

Seven steps to a winning digital experience that attracts and retains customers.

Using Digital as a Brand Differentiator

By Christina Dupre

In a world dominated by digital content, brands are faced with the tough task of standing out from the noise. Digital has been on the rise for years as technology has evolved and become more widespread — today, 85 percent of Americans report owning a smartphone¹ — but it's the pandemic that has driven digital adoption to new levels and created a necessity for digital tools. This necessity, in turn, has driven the need for companies to create best-in-class digital experiences.

As marketing saturation and the competition for consumer attention grow, brands need to get smart about how they approach their digital content strategy. Marketing was once primarily a lead generator, but that is no longer the case. The role of marketing has changed over time and that evolution has moved rapidly in recent years due to the increasing amount of data being generated by consumers. Marketing departments are expected to produce a solid return on investment (ROI) and have the data to back up their marketing spend. Gone are the days of Don Draper's quippy taglines and focus on simple product positioning. The execution of breakthrough digital experiences is essential to driving business results in today's environment, and content placement and cross-channel experiences have become as much a science as an art with a focus on data and digital.

Customer experience matters across the entire customer journey, but it is especially important when it comes to digital for two reasons: switching costs for customers are negligible (changing companies requires little effort) and the barrier to entry for potential competitors is low. These days, it feels like a customer need only think about a product and they'll be targeted online almost instantly in a web search or ad placement. Because digital content has only a split second to make a lasting impression before the customer clicks to the next site, the quality of that content has never been more important. A differentiated and hyper-personalized digital experience is critical to winning attention, market share, and brand loyalty.

So, how can brands provide the seamless, relevant, digital experience customers have come to expect while increasing engagement and driving loyalty? To start, they need to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment and answer the following questions.

HOW CAN I, AS A BRAND, DIFFERENTIATE MYSELF?

HOW DO I MAKE MYSELF STAND OUT FROM THE OTHER NOISE?

HOW DO I CONNECT WITH MY CUSTOMERS AND SET MY BRAND APART?

HOW DO I PROVIDE RELEVANT CONTENT AND OFFERINGS THAT MY CUSTOMER IS SEEKING?

HOW DO I OPTIMIZE MY PROCESSES AND ENSURE THAT THERE IS A RETURN ON MY MARKETING SPEND?

These answers will offer insight and allow leadership to identify gaps in how they are connecting with customers today. Additionally, this exercise will help leaders reflect and really understand their brand value statement. From there, we recommend executives use those findings as they follow our seven-step process to rethinking and reinventing their company's digital experience.

THE FOUNDATION: Understand How Digital Fits Into Your Overarching Customer Experience (CX) Strategy

While the ever-evolving digital landscape is a popular topic these days, it's important to remember that digital is only one piece of the puzzle. When reinventing your brand's digital experience, a cohesive cross-channel strategy is necessary for success. Before diving exclusively into your digital channels, step back to gain a holistic understanding of your customers' interactions. Identify gaps, such as an in-store experience where a customer fills out a form, but that information never makes it into a digital system (e.g., CRM or Customer 360), that might need to be addressed with an overarching strategy.

One of the best ways to examine interactions and minimize the risk of designing an experience in a silo is to create a service blueprint of customer touchpoints. A blueprint looks at a customer's needs and their desired experiences and integrates the findings with the structures, workflows, and processes required to deliver the services that meet those needs. If you find that existing goals no longer fit the bill, this step may require zooming out even further to reassess your organizational CX strategy and vision. That's okay.

STEP 1: Measure How Customers Are Interacting With Your Brand

Understanding how customers interact with your digital content is critical. Start by setting a baseline to benchmark. This allows you to understand how various changes and campaigns impact user interactions. From there, use customer intelligence data from your analytics tools to

track, gain insight into, and measure campaign effectiveness. Before you start building dashboards, however, it's important to outline success factors and key performance indicators to track.

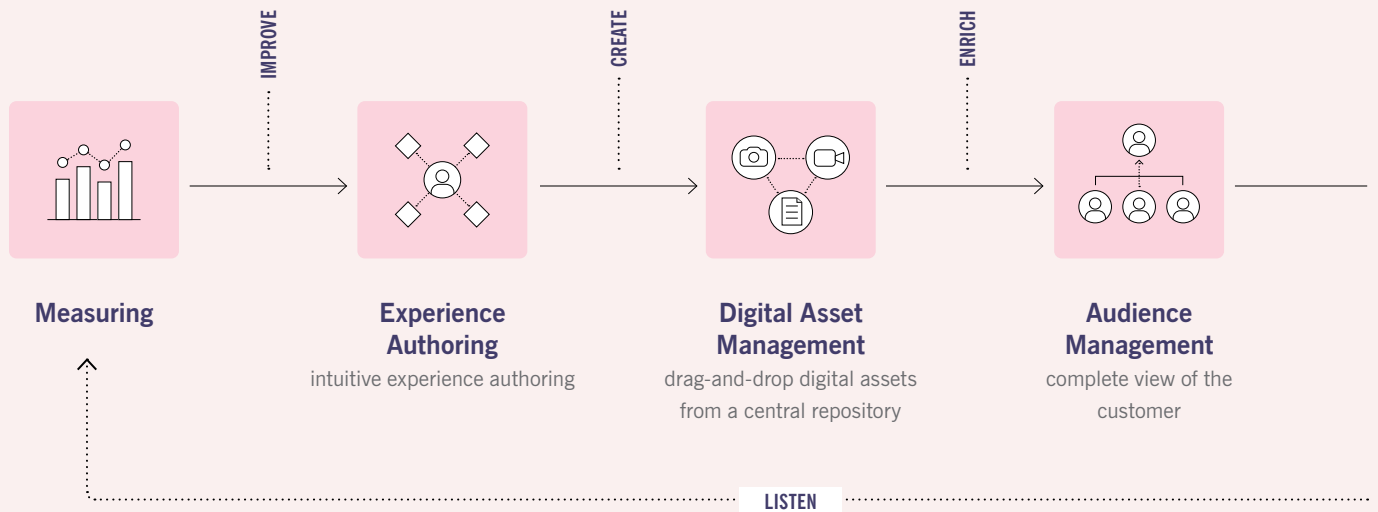
Keep in mind that when analyzing and reporting marketing ROI there is a difference between vanity metrics and value metrics. Vanity metrics can be vague and show an incomplete story. Some examples are website traffic, time on site, the number of social media followers, impressions, and page views. Individually, these metrics can make it look like your digital marketing is performing better than it is.

Imagine your website had one million page views. You may think that's good; a million is a lot of views. But what if you dug deeper and found that only one percent of those people were converted into customers? Now that's a different story. The right audience is not visiting your site. In this case, the value metric that you should be tracking is the conversion rate, to see where in the funnel potential customers are falling off. Other examples of value KPIs are customer lifetime value, sales-qualified leads, and content download rates.

Once you determine the KPIs and metrics to track, set up a dashboard to help better understand the data being collected. This could be as simple as creating a Google Analytics dashboard. It doesn't have to be elaborate. The key is that you collect robust real-time analytics, which will allow for detailed segmentation and will power customer intelligence for your organization.

STEP 2: Enable a Simple Way to Author the Experience

Intuitive experience authoring allows for content delivery to occur seamlessly from creation and review to publishing and archival. To enable this experience, there must be alignment between marketing, information technology, and other internal groups such as user experience and customer success, as well as with external vendors and agencies. If your company is more matrixed, it may be more complicated to execute a connected customer experience if the right tools and processes are not put in place.



To implement the most efficient and productive processes, your organization must nail down ways of working, and each group should understand its role in the content life cycle. Without this alignment, your organization will create siloed working and operational inefficiencies, which will impact turnaround time and effectiveness. Build out collaboration tools and standard workflows (automated workflows would be even better) to better manage tasks and projects.

STEP 3: Create a Central Repository for All Digital Assets

It needs to be easy to manage your marketing content and assets, especially as the amount of content you create grows. An organized central repository with the correct taxonomy and metadata will allow you to store assets and easily access them when needed. An organized content management system will also allow for seamless control over editing and versioning. This is especially important for organizations in which multiple individuals work with digital assets.

Additionally, having the central repository helps to maintain brand integrity because all parts of the business are utilizing the same assets. Take for example a multinational company that, absent a digital assets repository, allows each region to use their own logos, all of which are different and may not meet brand specifications. That reflects poorly on the company but can be avoided with a centralized asset library.

STEP 4: Use Data to Create New Audiences

Because not all customers are created equal, it is imperative to understand who your customers are and what drives them. The key is to capitalize on available data and create audiences. More than likely, your company has previously created customer archetypes to better understand your core customer. You can achieve a quick win by identifying those key customer segments and understanding their wants and needs.

There are various attributes — some easier than others to implement — that can be used to segment your audiences. For example, a simple way is to segment by geographic location or by whether an individual is a first-time visitor

or repeat visitor. More advanced segmentation techniques include identifying where the customer is on their journey based on previous interactions with any brand channel or by utilizing cookies, using artificial intelligence, or recognizing affinity to a product line or specific sub-brand based on how they interact with related content.

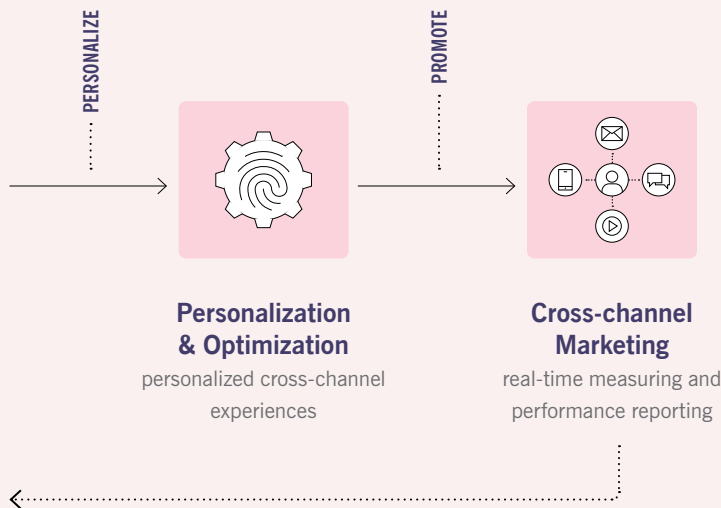
By using data from digital channels, you can identify who your most valuable segments are and better understand your target audiences. Data aggregation will allow you to continuously discover and create new segments. You can then use your new customer segments, and knowledge about their preferences, to engage in smarter targeting and personalization, as well as create more timely and personal content. A Customer 360 — a 360-degree view of a customer's data that includes every interaction, from a website form submission to a product purchase to a customer support ticket that provides a single source of truth about the customer — will also help you to better understand your customer and what makes them tick.

STEP 5: Personalize and Optimize Your Customer's Online Experience

Today, customers expect you to know them. They expect a robust personalized experience, and they expect the personalization to follow them in cross-channel experiences. Delivering a contextual and hyper-relevant customer experience is required to remain competitive.

Customers gravitate toward brands that understand them and their needs. They don't want to waste hours hunting online and would rather the content served to them be pertinent to their profile. By utilizing the new audiences you created with your data, you can now deliver content, campaigns, and experiences that resonate with each group.

Personalization technology continues to evolve rapidly. Remember when you thought an email blast was personalized when it had your name in the greeting or your company's name in the subject line? Today we are approaching one-to-one hyper-personalization, as fast-evolving



technology redefines how companies engage with customers. For example, tapping into AI technology allows marketers to spot and predict microtrends. By understanding these trends more quickly, strategic decisions can be made regarding who to target and when. The hyper-specific campaigns help to reduce advertising waste and ensure the marketing spend achieves the expected ROI.

STEP 6: Be Consistent Across All Marketing Channels

Consistency is powerful. A cohesive experience with relevant content should be delivered whether the interaction occurs on a desktop computer, on a mobile device, or in a store. As the number of interactions a customer has with your company goes up, so do the expectations. In their 2018 Future of CX Report, PwC surveyed 15,000 consumers and found that one in three will leave a brand they love after just one bad experience, while 92 percent would completely abandon a company after two or three negative interactions. Customers expect to have a seamless interaction with your company, and not providing one can be detrimental.

STEP 7: Listen, Iterate, and Retool Your Strategy

“Listening” can come in many forms thanks to the abundance of data available from digital interactions. When you identify how customers are moving through your site via their interactions, you can better understand your content’s performance. And understanding how your customers interact with your digital channels is necessary for improving usability, prioritizing functionality updates, and providing the most value to your customers.

The first form of listening involves analyzing the KPIs from Step 1. Measure and review the effectiveness of your campaigns and content to see how audiences are engaging. Understanding what works and what doesn’t will allow you to optimize based on the data you collect.

Another form of listening involves reviewing user sessions to capture both qualitative and quantitative insights. For example, you could watch the flow of screens

the user follows, where the cursor goes and how much time is being spent on each area. Insights could be gained, such as if users get stuck on a certain area or are thrown an error. Additionally, you could see interesting interaction tidbits, such as if users fill out a form from the bottom up if it requires too much information up top or if users start to fill out a form and then abandon it. Some of these items can be tracked via click data or backend error capturing, but you get the full view when you can see the session. Two tools that are frequently used are FullStory and Quantum Metric, and both allow users to visualize exactly how their customers are interacting so they can fine-tune the experience.

The third is experience management (XM). Experience management exploded onto the scene thanks to Qualtrics, an operating system for XM. Here, it is important to make sure digital marketing and customer success teams are in lockstep as they both play a key role in the customer journey. When they are working in sync, your business can use captured insights about customer satisfaction and feedback to better predict retention and loyalty, as well as to adjust content strategies and ensure customers are delighted.

It’s important to remember that this is an iterative process. And once implemented, it’s vital to measure the effectiveness of your strategy and optimize it (i.e., identifying and scaling best practices) based on consumer engagement. Best-in-class digital execution leads to brand loyalty, and for retailers, it can increase both purchase frequency and the size of the cart. In all industries, though, a positive, intuitive, and hyper-relevant digital experience will increase the adoption of platforms and digital products. ☺

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Source:

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>