



Maximise the Graph

A guide to optimising your first-party identity graph for maximum results

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PART 1

Introduction



Is your identity foundation strong enough?


Even though it's one of the most important questions facing any brand today, here's a question that few businesses can answer with confidence:

Is your identity foundation strong enough?

Let's expand this a little. Are you able to use the vast amounts of data at your disposal to truly understand the people you're trying to engage, so you can give them great experiences that build loyalty and trust?

As customers interact with your brand via a growing number of devices and digital locations, it's becoming ever more challenging to cut through the data chaos. If you want to identify and engage each individual and household with the right message at the right time, in a privacy-conscious way, you need to be able to understand the people behind the data.

That's where identity management comes in. It is a foundation on which you build customer intelligence. And at its core is the identity graph.



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What we'll cover in this guide

What is an identity graph?

Why is the graph so important?

Five ways to maximise the value of your identity graph

Selecting an identity graph provider

Ready to maximise your graph?

What is an identity graph?



WHAT IS AN IDENTITY GRAPH?

One way to define an identity graph is to say it provides a unified view of all the disparate data points you have about individuals who have interacted with your brand, so that you can build better experiences.

Another, equally accurate definition is to say that your identity graph is a foundational tool that powers the advancement of your business with customer intelligence. It really is that critical.

While some organisations historically housed their identity graph in the marketing department, or even in a siloed team within that department, forward-looking brands have recognised that to unlock the huge potential of your graph, you have to connect it across your organisation and optimise it to meet your specific strategic goals.

Your identity graph is like a keyring

If you think of all the bits of data you have about a prospect or customers as keys, then your identity graph is like the keyring holding them all together: with a persistent identifier that forms an ongoing tie between a real person and data points such as:

- **Mobile IDs**
- **Browser IDs**
- **Addressable and connected TV IDs**
- **Internet of Things (IoT) IDs**
- **Location IDs**
- **Email addresses**
- **Names**
- **Postal addresses**
- **Phone numbers**

Different types of graphs

First-party graph

You might have heard this called a private, brand, or first-party identity graph – it's the graph that's fine-tuned to your owned data. It represents your brand's unique view of the people you're trying to engage, encompassing personally identifiable information (PII) and digital signals, across the offline and online worlds.

With a solid first-party graph in place, you can be nimble when you need to bring in second- or third-party data. Without the underlying graph in place, it's much harder to build customer intelligence at speed and at scale.

Referential graph

Also known as third-party or public graphs, referential graphs can give your brand what you might call an industry view of the individuals you're trying to engage. In practical terms, it's made up of data that you and your competitors have access to, rather than the unique owned data that you might have captured during direct interactions with those same individuals.

For this reason, referential graphs can give you a good idea of individual and household identity – but they're often not enough on their own. In order to get towards a 100% understanding of identity that reflects the needs of the individual and your business, you need to have that first-party graph as your foundation.

Climbing the identity maturity curve

Most brands have not yet tapped into the huge potential value of a first-party identity graph. Many are reliant on the somewhat limited identity capabilities of marketing technologies such as CDPs. But identity doesn't live in any single marketing tool or app – your identity graph connects to many systems, but it exists as a separate data layer.

It's also worth noting that you shouldn't think of first-party and referential graphs as separate, distinct things. Instead, a well optimised first-party graph, supplemented with second- and third-party data where appropriate, is really just a more advanced step on the identity maturity curve.



WHAT IS AN IDENTITY GRAPH?



Wherever you are in your identity journey today, you can build on what you have. Even if you only have a rudimentary customer database – that’s a first step along the identity maturity curve. With the right data, technology, and expert support, you can build out your first-party identity graph, bring in referential data when you need it, and tailor your graph so it serves your strategic goals.

After all, if your identity graph is the foundation of all the intelligence that enables you to personalise customer experiences, then of course your graph itself should be personalised to that purpose.

Why is the graph so important?



Without an identity graph, brands are operating blind

Without a robust graph, your ability to acquire, grow, and retain customer relationships is severely limited. It gets back to the basics of customer data – or indeed any kind of data management program:

“Rubbish in, rubbish out.”

The symptoms of a poor identity setup are all too familiar:

- The telecoms company that sends you amazing deals for new customers – the problem is you’ve been a loyal customer for years, only now you’re annoyed because you’re paying way more than the discounted offer.
- The bank that sold you your mortgage but keeps pitching their mortgage services like you’re a new prospect.
- The direct mail you get that still, somehow, manages to get your name wrong.

These are the seemingly simple displays of customer understanding (or lack of understanding) that can make or break a customer relationship. Not to mention the costs they rack up for brands – through reduced customer lifetime value as well as marketing waste in terms of inefficient media and activation spending.

With an optimised graph, the possibilities are limitless

If, on the other hand, you can build and optimise your first-party identity graph successfully, everything becomes easier and more effective: all your customer intelligence use cases, whether they be in marketing, sales, onboarding, customer service, privacy, and so on. You can build trust through the small but impactful displays of understanding that identity enables. And you can create more rewarding outcomes – for your customer and your brand – over the lifetime of a relationship.



Identity strengthens privacy and compliance

A customer may interact with your brand on any number of touchpoints, on web, mobile, app, email or in person. As well as a seamless experience, they expect you to honour their privacy and communications preferences across all touchpoints.

A well-optimised graph means you can maintain a consistent, compliant relationship – in line with the individual's preferences as well as all relevant data privacy laws. Which in turn means you can keep building trust and reinforcing the value exchange you've established with your customer.

Beat the cookie countdown

For many brands today, the elephant in the room is the deprecation of third-party cookies. Google has been promising to remove third-party cookies from Chrome, following similar moves by Apple with App Tracking Transparency – although the deadline for cookie deprecation has been repeatedly delayed.

Nonetheless, brands face a cookieless future, and many are already looking for new ways to connect with audiences. In reality, this is a wake-up call for brands. Cookies were never effective tools for personalisation and decisioning use cases. It's not what they were designed for.

So, a rethink is long overdue. Brands are breaking free from their reliance on Walled Gardens and Big Tech. And an investment in first-party identity is the natural starting point: a data foundation that each brand can control and optimise to its own needs.

If you're still kicking this can down the road, it's time to take decisive action. To help you start, check out our [Procrastinator's guide to digital resilience](#).





Five ways to maximise the value of your identity graph

1. Give it the right home in your organisation

One of the first decisions you need to make is where your identity graph will live. In an ideal world, identity should ultimately become a shared foundation across your entire organisation, but you have to start somewhere.

Your data needs to be in the right place at the right time, instantly available to the right people (and not accessible by the wrong people). So, think about whether your graph should sit in marketing, sales, service, billing, or somewhere else.

If you operate a 'hub and spoke' model, your identity graph belongs in the hub, and radiates out via the spokes to power use cases everywhere. And from the beginning, work with your identity partner to minimise the chance of silos arising, whether they be across datasets, departments, or geographies.





2. Personalise it to your strategic goals

Many identity graphs come with robust capabilities out of the box. For example, when we help our clients at Acxiom, we have predefined match rules that can take brands 80–90% of the way to meet their needs.

So, you don't need to start from scratch, but it does pay to then configure your identity graph so it's fine-tuned to your specific business goals. Once you've established your strategic goals, you'll be able to prioritise the use cases that will get you there.

Common use cases for identity include:

- Personalisation
- Measurement
- Compliance
- Optimisation

FIVE WAYS TO MAXIMISE THE VALUE OF YOUR IDENTITY GRAPH

With your use cases defined, you will then be able to determine the appropriate levels of speed, resolution, and precision you need. For example, if you're a retailer embarking on a brand awareness campaign, you might prioritise reach and not worry too much about having real-time data access or pinpoint precision. However, if you're in a highly regulated industry like healthcare or financial services, you'll want to be very precise with your use of customer data to optimise communications.



Key considerations

- Can I customise grouping logic and business rules to optimise reach versus precision?
- Can I have different views of identity for operations, marketing, and data governance?
- Will the solution support multiple groupings, such as individuals or households?
- How will the solution provide the best customer view without destructive merging of data?
- Can I ethically connect anonymous and known data across devices and channels?
- Will the solution mesh with our existing systems and improve their performance?

3.

Trust the right identity partner

If this guide makes one thing clear, we hope it's that identity is a highly strategic capability for any organisation – one that has to be optimised to your specific needs if it's to drive maximum value.

But while you know the strategic goals that identity will help you achieve, you might not have the necessary expertise and resources available in-house to get there on your own. That's why your choice of identity partner is so important. In the next chapter, we'll equip you with questions and insights to help you get this critical decision right.



4. Keep things flexible

Your identity graph should be built with a few different kinds of flexibility in mind.

It should be configurable to your brand's strategic goals and priority use cases. It should be interoperable – that is, able to connect seamlessly with multiple technologies, channels, and data sources – and portable because, importantly, your graph belongs to you, not your identity provider.

And finally, it should be able to evolve over time with the constant changes happening in the digital ecosystem, in adjacent technologies, and in the legislation and compliance landscape.

5. Empower an identity champion

Maximising your identity graph is a marathon, not a sprint. And it's a team effort that requires collaboration across departments internally and with external partners. To keep you on track, and to ensure there's maintained focus towards (and accountability for) successful outcomes, it's helpful to appoint an identity champion within your organisation.

We're not saying every business needs a Chief Identity Officer. But make sure there's someone who's empowered to lead your identity capability, and give them the support and authority they need to do the job right.



Selecting an identity graph provider

Finding the right solution that best fits your identity challenges is of course crucial. However, probably the most important decision on your identity journey is picking a provider who can be a truly strategic partner to you.

Questions to ask a prospective identity graph provider

- What matching and maintenance do you provide?
- Is your solution configurable?
- Can you offer real-time resolution?
- Can you comply with evolving privacy regulations?
- Are you sharing insights about my customers with other brands or is it truly private?
- Is your solution affected by cookie deprecation?
- What kind of output and data visualisation do you deliver?
- How do you make identity actionable?

For answers to all of these questions and more advice for anyone going through the identity buying process, check out [‘Simplifying enterprise identity: Your guide to choosing an enterprise-wide identity solution.’](#)



Acxiom's strategic approach to enterprise identity

Acxiom has been in the data game for over 50 years, and identity has been at the heart of our offering since the start. As the first in the identity resolution business, we built industry-leading algorithms in the 1970s and '80s, then referential knowledge bases in the '90s and 2000s.

Today, the enterprise identity challenge is more complex than ever. It takes more than simply resolving disparate data sources. Enterprises need to take a strategic approach that takes into account their business objectives, their current tech stack, and their top-priority identity use cases.

Only once this foundational understanding is achieved can you start building first-party graphs that synchronise real-time signals with rich offline data, across devices, channels and platforms.

Identity at the speed of CX

Acxiom works with a Fortune 500 insurance and financial services company whose customers contact them via a number of channels: in person, on the phone, on their website, via email, and more.

The company needs to make sure its agents know who they're speaking with – within a few seconds or, ideally, before the conversation even starts. That's what real-time identity enables for them. So, website visits can be tailored to the person browsing, call centre calls can be answered with a customer profile already loaded, and all interactions can be informed by the most complete and accurate information available about the individual on the other side.

Ready to maximise your graph?

READY TO MAXIMISE YOUR GRAPH?

If you've made the decision to invest in identity, you're already on your way to building the kind of customer intelligence that fuels exceptional experiences.

And if you're looking for ways to further maximise the value of your identity graph, then you're ready to accelerate your path to personalisation, measurement, and all the other use cases identity enables.

This guide is just the beginning. To start maximising your graph today, [get in touch with one of our identity experts.](#)

ABOUT ACXIOM

Acxiom partners with the world's leading brands to create customer intelligence, enabling data-driven marketing experiences that generate value for people and for brands.

Acxiom's Customer Intelligence Cloud (CIC) brings it all together, combining data, technology, and expert services so brands can acquire the customers they'd love to have, grow trusted and valued customer relationships, and retain their best customers for today and tomorrow.

With locations in the US, UK, China, Poland, and Germany, Acxiom is a registered trademark of Acxiom LLC and is part of The Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc. (IPG). For more information on Acxiom and their Customer Intelligence Cloud, visit Acxiom.co.uk.

Meet Real Identity™

Acxiom's Real Identity™ enables the world's biggest brands to accurately identify and ethically connect with people anytime, anywhere to create relevant experiences.

Tap into more than 50 years of industry expertise to help define your brand's strategic objectives and use cases, and ensure successful integration and adoption of enterprise identity.

[Find out more →](#)