

Being a softlines retail marketer isn't easy! There is a constant flow of new products and different brands to entice shoppers with the latest trend. Consumers are always thinking "what's next" for the upcoming season... fall fashion, holiday gifting or bright spring styles.



Knowing your customers' needs is simple; the hard part is **connecting them with the right merchandise, at the right time with the right offer**. The speed of marketing execution needs to be as fast as your customer's fleeting interests, and merchandise targeting needs to be as precise as their wants and your inventory. Creating a symbiotic relationship between inventory levels, seasonal relevance and customer interest is nirvana. But is that attainable?

The typical marketing approach usually includes a flyer, email or a banner ad promoting a particular line of goods, such as winter jackets. It's expected that you will experience some lift in sales, but it's likely half of those customers would have purchased a new jacket for the season even without a special deal. **You want promotions to effectively compete but also drive a longer-term halo**. Even with all the intuition, planning and experience, many items still fall short of expectations. Early optimism yields the usual win/loss analysis with end of season post-mortem.

Do you ever wonder if there is a better way?

Yes, there is.

Advanced analytics and data inputs have progressed to the point where you can **deliver a one to one customer experience that fits**. It leverages the product you need to promote, the product your customer wants to buy and in the timeframe you need to sell it. Advanced customer engagement has dramatically improved in step with advances in cloud-based computing, machine learning analytics and real-time customer experience. With that in mind, here are **three ways to improve share of wallet by driving more effective customer engagement**:



Make it Relevant: Getting a customer to buy more only works when it's a win for both of you. Keep your suggestions tightly relevant to the customers' interests through the clues they give you. **The rapport you build with your customers is irreplaceable**; the more relevant the product suggestion, the more they will trust you and actually believe you understand them. This isn't the basic product-centric cross selling approach, but it's identifying the items your customer has hinted at that will build a deeper relationship.

Using insights from data sources such as past purchases, in-session browsing behavior, social media posts and product reviews yield deeper insights. These incremental insights inform the type of offer presented to the customer. Offers are more relevant, targeted and personalized to each customer in real-time. This **insight also provides greater motivation, turning passive customers into active ones.**

The trick is to not just personalize the “Ask” (what you want your customer to do) but also personalize the “Reward.” Marrying the incentive type, the specific incentive amount and a customer’s propensity to perform the action is a highly dynamic and effective combination.



Make it Timely: Creating an active and engaged customer base starts with having a deep understanding of each individual member and delivering the right message at the right time.

To build a deep cognitive understanding of each customer, utilize your customer data: loyalty data, click-stream data, member profile data, social participation data and unstructured data. Using these inputs, you’ll get a much better view of the customer and can present individualized offers and content during a customer’s shopping experience in real-time, seizing them in the moment. You can also play with dynamic offers, using a variety of SKUs during the shopping experience based on a customer’s unique profile.



Make it Incremental: Focus on delivering truly incremental transactions through specific and unique offers that are tailored to each customer. In doing so, you will reduce the cost of promotions by avoiding the “giveaway” inherent when incenting all customers with the same reward. You’ll also **benefit from increased customer engagement and brand interaction by appealing customers with contextually relevant offers and messaging.** All of which builds trust.

It’s all about advanced customer engagement: identify, target and engage those customers who provide clues about their interests and purchasing desires. Target the new fashion line to the right customers and engage each customer individually. You are providing a more relevant experience for your customers, providing optimized offers to gain the sale, moving through inventory at the pace of the planned sell through...or faster...and lowering your promotional spend.

Grow the category, increase value and beat the competition. Now that’s a plan all retail marketers can agree on. To learn more about building your advanced customer engagement strategy, visit www.exchangesolutions.com

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