Empathy in action.

Building a customer journey management strategy for authentic connections.

Choose your own adventure.

You're in the market for a new laptop. You can:

A. Order from a popular online retailer. **B.** Visit a cutting-edge electronics store.

Adventure A

You decide to browse through the online retailer's website. It's incredibly user-friendly, with clear categories that make finding the laptop you want a breeze. Each product comes with detailed specifications and customer reviews, helping you make an informed decision. The website also offers a secure checkout process with various payment options and speedy shipping. You receive real-time updates on your order's progress and can track it until it reaches your doorstep. If any issues arise, their responsive customer support team is just a click away, providing prompt assistance via live chat or email. This digital experience offers convenience, efficiency, and a hassle-free way to purchase products from the comfort of your home. Not bad!

Adventure B

You enter the store and are greeted by interactive screens showcasing the latest tech innovations and their features. Each laptop has its own digital display with detailed information, including videos and demos. A mobile app offers personalized recommendations based on your preferences and browsing history. After finding the perfect laptop, you scan its QR code using the app, add it to your virtual cart, and complete the purchase digitally. But that's not the end of your journey. You stay connected with the store by participating in their digital events, where you learn about emerging technologies and attend live product demonstrations. This immersive experience creates a memorable and distinct journey—one that continues so long as there are new tech discoveries to explore.

Now, which adventure did it best?

In today's fast-paced, interconnected world, true relevance takes more than just convenience. Brands must strive to create special and memorable experiences at every touchpoint and on every channel, with the customer sitting at the center of their efforts—because in the end, it's the customers who determine the success or failure of a brand.

By adopting a customer-centric approach to journey management, brands can better understand their customers' needs and preferences, and create experiences that exceed their expectations. In this guide, we'll explore how brands can embrace a customer-focused strategy to stay competitive in today's digital age, and the systems they need in place to succeed.

Start with an empathetic customer journey management strategy.

Throughout our lives, we often find ourselves occupying dual roles. We may be both parent and child, teacher and student, marketer and consumer, among others. These roles give us a better understanding of different perspectives and experiences, foster empathy and trust, and help us make more informed decisions. By taking on a dual perspective and putting yourself in the customers' shoes, you can create more targeted and effective marketing campaigns, identify new growth opportunities, and stay ahead of the curve.

Prioritize the customer over the channel.

One of the most challenging aspects of marketing these days is the overwhelming number of channels customers engage with. They can jump from mobile to web to in person to app in a matter of seconds—and brands are expected to know what they did last, what they want now, and what opportunity to present to them next.

It's tempting to focus on channel engagement as a way to tackle this complexity, but a single or even multichannel approach can lead to disparate technologies and inconsistent data. Instead, it's essential to center your strategy around the customer.

"Our digital strategy is all about serving customers well and building trust across channels, but that doesn't mean anything if we don't listen to the 5 million people and businesses who bank with TSB each day. From online reviews to Net Promoter Scores, we take every piece of feedback to heart.

Mike Gamble
Director of Analysis and Design,
TSB Bank

Rather than figuring out the best strategy for email, mobile app, or website engagement, figure out why customers come to you, why they choose a particular channel, and what drives their actions. Only by taking this customer-centric approach can you tailor your responses to their interests and priorities and keep the conversation going. You'll have a better understanding of what guidance, content, and offers to use with what channel—and when.

Create personalized and authentic connections.

To create authentic connections with your customers and move with them along their journey, it's crucial to meet them where they are. Whether you're using email marketing, social media, mobile apps, in-person interactions, or all the above, your customer journey management strategy should be flexible and adaptive.

Effective customer journey management requires a personalized approach that recognizes each customer's unique desires at every stop along the way. Brands need to collect and connect data from all touchpoints to gain a comprehensive view of each customer's journey and deliver experiences that are consistent, connected, and contextually relevant. To achieve this, you must segment your customer base and tailor your approach to each group's specific characteristics and behaviors.

> **"** We achieve a business outcome by listening, collecting knowledge, and delivering a consistent experience. And we do that across any channel, any touchpoint, and with every interaction.
>
> **Kevin Lindsay**
> Director of Product Marketing,
> Adobe

Ideally, you want to go beyond segmentation and build personal relationships with your customers. You might start with a large audience, but as you gather more information, you can treat everyone as an individual based on their actions. By using data and insights to personalize your communication tactics, you can demonstrate that you understand where the customer is in their journey and why they are interacting with your brand. For instance, when you know each customer's past engagements

with your brand, their current needs and preferences, and their likely future behavior, you can deliver messages and offers that resonate with them and encourage them to take the next step in their journey.

However, personalization alone is not enough to create authentic connections with customers. Your engagement tactics must be useful, informative, and aligned with the customer's goals and motivations. This requires a keen awareness of your customers' pain points, aspirations, and values, as well as the ability to craft messages and offers that address these factors in a memorable way.

Do it together.

Customer journey management requires collaboration across different departments and teams. To provide a seamless experience, teams must work together and share information. This means providing employees with tools that give them access to customer data, such as purchase history and browsing behavior.

To foster a truly customer-centric culture, businesses must get buy-in from leadership, train employees to prioritize customer needs, and regularly measure customer satisfaction. By placing the customer at the center of all business decisions and actions and breaking down organizational silos, companies can achieve a more unified and effective approach to customer journey management, resulting in improved customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Insulate your coffee for 24 hours with this stylish mug.

Add to cart

Checks Email In The Morning

Warm Coffee Drinker

Set strategy in motion with a strong data foundation.

Imagine Sarah, a customer, visits an online clothing retailer's website and purchases a summer dress. The retailer, without considering Sarah's previous purchases or browsing history, sends her promotional emails and advertisements for heavy winter coats. The mismatched recommendations annoy Sarah, who feels like the retailer doesn't understand what she really needs. The lack of thoughtful data curation results in a poor customer experience, and Sarah probably won't be shopping with the brand again.

Let's see the kind of experience you can create when data is curated with more empathy.

David, a frequent traveler, likes to stay at a particular hotel chain. The hotel brand collects and analyzes David's data, including his preferred room types, amenities, and travel patterns, so they can anticipate his needs and preferences. The hotel staff greets David as soon as he arrives. They already have his favorite room prepared with personalized amenities and welcome notes. The hotel also recommends nearby restaurants and attractions based on David's past choices. This thoughtful data curation creates a superb customer experience, encouraging him to choose the same hotel chain for his future travels.

By combining the right tools with a customer-centric mindset and a team of dedicated, empathetic professionals, you can execute an effective customer journey management strategy that delivers personalized experiences, builds authentic connections with customers, and drives long-term loyalty to your brand.

Data is the natural place to start. It provides the insights and information needed to understand each customer's journey, their behaviors and expectations, and how they interact with your brand. But it can also be the most challenging aspect of customer journey management.
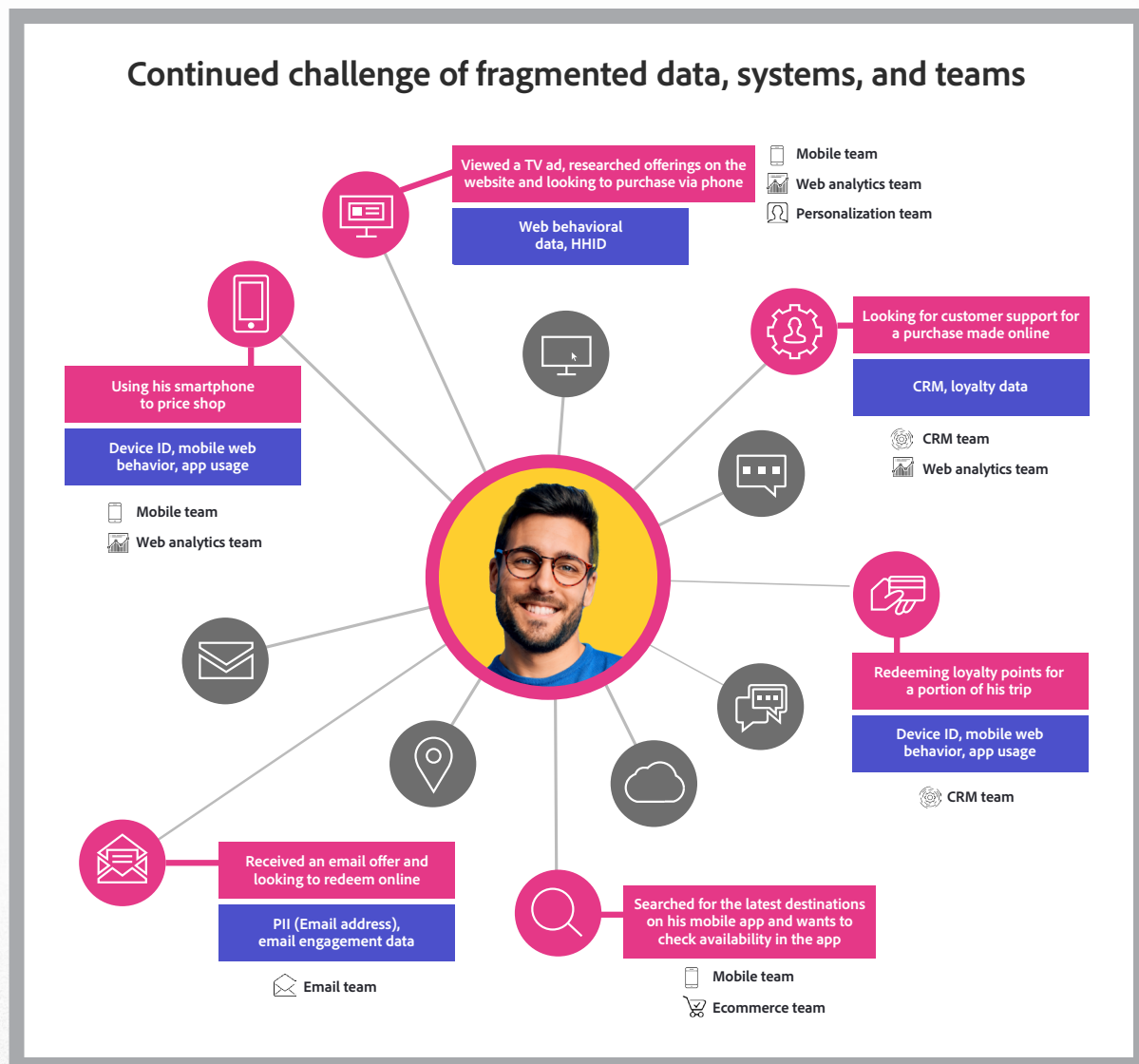
It can be difficult to organize and make sense of the abundance of data from various sources without a single source of truth on the customer journey, making it virtually impossible to know where the customer is at or what they might need next. Also, some data may be more valuable than others, and it can be hard to determine which data points are the most important for your customer journey management strategy.

Another challenge with data is ensuring its accuracy and consistency. Inaccurate or outdated data can lead to incorrect assumptions and misguided strategies, which can have a negative impact on your customers' journeys. It's important to regularly audit your data sources and ensure that the data you're using is accurate and up to date.

There are, of course, legal and ethical considerations to take into account when it comes to collecting and using customer data. Privacy laws, such as GDPR and CCPA, are in place to protect consumers' personal information, and it's essential that you comply with these regulations to maintain the trust of your customers.

While all that may sound intimidating, the right technology makes it possible to troubleshoot these potential data obstacles. Let's take a closer look at what optimal customer journey management looks like when a strong data foundation is running the insights.

Continued challenge of fragmented data, systems, and teams

Viewed a TV ad, researched offerings on the website and looking to purchase via phone
Web behavioral data, HHID
Mobile team
Web analytics team
Personalization team

Using his smartphone to price shop
Device ID, mobile web behavior, app usage
Mobile team
Web analytics team

Looking for customer support for a purchase made online
CRM, loyalty data
CRM team
Web analytics team

Redeeming loyalty points for a portion of his trip
Device ID, mobile web behavior, app usage
CRM team

Received an email offer and looking to redeem online
PII (Email address), email engagement data
Email team

Searched for the latest destinations on his mobile app and wants to check availability in the app
Mobile team
Ecommerce team

Unify your data sources for a complete view of the customer journey.

To improve the customer journey, it's important to bring together data from across the customer experience, going beyond specific channel engagement data such as social media engagement or website analytics and instead taking a more holistic approach. You'll want to integrate data from various touchpoints—such as point-of-sale (POS) transactions, ecommerce interactions, customer service inquiries, and even signals from the business itself like partner delivery information or live event updates—to get a more complete view of the customer experience.

In a cookieless future where first-party data is key, unifying customer-specific information with pseudonymous data becomes essential to business success. By combining the wealth of zero- and first-party data with anonymous but identifiable information, businesses can create comprehensive customer profiles that dynamically update in real time. This allows marketers to gain valuable insights into how customers engage with their brand across various channels and touchpoints—and respond with a more empathetic experience.

For instance, different types of data such as demographic information, purchase history, website interactions, social media engagement, and app usage can be consolidated to create a holistic view of each customer. By analyzing these profiles, marketers can understand customer preferences, behaviors, and patterns, and personalize marketing efforts for targeted messaging.

" By unifying our data, we started waking up to the fact that our customers' trust is an extraordinarily valuable asset. They were telling us exactly what they were looking for, and we needed to be more aligned with ways to help them.

Melanie Babcock
Vice President of Integrated Media,
The Home Depot

To deliver personalized experiences, marketers must monitor all interactions—including website visits, form fills, event attendance, and more—and update customer profiles simultaneously. A real-time customer data platform makes this possible. Real-time customer data profiles provide marketers with immediate access to insights, allowing them to track events as they occur and engage their audience segments across connected channels from a single location.

Track and analyze customer journeys in real time.

Connecting every touchpoint and visually exploring comprehensive journeys in real time is critical for effective customer journey management. When you can see the entire journey from start to finish as it happens, you can quickly identify areas where customers are experiencing roadblocks or drop-offs. With this information, you can make informed decisions on how to optimize the customer journey and provide a better experience for your customers. Perhaps you make changes to the website design, adjust your messaging and offers, or simplify your customer service processes.

Analyzing customer journeys can also uncover valuable insights into patterns and trends in customer behavior, so you can modify your marketing and sales strategies to better meet their needs.

Streamline your marketing efforts with omnichannel journey orchestration.

A strong data foundation is the backbone of effective customer journey management, connecting all touchpoints and allowing you to track and visualize interactions in real time for a deeper understanding of your customers. This knowledge helps you create personalized campaigns and have empathetic conversations that drive engagement and loyalty.

To unlock the power of your data, a single application is necessary to manage all campaigns and customer journeys. This centralized hub oversees customer journeys across various channels, including inbound interactions like web and in-app, as well as outbound channels like email, push notifications, and SMS. It also extends to cover offers and content delivery across all touchpoints, such as point-of-sale (POS) systems, kiosks, IoT devices, and social media platforms.

With a singular application in charge of the full customer journey, you can create cohesive experiences where the next action is triggered based on the desired customer outcome, guiding them seamlessly toward the next step. This contextual approach enhances the overall customer experience by ensuring relevance and personalization in every interaction.

> **❝** We will continue to provide high-quality, omnichannel experiences to athletes as we grow as a company. Our customers expect that whether they're shopping online or in-store, we remember what they like and give them personalized recommendations.
>
> **Steve Miller**
> Senior Vice President, Strategy, Ecommerce and Analytics,
> DICK'S Sporting Goods

The benefits of a single application go beyond just consistency. By managing your journeys from one central location, you can easily track their performance in real time and adapt your strategies accordingly. This involves continuously analyzing customer data, experimenting with different messaging and offers through A/B testing, and using insights to make informed decisions about which campaigns to prioritize. Experiment to learn how customers engage by finding answers to questions like—*What is the best experience? Is there better content, a different tone we should use, a channel that's better than another?*

An omnichannel shopping journey engages shoppers with consistent and personalized messages, no matter where the purchase is made.

Weekly promo email with a link to download the mobile app

Customer downloads the mobile app

Geolocation fence triggered as the customer arrives

A push message is triggered welcoming the customer to the store

The customer uses their mobile app to track their grocery list

Push promo received
While the customer is shopping an offer is sent related to past purchases or location-specific deals

A thank-you notification is sent with recipe links included based on past purchases

Ongoing shopping engagement

Customer does not open their app for > 48 hours

After 48 hours, a thank-you email is sent to with the recipes

Email follow-up to reinforce push

Ongoing shopping engagement

Let's break it down—building the technology stack for customer journey management.

When it comes to managing the customer journey, building the right technology stack is crucial. You'll need three interconnected systems to lay the groundwork.

- **A system of data** that responsibly combines customer information from different sources in real time to create detailed customer profiles, giving you a clear picture of who you're interacting with.

- **A system of insights** that uses AI to analyze data from various channels for a complete view of the customer journey and a deeper understanding of why customers behave the way they do. You can then use these insights to predict their future actions and engage with them in a more empathetic manner.

- **A system of engagement** that uses real-time data to create personalized journeys for customers. Artificial intelligence decision-making and automation can match tailored content to individual customers, allowing you to focus on creating experiences that evoke emotional connections and build loyalty.

> " We've gone out of our way to try to create digital tools to improve the fan experience or bring personalized experiences and information to them so that they feel like we know who they are. We know who their favorite team is. We know who their favorite players are.

Kasia Danilczuk
Senior Product Manager, Fan Data,
Major League Baseball

As your customer interacts with your brand along their journey, they'll likely engage with a variety of touchpoints that a marketer may not have full insight into, such as submitting feedback through a customer feedback tool or making a purchase on an ecommerce site. With so many channels to manage, it can be overwhelming to know where to start. To make the process more manageable, let's break it down and focus on two critical rrequirements—a unified infrastructure and AI-powered functionality.

Create a cohesive customer experience infrastructure.

To create a smooth customer experience, you need a flexible customer journey management application that easily incorporates the different channels and touchpoints along the customer journey. When selecting a solution, prioritize those that utilize open APIs, as they enable smooth data flow between systems, leading to the timely triggering of relevant messages, content, and offers.

It's also important that your systems of data, engagement, and insights are built on a unified foundation, ensuring they are interconnected and functioning harmoniously. It makes it much easier to use the real-time data you are collecting. Customer profiles update with every interaction, so you get immediate insights and can adapt your response accordingly. Without a unified foundation, your technology stack can become a disjointed mess of data silos, causing inefficiencies, making it difficult to gain insights into the customer journey—and making the experience far less cohesive and memorable.

Let AI make experiences (and experience-making) easier for everyone.

In addition to a seamless infrastructure, it's also important to consider the level of AI powering your solutions. AI can help you make sense of the massive amounts of data generated by customer interactions and provide insights and recommendations for a more impactful customer journey.

Look for solutions that use AI-powered functionality to help you personalize communications, predict customer behavior, and proactively identify issues that could be degrading the customer experience. For example, some solutions use machine learning algorithms to analyze customer data in real time and generate personalized recommendations for each customer.

AI-powered functionality can also help detect patterns and trends in customer behavior, creating more meaningful and personalized customer experiences with privacy, security, and ethics in mind. A news website, for example, could use AI to create customized news articles for each reader. Automating decisions with AI, also called intelligent decisioning, makes this type of hyper-personalization possible, aligning timing, content, context, and channels. It guarantees that customers receive relevant offers whether they are interacting with a teller at a retail bank, browsing their email, or logged into their account on the website.

The rise of generative AI.

Generative AI has gained significant attention and popularity due to its ability to generate high-quality content to support personalization at scale. However, its utility needn't be limited to producing written articles and visual assets, In the very near future generative AI will augment the marketer's or CX professional's ability to orchestrate personalized customer journeys — predicting, simulating and experimenting to optimize journeys against desired business outcomes.

Take the next step in your journey.

With the right tools, a customer-centric mindset, and a team of empathetic professionals, brands can execute an effective customer journey management strategy that drives long-term loyalty and builds authentic connections. Adobe, a leader in digital experience solutions, offers a unified platform that ties your systems of data, insights, and engagement together so you can orchestrate a seamless customer journey across channels. Your customers deserve the best, and with Adobe's expertise, you have the power to deliver it.

Learn more

Adobe can help.

Adobe Experience Cloud

Adobe Experience Cloud is the most comprehensive suite of customer experience management tools on the market. With solutions for data, content delivery, commerce, personalization, and more, this marketing stack is created with the world's first platform designed specifically to create engaging customer experiences. Each product has built-in artificial intelligence and works seamlessly with other Adobe products. And they integrate with your existing technology and future innovations, so you can consistently deliver the right experience every time.

Adobe Journey Optimizer

Adobe Journey Optimizer manages scheduled omnichannel campaigns and one-to-one moments for millions of customers. It helps brands intelligently determine the next best interaction with scale, speed, and flexibility across the entire customer journey—allowing companies to create and deliver both scheduled marketing campaigns and tailored individual communications all within the same application.

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