



Analytical Marketing Will Deliver for Your Customers | **ADELE SWEETWOOD**

As many life-long marketers can attest to, throughout our careers, we didn't always know if what we were doing was *actually* working.

When I was a new marketer more than 25 years ago, the profession functioned, for all intents and purposes, around concepts like the “four p’s” (product, price, package, and promotion) and as a primary support for the sales organization. We were simply communicating (usually in mass) with potential and current customers in order to feed them into a sales or renewal cycle. The early correlation was plain—if revenue was up, then marketing was doing its job.

While moving the revenue needle is still a critical benchmark for many modern marketers, our positions are no longer solely about supporting a sales team with the basics. Naturally, marketing tactics have become more sophisticated, but our roles have really been redefined by the value of one word: data.

By collecting and analyzing data, marketers can know if what we're doing makes an impact. We can point directly to why specific offers, emails, or thought leadership works (or doesn't work) for our customers. If your marketing organization is still just sales support, you're getting left behind. Not only are modern, data-driven marketers driving sales, we're monitoring or shaping a customer's experience with our brand.

At SAS, we define the term “customer experience” as all of the perceptions and interactions a customer may have with an organization. The experience itself is complicated by a much more convoluted decision or buying journey. By the time customers engage with your company—by visiting your website to download a white paper, for instance—they have traveled through almost 60 percent of their decision journey. That means they have done their homework, networked with their peers, searched through research reports, joined communities, read blog posts, and more. Most of that decision journey now occurs in the digital and social world. This new customer journey is a complex maze of influences that spans channels and defies consistency. What used to be a very linear relationship has now evolved into something continuous, where people are at various points along the journey. Our customers are now always on, always engaged, and always consuming information.

The challenge we have as marketers is to ensure that we are present and relevant at that 60 percent stage (or more) of the customer's decision journey. That challenge continues to grow, as the number of ways in which a customer can connect with your organization in the digital world literally grows daily. Gone are the days when you could simply wait for customers to walk into your storefront to engage with them. Gone, too, is the simplicity of controlling your interactions with your customers through phone calls and snail-mail communications. In the digital and social world we now live in, we can no longer fully control how or where we can make those connections with customers.

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Things are going to speed up. Consider the trend in the Internet of Things, a phrase capturing the fact that just about everything in our lives—from our cars and refrigerators to even our toothbrushes—is now linked together and transmitting data about our habits and decisions. By 2020, estimates indicate that 30 billion devices will be connected to the Internet. Can you imagine how much data will result? Are you prepared to take advantage of it?

Customers now have more choices for who to do business with and how—a trend that some have identified as the other hot buzzword, “omni-channel.” The challenge for organizations, then, is to be present in whatever channels the customer expects to find them in. In the technology space, customers are more informed and educated than they have ever been. Their peer groups also influence them, and not just when they are looking for solutions.

But rather than relying on what we marketers might call a “peanut butter” strategy of trying to be everywhere equally, we need to be more strategic and deliberate about our outreach. We must understand customer expectations; data and analytics are central to that effort. Marketers now have the data and analytical tools to understand, predict, shape, and enhance the customer experience in ways previously unimaginable. As Jill Dyché, vice president of SAS best practices, framed it for me, “The analytics and post facto understanding of customer information we are generating and collecting is quite possibly the competitive differentiator of the future.”

How do I get my organization to understand the “why” today?

As a marketing leader, you’ll be challenged to get your team members to let go of the traditional methods, investments, and approaches. How can you help them connect the dots? Take the time to figure out what your customers look like in the maze of information flow. Analyze the paths that you know they took, ask questions, and tell the story.

1. **Define your customers’ decision or experience journey**—the phases that make sense for your product or services. Don’t over-engineer it. Keep the definition clear and simple.
2. **Identify the location of your customers and prospects in their journey based on their actions**—what channels, what outcomes, and so on.
3. **Leverage the data and analytics** to tell your customer’s story, and listen to it.

The message is clear: today and into the future, customers or buyers will be coming in and out of cycles at multiple points throughout the process. The decision-making process is something that remains in constant motion. The job of a marketer is to be *present* and *relevant* in that journey.

For our marketing organization, like so many others, the shift to more digital marketing and channels was certainly the start of being where our customers needed us to be. But we have evolved from simply adding channels to better understanding the value of those channels, as well as the need to align our messages across them. That also includes rethinking the balance of our outbound marketing efforts—everything we do to get our messages out to customers—with our ability to service and handle inbound requests, or engaging with our customers in their journey. If we do a fabulous job of using digital and social channels to drum up interest in our products, for example, but then fail to welcome that prospect appropriately with, say, an effective landing page that contains information relevant to what that person is searching for, then we haven't completed our work.

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This process is also continuous. Consider the example of RCI, part of Wyndham Exchange & Rentals and the Wyndham Worldwide family of brands. The company, which pioneered the concept of vacation exchange in 1974 and altered the way millions of time-share owners experience the world, is no stranger to innovation. That's why, about eight years ago, the organization began its own modernization efforts in how it approached marketing, according to Phil Brojan, senior vice president of global marketing for RCI and other Wyndham Exchange brands. "I still remember the meeting that started it all," Brojan said. "I can remember exactly where people were sitting. We had so many people participating in what we knew was going to be a sea change for RCI that some people had to sit on the countertops of the cabinets around the edge of the boardroom. That was the point at which we all made the commitment that we were going to transform; we were going to become a much more data-driven organization. It was all driven by a simple fact: we were a membership organization that simply didn't know enough about our members. We wanted to make sure we had reliable data to understand our customer better and to make better decisions. And we knew that had to change."

That transformation has enabled the company to segment and model customer data and act on it quickly. "We can personalize communications and sales channels like the web and make them more relevant and timely," Brojan said. Data scientists work within the organization and collaborate with data analysts on advanced analytical techniques like optimization and modeling.

“We’re seeing more direct attribution of revenue back to campaigns, and we’re better able to see what’s working and what’s not,” Brojan added. The impact of this analytical transformation is enhancing the role of marketing at RCI. Brojan continued, “The insights we glean from the data now help drive overall business strategy. We’re providing key indicators of where the revenue opportunities are. This has been huge for marketing at RCI over the past five years, because we’re helping set the direction for the company and helping other organizational areas.”

Brojan said that analytical marketing organizations like RCI and SAS need to become more predictive in order to anticipate what consumers want before even they know—to recommend and predict more than react. “It’s about continuing to personalize the customer experience,” he said. “Everyone’s come a long way on focusing on the customer experience, yet there is still work to be done. The effort to personalize is never complete.”

When making their decisions to purchase or repurchase, customers now have much information to work with. They can do their research using different devices and web search tools, or even by tapping into their online and offline social networks. Customers are increasingly relying on comments and ratings to help influence their decisions, which means that, as marketers, you need to stay on top of that information as well. Someone complaining about your products or services can potentially damage your business.

Social channels have a massive influence on the customer's decision journey. But as a marketer, you can't control those channels per se. What you can do is be engaged, present, and relevant in them in a way that builds the trust of your customers and prospects. "Our challenge is to see the customer as a single individual with a rich set of behaviors and preferences," Dyché told me, "while also enabling them to see us via a unified approach and differentiated messaging."

Or, as Jennifer Chase, a senior marketing director at SAS, put it: "For the marketers of the past, the campaign was at the center of everything we did. Now, everything is centered around the customer."

We need to employ the power of analytics to understand where a customer is in the decision journey. "If you don't understand where the customer is in their decision journey, you can really be off target with your messaging," said Matthew Fulk, director of marketing sciences and analytics at SAS. With so many channels available to engage with your customers, using e-mail effectively has also never been more important. "A lot has been written about understanding your customer behavior," Fulk told me. "But understanding where your customer is in their decision journey provides the context you need to move your e-mail marketing from blast to conversation."

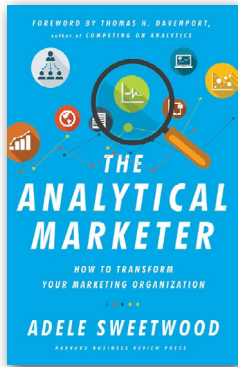
The point is that all this stuff happening in the digital world is affecting the customer's decision journey. We've begun to visualize our customer's decision journey with SAS on the acquisition side and our customer's engagement journey with SAS on the retention side. It is an "always on" concept, an infinity loop in which we are all either buying or not buying, with that decision always present as a consideration. Understanding and designing to the phases in your customers' journey, while they are making their way through the maze, will improve their experience with you and positively affect the outcome.

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We need to embrace the latest data and tools to ensure we are able to leverage all of the insights and information our customers are providing us along the way. Yes, things are changing fast. But that doesn't change the fact that our customers expect us to change as well, regardless of the industry we are operating in. Even buyers at business-to-business companies are shopping on consumer sites like Amazon and Zappos. That means they see the possibilities and want the same kinds of experiences, whether they are at home or at work.

While we all want to contribute to making our companies financially successful, data and analytics-driven marketing has completely reshaped the way marketers can measure that impact and their results. **Understanding your customer is no longer a shot in the dark. With data and analytics to support a marketing decision, all levels of the organization can feel empowered to positively impact the bottom line, a customer's experience and a brand's presence in the market.** 📊

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Adele Sweetwood is Senior Vice President of Global Marketing for SAS, the world's largest independent analytics company, has held a variety of sales, services, and marketing positions at SAS for 26 years, and most recently led the transformation of the marketing organization to meet the challenges and opportunities of data and analytics.

You can find her online on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

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