

Maximizing Moments of Truth: Creating Meaningful Real-Time Customer Interactions

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Introduction

“Listen more than you talk.
Nobody learned anything by hearing themselves speak.”
– Richard Branson

In 1999, Seth Godin wrote one of my favorite industry books, *Permission Marketing*, which would prove to be eerily prophetic. Godin advocated a revolutionary approach to “turning strangers into friends and friends into customers” by eschewing traditional unsolicited marketing communications. Instead, he suggested that companies “date” their customers – first offering incentives to engage (essentially asking for permission to interact, possibly with a freebie or discount), then using the knowledge gleaned from those interactions to speak to customers as friends.

This new tactic, he suggested, would yield more personalized, relevant communications and transform independent campaign communications into cyclical interactions. The ultimate goal of permission marketing? Moving beyond random, interruptive campaigns to develop deep relationships with engaged, loyal customers – customers who both anticipate and initiate interactions.

Today, the predominant industry focus is on shaping customer journeys and managing customer experiences (CX). CX is the management of customer interactions at every touch point, from digital to physical, in order to create personal experiences that promote loyalty and increase revenue.

Its foundational tenet is that the cumulative impact of these personalized interactions – many of which occur outside of traditional campaign boundaries – determines customer sentiment toward an organization. In fact, personalization pops up on just about every list of important trends for marketers in 2020 and into the future. One [Marketing Insider survey](#) found that 80% of consumers said that they would be more likely to do business with a brand that provides a personalized experience.

If permission marketing, CX and personalization sound similar, it’s because they are. The difference in this then-versus-now story is in the technology. In 1999, when Amazon and Yahoo were both five-year-old fledglings, Godin (then a vice president at Yahoo) recognized the potential for technology and digital devices to allow companies to connect with their customers in a very personal way at scale. Today’s sophisticated marketing automation capabilities, big data platforms and AI-driven decisioning engines facilitate the “at scale” part. According to Statista and MarTech Advisor, the 3 billion smartphone users today and the 15 billion connected devices that each individual is projected to own by 2030 will provide timely and intensely personal information about our customers. Together, these technologies and extended customer information have transformed Godin’s early vision into a current reality.

Reacting to our customers’ “moments of truth” – when they form or change their impressions – will require unique, personalized responses in real time that transcend

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traditional marketing and span channels and devices. The recent [Experience 2030](#) study from SAS and Futurum looked at the future of CX and had this to say about what to expect: “The brands that survive today and who continue to grow and thrive into and beyond the coming decade are the ones that can not only integrate nimbleness and agility into their business practices, but who also are committed to uncovering new ways to engage with and drive loyalty with consumers.” This is more than marketing maturity; it’s the new marketing imperative.

A Tale of Two Offers

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...”
– Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Jason is a longtime customer of a large US bank. The bank has a sophisticated next best offer program in place, illustrated in Figure 1, below.

Individual marketing campaigns employ analytical models using a rich set of integrated customer and product data to generate lists of customers most likely to respond to campaign offers. The list files are consolidated into a central contact optimization decisioning engine, which allows the bank to sequence and prioritize all possible cross-campaign offers for a particular customer. Offers can be delivered to a wide variety of automated and face-to-face channels, including the web, mobile, branch offices, call center agents, ATMs and in-branch kiosks.

When a customer interacts with one of those channels, the decisioning engine makes a real-time determination of the best offer for that customer based on offer priorities and preassigned business rules. The selected offer is then delivered directly to the appropriate channel. Offer priority is assigned based on overall factors, such as customer lifetime value and offer value, as well as campaign constraints, like channel applicability and campaign budget.

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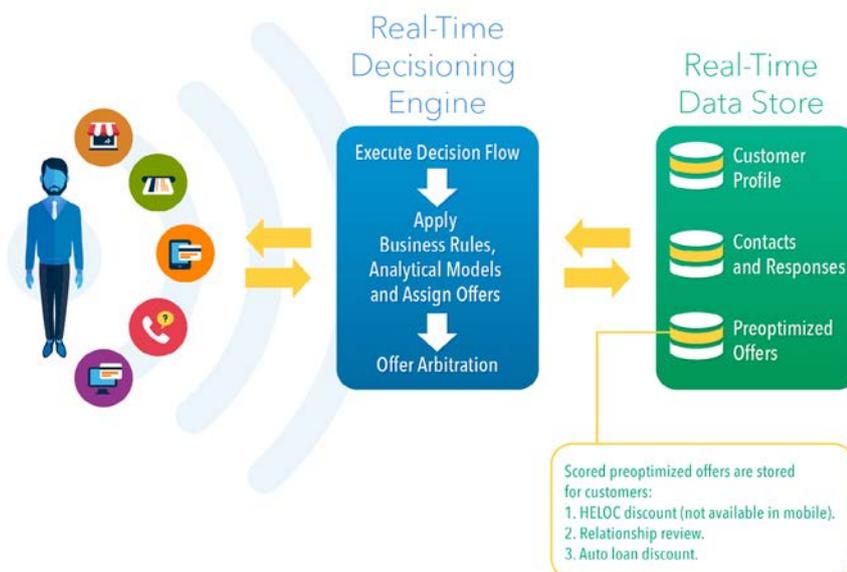


Figure 1: Next best offer program.

Through the historical analytics associated with the program, the bank knows that Jason does most of his banking on the web and mobile applications, rarely visiting a branch. It understands that with a small change in account usage patterns (using his debit card a few times more a month, having a direct deposit into his checking account), Jason could get a gold tier checking account with extra benefits, such as interest checking and free checks. It also knows that Jason has been in his house for 10 years, tends to use the bank's loan products (has a current mortgage, paid off an auto loan recently), has browsed home equity line of credit (HELOC) rates and viewed "hottest home remodels" content on the bank's website.

These insights allow the bank to generate a targeted list of possible offers for Jason that include a relationship review (for upgrading the checking product), a discounted HELOC interest rate and a discounted auto loan rate. Applying the offer priority calculation delivers a recommended sequence: first offer the HELOC, then review the relationship, then offer the auto loan.

One Saturday while waiting for a salesman, Jason logs into the bank's mobile app from his smartphone. He looks at the current auto loan rates, then swipes over to his checking account information. As he views his account, the decisioning engine retrieves Jason's offers in real time, applies suppression rules (eliminating the HELOC offer because it's not available through the mobile channel) and selects the highest-priority offer available for Jason at that moment, the relationship review. The system sends him a personalized message highlighting the benefits of a gold tier checking plan and asks for permission to set up a phone-based relationship review. Jason is interested and takes the appointment.

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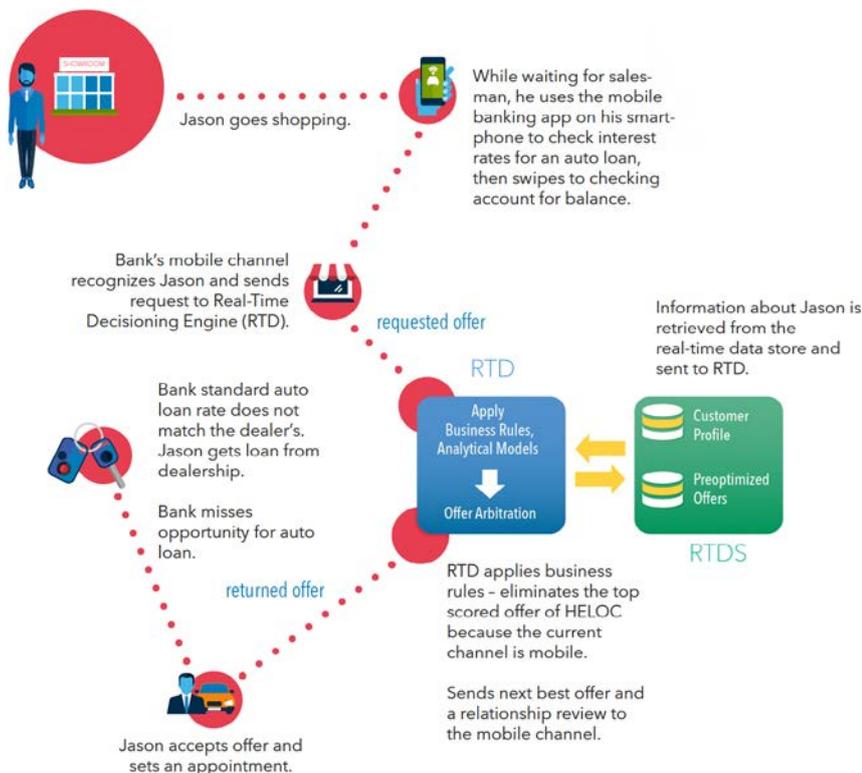


Figure 2: Jason's journey.

On the surface, this was a big win for both Jason and the bank. But looking a little more closely at Jason's activities that day paints a different picture. The salesman Jason was waiting for was the finance manager at an auto dealership. Jason was using the bank's mobile app to compare auto loan interest rates as he completed the car purchase. Unfortunately, the standard bank rate could not match the dealer's, but the discount rate in his offer list - a lower-priority offer than the checking plan - would have. Missing out on the offer, Jason secured the financing from the dealer rather than from the bank.

Moments of Truth - Moments of Now

"Forever - is composed of Nows"
- Emily Dickinson

In no way was the situation with Jason a negative outcome for the bank. It delivered a timely and personalized communication resulting in an opportunity for a review conversation and a product upsell. Jason benefited as well, feeling more connected to the bank for suggesting a product that better suited his needs.

The next best offer program, which is triggered millions of times per day and juggles tens of millions of offers, has significantly improved the bank's ability to provide relevant communications to customers in moments of truth where a positive response is likely. But how much more powerful could this experience have been if the bank had been able to understand and react to the context behind Jason's mobile login that day?

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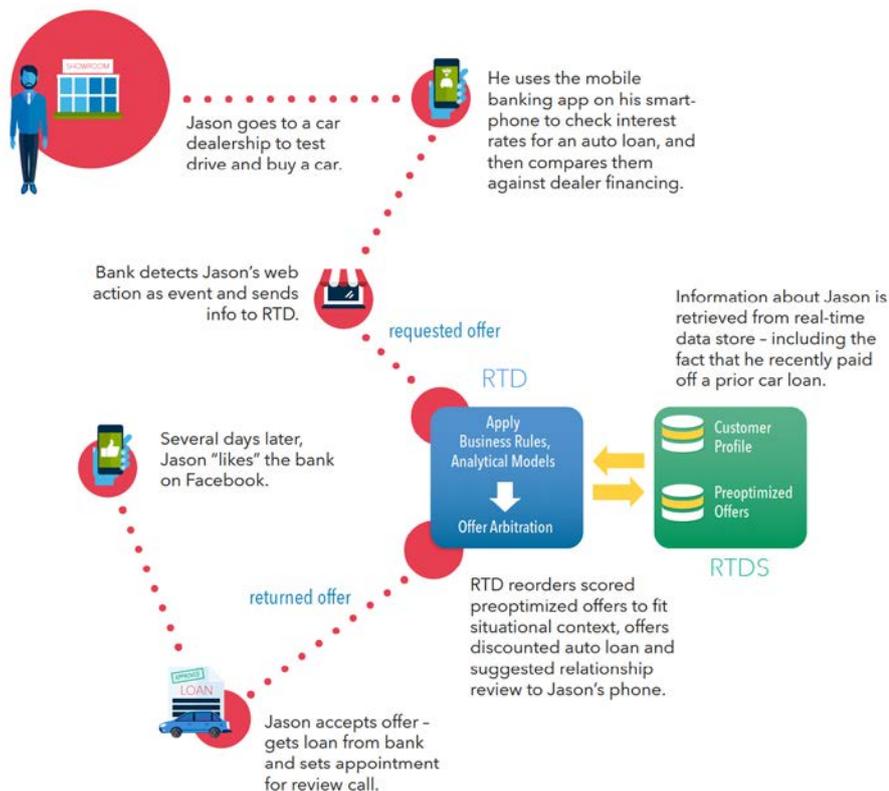


Figure 3: Jason's journey in context.

The information and technology exist to do just that. The bank already knows Jason has the propensity to use loan products. That and the prior auto loan payoff triggered an auto loan offer. The technology is available to understand exactly what Jason is looking at when he uses the mobile app, and the bank is already doing some real-time decision making and communication to the channels. Why not stream the mobile app activity to the decisioning engine and use it to resequence offers when appropriate?

Capitalizing on these moments, the moments of now, requires that we shift our focus from simply understanding which offer and which channel to truly understanding the context of a customer's interaction. What exactly are they doing right now, what is their intent, how can we engage them and how can we provide value?

Google calls these "micromoments," and although they're not exclusively digital, mobile has certainly ratcheted up the need for immediacy of recognition and response.

The website Think With Google identifies four predominant micromoments:

"I want to know" moments: In these moments, consumers want to learn something and are searching for information on a product or related topic. Jason's consumption of the "hottest home remodels" content on the bank website is a good example of this micromoment. Once you recognize the moment for what it is, you realize a vital part of closing a deal is making sure customers can easily find and consume relevant content.

"I want to go" moments: These are all about location and can yield big benefits. The popularity of location-based search is skyrocketing. [According to Blue Corona](#), 67% of smartphone users are more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps customize information to their location. Companies can augment location results and enhance customer experiences in these moments by including information relevant to the location, such as on-hand inventory, approximate wait times or available tables.

"I want to do" moments: Customers here are generally looking for information on how to use a product or complete a product-related task. [Blue Corona says](#) that 90% of consumers say they use multiple devices to complete everyday tasks, and 40% use mobile devices to conduct research prior to making a purchase. So satisfying these how-to moments with interesting, easy-to-find content can significantly improve brand loyalty. The [SAS® Software YouTube channel](#), for example, contains hundreds of videos, including tutorials, installation guides, and tips and tricks, and is extremely popular with our clients.

"I want to buy" moments: Jason's research on auto loan interest rates was a clear "I want to buy" moment. These moments are your best opportunity to close the sale or swing a consumer to your brand. While they happen in every channel, understanding mobile usage is critical. [According to Pixel Union](#), mobile commerce sales broke records on both Black Friday (US\$2.9 billion) and Cyber Monday (US\$3.1 billion) last year.

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Unraveling the Mystery

“A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other.”

– Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Recognizing and reacting to micromoments requires a confluence of contextual data, as illustrated in Figure 4.

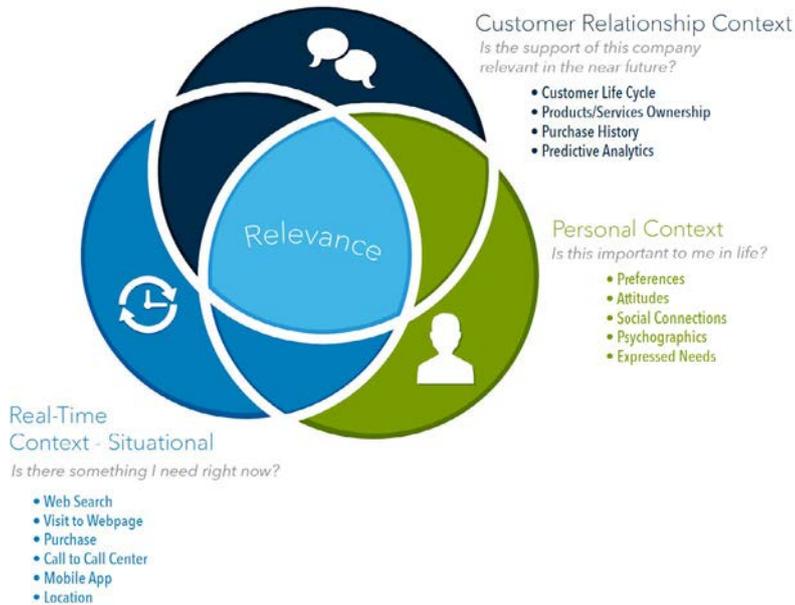


Figure 4: Context in moments of truth.

Relationship context goes back to CX’s foundational tenet, where the sum total of a customer’s interactions determines how the customer feels about the relationship with the organization. From the company’s perspective, information about where customers are in the life cycle, what products they own and how they use them, historical purchase information, and the results of various predictive analytics can provide input into how a company can affect customer loyalty.

Personal context can illuminate how the customer is going to react in a given situation and can even reveal intent. Companies can use information such as expressed and inferred preferences, attitudes gleaned from social media and other conversations, and purchased psychographics to help determine the personal context a customer brings to any situation. Reactions can then be personalized accordingly.

Real-time situational context boils down to the actual micromoment where the customer wants to know, go, do or purchase. Web or mobile access, call center interaction, and in-store or online purchases are all possible events signaling moments of truth – moments when action should be taken.

Together, these different types of contextual information provide a powerful mechanism for marketers to achieve the unique, relevant, personalized and real-time responses that make up the new marketing imperative.

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The Path to Real-Time Journey Optimization

“And a beautiful world we live in, when it is possible, and when many other such things are possible, and not only possible, but done.”

– Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Using contextual data in conjunction with the type of predictive analytics applied by Jason’s bank to determine the what, when and where for customer offers can provide benefits well beyond marketing and customer experience. Positive impacts include customer-oriented benefits, such as greater engagement, increased sales and revenue, and better insights into preferences. They also include organizational benefits, including faster decisions, better collaboration between departments and more confidence in analytics.

Achieving these benefits requires a mix of activities and organizational disciplines that can be quite complex. The following four best practices highlight the critical issues your organization should focus on to shape customer journeys, optimize marketing contacts and capitalize on moments of truth.

1. Make optimization iterative.

CX programs do not happen instantaneously. Successful organizations take the time to develop a phased plan that identifies participants, roles and activities, metrics, technology and capability phases. Participants should represent various functional areas. These typically include marketing, customer support, product groups, channel owners, data management, and analytics teams and IT. Categories in the plan can incorporate strategy development/refinement, operational and process readiness, decision making (sequence and priority across business lines), technology design and build, and performance monitoring and governance.

Most organizations start these efforts with a pilot set of customers (a segment), a group of business units (for instance, the sales team) or a subset of channels. This provides the opportunity to measure effectiveness and refine processes before expanding the program. In the case of next best offer initiatives, many companies will initially limit real-time capabilities to offer delivery, gradually rolling out event streaming technology required to detect micromoment events and modify offers on the fly.

It’s also important to consider progressively expanding the types of contacts included in the program. Marketing and sales offers may be the starting point, but the micromoments will definitely involve content provision, service contacts, fulfillment contacts and complaint resolution. You can add all of these to the contact strategy (contact frequency, contact sequencing and prioritization) and incorporate them into the optimization process.

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2. Put data in the driver's seat.

Establishing scope, breadth and integration of data for customers and interactions is critical to CX programs. Yet data issues still plague many organizations. A [Pointillist study](#) looking at customer journey management professionals found that breaking down organizational data silos is a top CX challenge today, with less than a quarter (22%) of respondents saying that they are very or extremely effective at integrating data across all tools and sources, and 41% saying they were not effective at integrating cross-channel customer data.

Data scope and breadth are also increasing dramatically. Types of data that companies should expect to capture and use in shaping journeys include:

- **Customer profile CRM** - name, address and contact information; call center and store interactions; product ownership and usage; offers.
- **Demographics and/or psychographics** - age, gender, income, children, marital and employment status, education, lifestyle, preferences, attitudes.
- **Web and mobile** - sessions, pages, referring sites, viewed content, navigation, commerce, app downloads, open frequency, time spent, abandonment, feedback.
- **Social** - network and influence data, profiles, work history, group memberships, product and company associations (likes or follows), online comments and reviews, voice of customer.
- **IoT, beacon and sensor** - varies by industry and application, but typically includes location, GPS, proximity, biometric (e.g., Fitbit), RFID, or product sensor messages.

3. Map the moments of truth.

Journey mapping is a visual representation of a customer's interactions. These maps are developed from a customer point of view, designed to highlight how customers interact with your brand, product, services and people. The journey map is a good way to identify those moments of truth that will have a significant impact on the customer experience - the moments that you want to capture as events while they're happening.

To use a journey map to highlight moments of truth, first identify the major steps that a defined persona (for instance, "high-spending business traveler") will go through during an interaction. For an airline, these might be research and booking, check-in, boarding, travel and baggage claim.

The next step is to define the three to four more detailed substeps associated with the major steps. For the airline, the check-in substeps may be to print a ticket at the kiosk, check a bag, check flight status and pass through security.

The substeps are where you identify influential moments, challenges and satisfiers. These factors will shed light on moments of truth, highlighting those events you should capture and use in the next best offer process. Finding out about flight delays, particularly for a high-value traveler who has experienced multiple recent delays, may be an event that the airline wants to respond to in real time. Offers to ease the pain of that moment could include delivering a free drink coupon or additional frequent flyer miles via the mobile app.

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4. Invest in automation.

It would be virtually impossible for a large or medium company like Jason's bank to deliver results without a robust technology platform. Optimizing offers at scale ups the ante by balancing large numbers of personalized offers against complex constraints and objectives. The need for automation will become increasingly important. The [Experience 2030 study conducted by SAS and Futurum](#) found that to succeed in CX, businesses must embrace agility and have the ability to use automation to reduce risk, improve consistency of performance, and increase responsiveness to consumer needs.

By 2030, the study predicts that agility and extreme automation will become the twin pillars of customer experience. Critical capabilities to incorporate into the marketing technology ecosystem include:

- **Marketing planning and automation.** Planning accelerates, automates and streamlines all marketing activities, enabling agility and accuracy in accounting for investments in marketing initiatives. Planning features should include financial management, calendar management, marketing workflow, digital asset management and APIs for integration to other martech solutions. Automation significantly reduces the time required to develop the large number of campaigns and targeted offers needed to feed a next best offer program.

Features should include the ability to develop sophisticated predictive analytics and models, access online and offline data, incorporate data management processes needed to ensure high-quality data, test and learn prior to campaign deployment, and design and schedule campaigns for a multitude of communication channels.

- **Data discovery and journey optimization.** Data discovery collects digital customer-level data and uses it to discover insights for message, offer and content performance across web and mobile channels. Digital messaging departments - such as marketing, sales, service and support - use these insights to engage customers at relevant times along their customer journey.

Capabilities should include dynamic data collection from all online properties; integration of online and offline data; post-data collection contextualization and business rules; analysis and reporting; and visualization. The solution should provide optimization engines with sophisticated analytics to direct a multitude of business constraints, complex contact strategies and multiple delivery channels to achieve specific business objectives. What-if scenario modeling to understand the impact of changing constraints and objectives should be easy to execute. The technology should be tuned to handle significant amounts of data and complex calculations, with the subsecond response times required to respond to micromoments effectively.

- **Real-time decision making and event detection.** The technology platform should be able to detect the events representing micromoments in real time, balance algorithmic optimization with business rules and deliver the highest-priority results to multiple channels on demand.

Yesterday's trend of permission marketing is alive and well today - enhanced by exploding digital adoption rates, ever-increasing types of experience and interaction data, and sophisticated real-time communications, decision-making and offer-delivery technologies. Is your company ready to embrace this new trend?

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