Building Your Omnichannel Data Foundation:
This Time It's Personal

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INTRODUCTION
Data Activation: The Clock is Ticking

In the movie The Godfather, you hear the saying - "*it's not personal, it's business.*" The inverse of that is true for marketers today trying to understand and take action on the customer journey across the many devices and channels that their business operates in. For marketers, it needs to be personal and, quite frankly, customers are beginning to demand that.

Internally, marketers are facing immense pressure to produce results and with the ever-increasing shift of budgets and investments to digital, the need to not only understand the customer journey, but also optimize it, is priority number one. Externally, customers are looking for an experience that is unique to them instead of the "catch all" bucket of content targeting. Relevant messages at the right time to the right person has become the "holy grail" for the digital experience.

For years we have discussed web or digital analytics, but today the goal is customer analytics, and in order to obtain that, marketers must build a technology stack that can create a customer profile across device and channel, as well as over time. This path is not easy, nor does it happen overnight and it's not something that can be solved by traditional analytics vendors.

> Nowadays, organizations have to accomplish two things when building an analytics program:
>
> 1. Obtain global adoption by providing the business with necessary reports for evaluating performance across all marketing investments.
>
> 2. Create a business intelligence-driven optimization program that is focused on providing multi-channel insights for the purposes of improving the user experience in real-time.

While the first can be accomplished via any of the major analytics vendors, the second goal is something much more complex and requires a solution that can cut through the complexity of data collection. When dealing with complex data, we too often see organizations spend the majority of their time collecting data and building reports, and not nearly enough time taking action on the data. A customer-centric data platform will give organizations a competitive advantage in the ever-increasing complexity of the customer experience.

We will spend the remainder of this eBook considering the different options available for building a customer-centric data platform, the pros and cons of each based on our experience and that of our clients, plus how the optimal approach differs from some of the traditional data capture methods.

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CHAPTER 1
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WITH THE DATA?

Capturing the data is only half the story; hence you need a solution that makes capturing everything quite simple so you can focus on using the data to drive value. In order to move beyond spending 90% of the time manipulating the data for reporting, the solution you select should make raw, customer-centric, event data easy to collect. The difficult part will be deciding how to use it to power customer analytics and build a real-time personalization program.

Business use cases must become your guiding light as you determine where to put the data and how to use it once it gets there. Whether you are depositing the data into a traditional data warehouse, a decisioning engine to power data-driven real-time marketing, or a business intelligence solution to analyze the data and build models, you must first take a step back and outline your business needs. You also need to be cognizant of the fact that your needs will evolve over time, which is why a flexible solution that can scale with your needs becomes extremely important.

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CHAPTER 1 (CONT.)
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WITH THE DATA?

Building your marketing cloud in a scalable fashion is an arduous task. In addition, connecting the data from each technology in your marketing stack to build your dataset typically ends up requiring a customization to build each of the ETL processes, which unfortunately can be both time-consuming and expensive. Furthermore, you'll often find that the digital technology you have purchased will charge you additional money for access to the raw data for manipulation. Plus, even when you get access to this data, it's rarely ever in real-time, which will put a latency into your ability to drive timely communication to your customers.

Creating a first-party, real-time dataset that you can own and control into perpetuity, and so move beyond rented 3rd party data, should be the fundamental goal for any personalization program (you don't want to pay every time you want to make a targeted decision about an individual). To get there, the time to value for the data you are collecting should also be short as that is the key to gaining a large ROI from your investments. If you are spending all of your time designing and connecting data, then you're missing out on getting, and using, all of this rich customer data to transform your customer analytics and data-driven marketing strategies.

CHAPTER 2
WILL YOUR EXISTING WEB ANALYTICS TOOL SUFFICE?

When building your technology stack, the key theme should be "highest and best use."

You want to ensure that every single technology is aligned appropriately to make the best use of the strengths of the solution. Web analytics tools were built to provide reports to help you understand the effectiveness of your website, your reach and acquisition efforts. They provide the necessary reporting to inform the organization and will also allow for you to identify areas of potential improvement and low-hanging fruit to optimize your web channel.

Many of these solutions were not, however, designed to be customer-centric and provide you with complete, granular omnichannel data about individuals without an immense amount of tagging. As a result, this tagging effort tends to be quite time consuming and once completed will still require considerable on-going work to maintain data integrity. Furthermore, tracking the customer journey across device and channel will require a well thought out tagging strategy and customization in each channel to pass those identifiers along.

'near real-time'
adjective
1. denoting or relating to a data-processing system that is slightly slower than real-time.

Beyond the tagging effort, getting the real-time individual data is also not possible in today's solutions. "Near real time" is the phrase that you'll hear when describing the nature of the data being collected. Another major flaw here is that you need to know what data you require ahead of time about each individual, which is rarely something any organization can clearly articulate during the implementation process. As a result, clients risk missing out on uncovering previously hidden, and often valuable, insight due to an incomplete dataset.

Furthermore, if you uncover an incomplete dataset, the time and effort to rectify that throughout upcoming code releases is only second in frustration to the fact that you most likely won't have a historical representation of behavior anyways.

CHAPTER 3
WILL A TAG MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (TMS) HELP?

When it comes to the aforementioned tagging complexity of the web analytics vendors, Tag Management will help resolve and centralize the deployment.

These vendors play a very important role in your toolkit, as they reduce the dependence on IT and put more control into the hands of the marketers. With that shift in control comes a shortening of the runway to value in the deployment of tags and the collection of data.
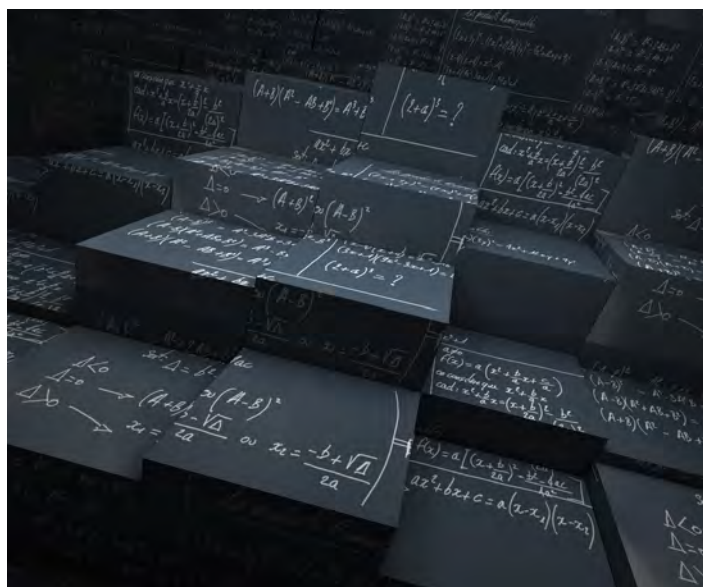
However, while the dependence on IT and the typical release cycles falls by the wayside, you would be remiss to think that the complexity of the deployment drastically lessens. For sophisticated implementations, a complex tag rule framework, data layer, and governance process is needed just like they would be in a standard, old-school deployment. Maintenance and quality assurance is also needed with each deployment, though the centralized approach provided by TMS does make it more manageable.

CHAPTER 3 (CONT.)
WILL A TAG MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (TMS) HELP?

So, while TMS makes the implementation process shorter, and the tagging process easier, there is still tagging that needs to be completed to actually collect the data. In addition, the added complexity of mobile apps makes for a significant amount of effort to tie together the customer journey and provide individualized data about your customers. Despite the introduction of SDKs from the leading TMS vendors, there is still significant effort to build the rules required to complete the implementation of an app across iOS and Android.

With the right data flowing into the data layer, however, a TMS can be a useful strategic partner for personalization. Across our clients today, the most advanced deployments for personalization and content targeting involve deployments maintained within tag management. However, you must first focus on creating the necessary omnichannel dataset to feed into the deployment without all of the tagging hassle.
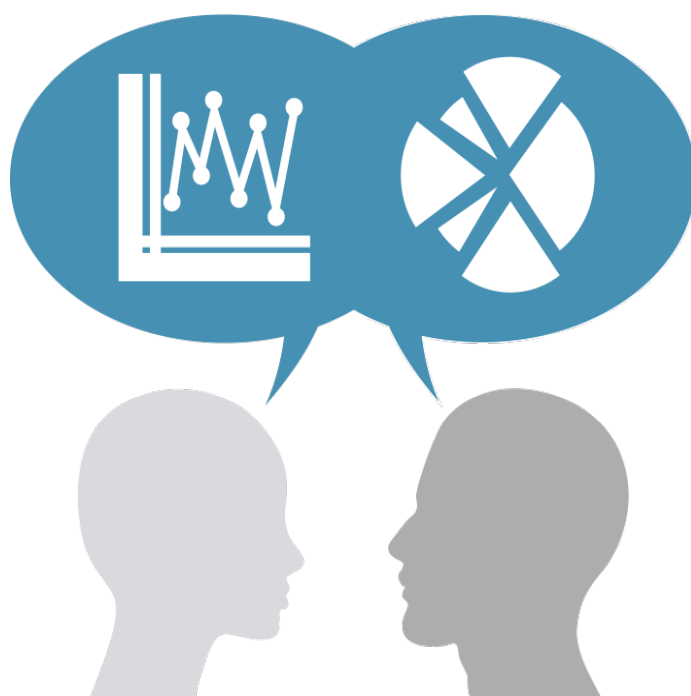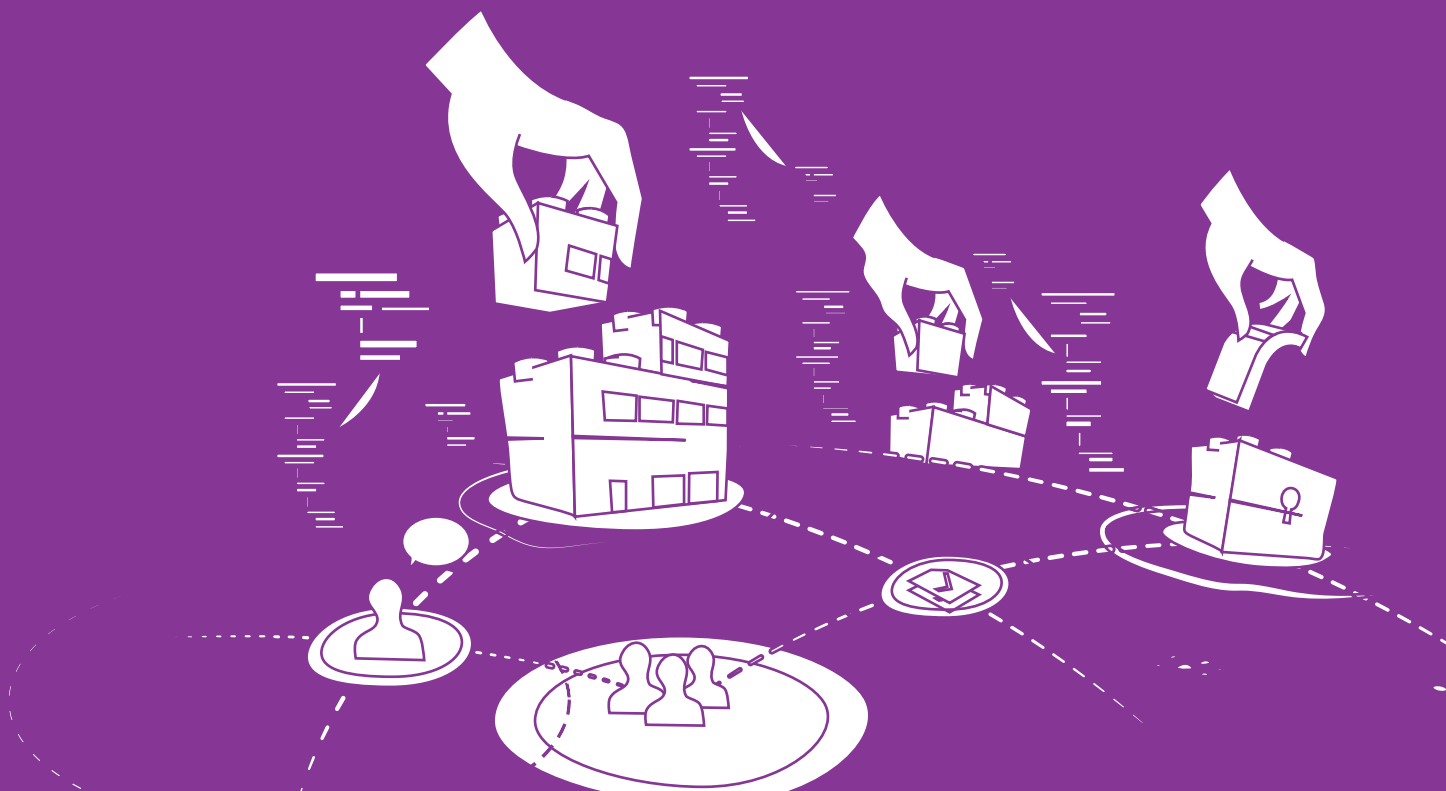
CHAPTER 4
SHOULD WE INITIATE A DIY PROJECT?

Reinventing the wheel when innovation is happening all around us in today's industry would be the biggest mistake that your organization could make when it comes to building a personalization engine and real-time data. For starters, your IT division is not a product development firm and the runway to value for building a solution of this stature and capability would take way too long. Going down that path will ultimately allow your competition to lap you while you plug away at building something that you could have purchased and already made use of.

Even if you did decide to go down this path, the increasing complexity of technologies used to create digital experiences, and the ever-growing variety of channels, would make it extremely complex to build a data collection technology which enabled you to capture data at the individual level effectively across all of them as well as having the ability to historically tie together sessions once an individual provides identifying information. In addition, with the constant evolution of web technologies, the maintenance and ongoing work required keeping a home grown solution relevant and innovative would be substantial and unrelenting.

! | The difficulty in a DIY project is not only the time to value, but also the science behind the sessionization, data schema, real-time availability, and the power of action with that data.

Anyone can build a tag that collects data, but that's not what you're trying to solve in today's world.

CHAPTER 5
SHOULD WE CONSIDER A NETWORK SNIFFER APPLIANCE TO CREATE OUR DATASET?

Many of these network tools, such as IBM Tealeaf, are built on a framework focused on providing event or error data at the session level and the ability to replay those sessions for further diagnosis. While that is an incredible amount of data, and is valuable in its own right, the dataset is not designed to provide customer-level interactions in a real-time manner for personalization purposes.

Even if you are using the client-side JavaScript tagging to augment the server data with browser interactions and in-page data, the lack of a true data schema for sessionization purposes limits the ability to use this as your primary business intelligence dataset. Similar to a DIY project, the time to value for creating this ability would require a considerable amount of research and development simply to build the necessary schema, let alone the effort to build the custom ETL to integrate this data with any other offline datasets you may be trying to utilize. Several of our customers have decided to go against our advice in the past to attempt to leverage this dataset as the primary source of customer-centric data, and all of them have failed after spending considerable time and money along the way.

Any true, real-time personalization dataset requires the ability to map back across historical data when an individual provides identifying information, while also having the capability of building a schema that maps the customer journey across all digital touchpoints, investments and campaigns. This is not something that is possible in the traditional customer experience management technologies, and as a result would not be the "highest and best use" for that application.

Don't waste considerable time and money.

"Even if you use the client-side JavaScript tagging to augment the server data with browser interactions and in-page data, the lack of a true data schema for sessionization purposes limits the ability to use this as your primary business intelligence dataset. Similar to a DIY project, the time to value for creating this ability would require a considerable amount of research and development..."

CONCLUSION:
THE PATH TO PERSONAL ENLIGHTENMENT

There is a great opportunity for organizations to achieve truly achieve data-driven marketing in this omnichannel world and drive customer engagement, advance customer analytics, and improve the digital customer experience. It's not an easy path to enlightenment, however, and there are many difficult questions to answer along the way.

The landscape will continue to evolve and with evolution comes more complexity within the customer journey. The goal must be to build a customer-centric dataset that will ultimately open the door to conducting analysis and optimize the customer experience at the individual level. Having a data platform for individual, multi-channel digital data that doesn't require intensive tagging and maintenance to create will ultimately give you the stable foundation on which to build your data-driven marketing and digital analytics program so you can stay ahead of the competition and meet your customers' expectations.

WHERE DATA
DRIVES DECISIONS.

About Stratigent |

Founded in 2002 with the goal of helping customers better leverage data to make decisions, Stratigent set out to help customers establish confidence in their data. Over the years, partnerships were formed with all of the major analytics vendors and Stratigent's approach evolved into a full-service, multi-channel analytics consulting model.

Today, Stratigent is known as a leader in providing multi-channel analytics consulting to organizations as a vendor-neutral, 3rd party, strategic advisor. Our unique blend of both business and technical acumen allows us to serve each analytics need as companies mature in their usage of their data. As a company of forward thinkers, we continue to evolve and pioneer in an industry that is rapidly innovating. To learn more, visit: www.stratigent.com

About Celebrus Technologies|

Celebrus Technologies enables organisations to understand their individual customers' interactions across the digital channels they own, including websites, mobile apps and social media. Celebrus' award winning tagging-free digital big data software then feeds this data into a wide variety of big data technologies in real-time. Celebrus' global blue chip clients use this highly granular data to power advanced customer analytics and real-time personalisation and to drive actions that maximise revenue, marketing effectiveness and brand loyalty.

Celebrus partners with world-leading technology companies to provide integrated solutions that meet critical business goals. Celebrus also has global reach with their fast and flexible digital data and real-time personalisation platforms available from resellers across the world. To learn more, visit: www.celebrus.com

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