, womenswear, furniture etc.), with responsibility for sales across all channels and devices.

Ultimately, what will concepts like SCV promote and achieve?

James Cartlidge: A happy customer who remains loyal through a better understanding and actionable data to help increase relevancy and drive a bigger revenue per user.

Gill Makepeace: I think SCV is key for both merchants and publisher to be able to offer

intelligent bespoke marketing to customers. The users these days are becoming more demanding and savvy. Receiving offers and content that is not relevant for their needs now could turn a them off from a brand or publisher. I think the future potential is huge once companies are able to have SCV.

Nicola White: SCV can help organisations to understand a customer's history, their product relationships and allows for better retention, communication and up-selling. Ultimately, if done successfully, it can achieve an increase in customer loyalty with a brand and help to target the right people, with the right message at the exact right time which is vital in this modern marketing era.

Lewis Lenssen: These concepts will help marketers to see a more realistic view of their customers. It will help to promote better marketing that's based on the real consumer, rather than the concept of a pure online or pure offline persona – a notion that doesn't exist in reality. 📌



CONTACT US

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