

You'll be left short without eCRM

Matthew Simons, Acxiom Europe's Digital Leader, explains how to deploy eCRM to help combat market fragmentation and build successful customer relationships online.

Let's face it, marketing has never been so challenging. We have more channels than ever to reach consumers, but they expect us to know which one they are happy to interact through. And of course they expect communications to be relevant, timely and accurate. There are more third parties getting in the way of consumer interactions, such as spam blockers, which stop our messages getting through, even if they're relevant. And intermediaries, such as price comparison sites which give consumers yet more brand and product choice but potentially distort the direct consumer messaging we all strive for.

So how do we embrace these issues and look at them as opportunities? The whole answer is complex, but overcoming fragmentation through customer-centricity is key. eCRM is the best way of taking a customer through their lifecycle and maximising their lifetime value. To carry this out effectively, you need to look at each stage of that customer lifecycle and plan how to optimise each step along the way. Opposite is a brief guide to the key lifecycle stages and issues you need to consider in order to become a true eCRM practitioner.

Matthew Simons, *Digital Leader, Acxiom Europe*



Acquisition Implement an 'onboarding' programme which welcomes new customers. This reinforces the start of your relationship with them, gives you a chance to explain more about your company and sets expectations for the rest of the communications they will receive from you.

Retention It's important to think long and hard about the number of emails you send a customer. Inextricably linked to this is the fact that people's appetite to receive emails is directly proportionate to their relevance. If SMS is part of your eCRM programme, then relevance is of even more paramount importance as it's such a potentially intrusive, personal channel and when used inappropriately could turn a consumer off your brand for good.

Enhancement and Repurchase Use eCRM to provide an enhanced experience, giving people a sense of belonging and making them feel special. Communications don't just need to be about your latest offer. Ask customers for their opinions – they like to be listened to. One of the best results we've achieved was in response to a questionnaire we sent out on behalf of Odeon, which we then followed up by sending responders the final survey results.

Other key tools are to provide exclusive content, promotions and features – perhaps offering the chance to order a new product pre-launch, or the opportunity to buy exclusive branded items. Triggered emails based on customer behaviour also maximises relevancy and enhances the brand experience.

Infrastructure and Process This should almost be the first step, as without the right infrastructure and processes in place you are not going to be able to do any of the above! Think about where and how you store

your information so you can access it in a timely manner. In one campaign you may have 6,000 to 7,000 pieces of content so you need to understand how you control them and where they go and to whom. Think about the approval procedure and who's going to check the different campaign components and what they look like. In order to get it right you really need to have automated optimisation, backed up with intelligent thinking.

Resources You must also have the relevant resources and experience to make eCRM work. Clients can partner with companies such as Acxiom which provides both the technology and the experience required, but this needs to be matched client-side too. It's not just a question of seeing what skills are available within the marketing and/or IT team. You're likely to be able to leverage useful resource from across the organisation and also find relevant content from other divisions too.

Multi-channel Marketing Finally, you need to truly think in terms of multi-channel marketing. Any companies with separate online and offline divisions need to consider seriously whether this is the best structure for their business. Don't think about media but about the customer and how they want to be contacted – and how you can combine media within your campaigns to boost results. We have seen results **increase by 25%** when combining direct mail and email within a campaign.

In Conclusion Each of these 'steps' are an essential element to achieving a successful eCRM programme. On their own, they're effective – but get all of them right and you can start making a huge impact on your company's success. By planning for each aspect of the customer lifecycle, with insightful customer data and measuring across all media channels you can reach the nearest a marketer has ever got to marketing nirvana.