How to select the right personalization solution.

For you to grow and succeed, your customers need to have great experiences with your brand whether on the web, with a smartphone, in a brick-and-mortar store, or anywhere else. A whole technology industry has arisen to help you with that effort, providing capabilities such as rules-based targeting, recommendations, experimentation, and automated personalization, all designed to help you tailor and deliver relevant experiences that customers want and demand. Every organization is at a different point in their ability to optimize customer experiences, as well as their familiarity with what requirements and capabilities to look for in a personalization solution.

Wherever you are on the personalization spectrum, investing in a new solution is an important decision that will have significant short-term and long-term impacts on your marketing efforts. Reaching the best decision for your organization will take considerable time and effort, including substantial research and evaluation. To help you in that effort, this guide covers some of the most important questions you should ask and issues you should investigate. It provides tips for navigating the information and the targeted marketing you encounter along the way to help you make informed, objective assessments of the solutions you evaluate.

Personalization and experimentation.

The personalization and experimentation market space has grown crowded with a large number of vendors offering solutions with widely varying capabilities. Most offer some level of targeting or testing but don't necessarily provide personalization capabilities. Of those that offer personalization, some only provide limited testing options. But of greater concern is that all too often, personalization solutions rely on manual or rule-based personalization rather than leveraging automation or artificial intell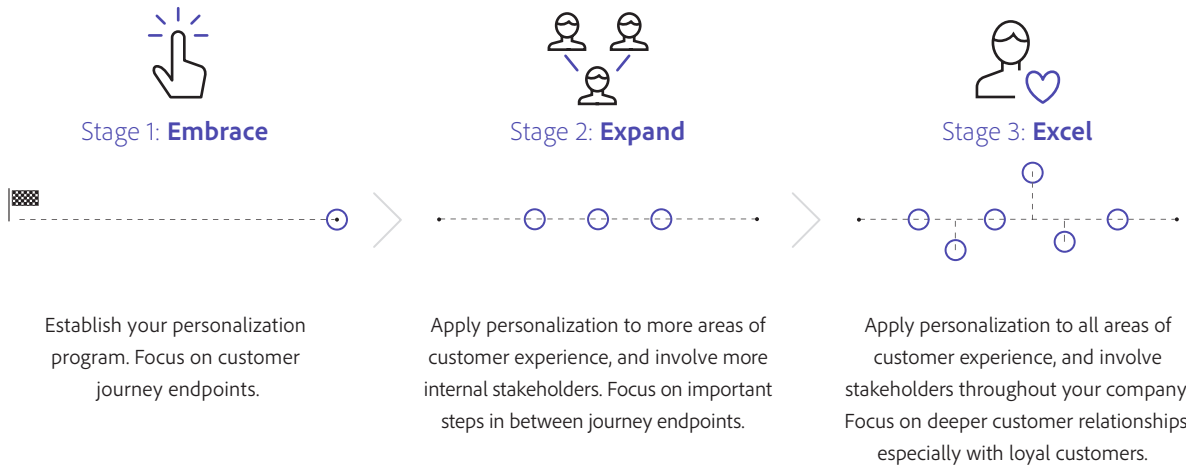igence (AI). For true experience optimization, a solution needs to support not only manual personalization, but the ever-increasing scenarios that call for an automated approach.

When evaluating experimentation capabilities, make sure the solutions you're looking at provide more than basic capabilities. Even if they offer multivariate and not just A/B testing options, the most important limitation to avoid is a manual approach. Manual testing slows and complicates your ability to optimize every customer experience due to the significant time delays and resource requirements of manually performing, analyzing, and responding to each test. That leads to frustrated customers, lost revenue opportunities, and an inability to scale.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Beware of solutions with only basic and siloed experience personalization or A/B testing capabilities or with limited intelligence that requires manual targeting.

A phased approach for leveraging AI in targeting efforts.

Stage 1: **Embrace**

Establish your personalization program. Focus on customer journey endpoints.

Stage 2: **Expand**

Apply personalization to more areas of customer experience, and involve more internal stakeholders. Focus on important steps in between journey endpoints.

Stage 3: **Excel**

Apply personalization to all areas of customer experience, and involve stakeholders throughout your company. Focus on deeper customer relationships, especially with loyal customers.

When looking at automation capabilities, evaluate how well the solution will enhance your ability to perform more tests and analyses across more audience segments. What does it do to help you fine-tune customer experiences to get better results? Automation should also be able to help you identify and respond more quickly to changes in customer behavior. Additionally, the ability to manage, control, and experiment with personalization and experimentation needs to be marketing-friendly. If it's so complicated and technical that it requires IT intervention, it will severely cripple marketing teams' ability to take full advantage of the solution. Customer behavior continually changes. Your marketers and developers need to be able to deploy personalization or experimentation efforts in immediate response to behavior changes so they can gain full value from what they learn.
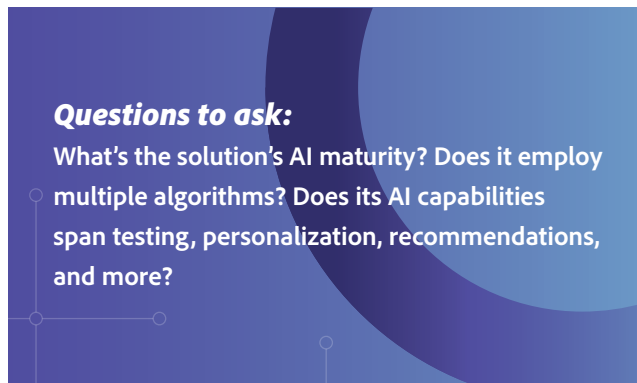
Question to ask:
Does the solution allow you to control what you automate, as well as take action on your behalf to optimize traffic towards the best experiences without manual intervention?

When it comes to personalization, you'll hear varied definitions of what personalization means depending on who you ask. That can make evaluating personalization competencies tricky. A good initial frame of reference is to make sure the vendor's definition

of personalization matches your own, or at least matches the personalization use cases that you want to be able to execute. Be wary of vendors who think personalization is all about targeting a banner at certain locations within a visitor's journey. In fact, stay away from narrow personalization definitions altogether. For true experience optimization, having a full spectrum of personalization capabilities that can address a wide variety of use cases is the standard. Ideally, a personalization solution should have the ability to leverage historical profile data along with data captured on a visitor's current context to quickly decision and deliver a next best experience, display or series of experiences for improving performance.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Some personalization solutions have been primarily designed for e-commerce, limiting their ability to personalize content or offers.

In addition to being able to address a broad array of use cases, look for solutions that incorporate the following three core competencies:

- **Personalization at scale**
- **Automated offer-level personalization**
- **Automated experience personalization**

But for sustainable, successful personalization, automation really needs to rise to the level of AI or machine learning. The reason is simple. Regardless of what industry you're in, you'll never

be able to create enough content, quickly analyze and surface data trends, or staff enough people to meet with customers' personalization expectations without offloading some of that effort to AI. That's why having AI-infused personalization capabilities has become mission-critical. AI should be able to automatically discover all of your audiences and cluster them to create the best experience for each.

When evaluating a solution's AI strength, look at its AI maturity. Does it rely on a single algorithm or leverage multiple algorithms to accomplish different goals or address different use cases? What is the AI breadth? Can it span testing, personalization, recommendations, and more? Can it give you the flexibility and control to easily move between manual and automated execution? Can the algorithm self-optimize, constantly evaluating itself to ensure it is current and optimal? Can it support one-to-one personalization, looking at profile attributes to dynamically identify the best experience for each individual customer? And does it have a robust set of recommendation criteria that goes beyond ecommerce and helps you target products, content, articles, offers, and more?

As great as AI is, one problem you might have with it is trust. Since you can't always tell why it's making the decisions it is. It's human nature to want to see under the hood. It can be a big help if the solution provides AI transparency that lets you see why it makes the decisions it does. This is beneficial not just from a trust standpoint, but so you as a marketer can learn from those AI decisions as you see their impact.

Questions to ask:
What's the solution's AI maturity? Does it employ multiple algorithms? Does its AI capabilities span testing, personalization, recommendations, and more?

Reporting quality and frequency.

Different industries and businesses have different concerns and questions. As you consider experience optimization solutions, make sure their reporting capabilities can provide answers to the most important questions for your business. The reports need to enable you to make informed business decisions and detect false positives. Avoid solutions that offer limited or subpar reporting. Limited reporting undermines the solution's overall value.

Just as important as report quality, you need to understand the frequency and availability of the solution's reporting. Will you have complete control of the reporting, or will you be at the mercy of the vendor to provide reporting on their schedule or at their convenience? If you're dependent on the vendor for reporting, how frequently will you get updates? Weekly? Daily? On demand? Can you control the frequency?

Ideally, you want to be able to get reports whenever you need or want them. Self-service reporting is the best way to get that. You won't have to log tickets, call for help, or wait for available development resources to get the reports and answers you need. Along with that, near-real-time reporting should be a top priority. If you have a big event going on, but your promo or offer just isn't working, you want to know about it right away, not after the event is over. The immediacy of near-real-time reporting also enables you to be more responsive to changes in customer behavior and adapt to emerging trends.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:
If you have to rely on a vendor's consulting services to create reports, you may end up with limited metrics, delays in getting answers needed for timely decisions, and costly service engagements.

Unified customer profile.

To drive relevant personalized experiences, you need detailed customer context. If you're a travel agency and data indicates that a prospect is researching vacation spots in Europe, you can insert a cruise offer that has port stops at the places researched. Additional data you receive from a partner airline might indicate that the prospect is a gold member of the airline's loyalty program and has enough frequent flyer miles to cover roundtrip tickets to the cruise's departure port. That additional information allows you to spice up the offer even more.

Audiences start with what we know: Adobe visitor profile.

Environment Variables

- IP address
- Country of origin
- Time zone
- Device type
- Operating system
- Browser type
- Screen resolution

Site Behavior Variables

- Customer/prospect
- New/return visitor
- Previous visit patterns
- Category affinity (scored)
- Previous product interests—top level
- Previous product interests—low level
- Searches
- Previous online purchases
- Previous campaign exposure
- Previous campaign responses

Offline Variables

- CRM
- Call center
- Ticket sales
- Third-party data

Temporal Variables

- Time of day
- Day of week
- Recency
- Frequency

Referrer Variables

- Referring domain
- Campaign ID
- Affiliate
- PPC
- Natural search
- Direct bookmark
- Social/graph/login

Gaining highly actionable unified customer profiles is all about being able to easily collect a wide variety of data points from a broad array of sources and touchpoints and then use that data to create a single, unified customer profile. As a brand, you likely have access to a lot of data about your customers from a lot of different sources. It may reside in your CRM system, a data warehouse, or an analytics platform. You might have data you've collected and groomed for rich, progressive profiles. Perhaps you have access to second-party customer data from one of your partners. Maybe you've purchased data from a third party. Being able to leverage all of that data in a unified customer profile can have a significant impact on the success of your testing and personalization efforts.

That's why as you consider a personalization solution, you should make sure it can take advantage of any and all data sources you've already invested time and money in, as well as those in which you might invest in the future. Otherwise, you end up with silos of customer information that you simply can't use for experience optimization. In addition, you want your chosen experience optimization solution to be able to send its own compiled data to other marketing technologies you own. That includes being able to use the solution's testing results as behavioral data that your other technologies can repurpose for marketing activities.

And finally, a personalization solution should be able to continually and consistently build on your unified customer profiles. It should natively connect to behavioral data so the profile can get richer every time a customer interacts with your brand. It's a good idea to ask the vendors you consider—if they're able to promise this level of integration at all—what time is required to import data from other sources into the profile. If it's not real time, you'll likely miss out on opportunities to generate revenue and drive customer satisfaction in the moments that matter. You'll also be lacking a foundational element for true omnichannel personalization.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

A personalization solution that only collects data from a couple of sources or touchpoints, or only pulls in a small set of customer attributes, limits your ability to create relevant experiences that spark the results you want.

From a technological perspective, it's helpful to look at your experience optimization solution as a key piece of your marketing technology stack. It needs to be able to easily integrate with other marketing technologies that coexist in that stack, sharing and exchanging customer information in both directions.

Questions to ask:
How hard is it to get first-, second-, and third-party customer data into the solution? How hard is it to get testing and personalization data out of the solution and into your own reporting systems, analytics platform, data warehouse, and other repositories?
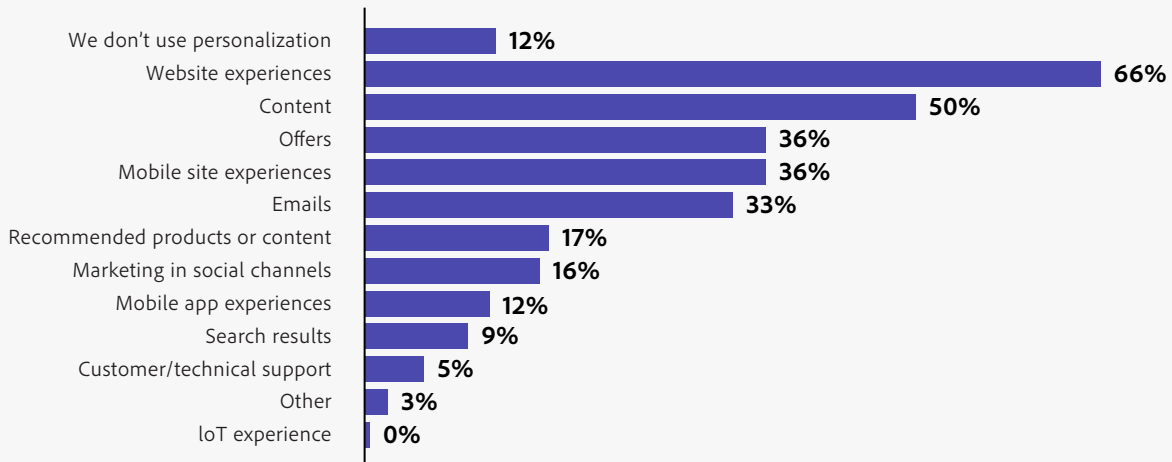
Coordinated cross-channel optimization.

Most vendors in the personalization market provide some form of web personalization and testing. Not as many offer mobile. Even fewer do anything with Internet of Things (IoT). The reality is that to deliver consistent experiences wherever your customers interact, you want a vendor who understands that customer experience is, by definition, a multichannel endeavor. In addition to traditional web, email, and mobile touchpoints, consider all the other places customers might interact with your brand. Virtual voice assistants. Gaming consoles. Vending machines. Smart cars. ATMs. Kiosks. Call centers. Digital assistants. If your experience optimization is limited to two or three channels, you're missing out on some of your customers' key interaction points.

So you want to be sure your experience optimization solution can execute on multiple channels. The good news is that more and more vendors understand the need to personalize and

Differentiate from competitors by personalizing across channels.

Category	Percentage
We don't use personalization	12%
Website experiences	66%
Content	50%
Offers	36%
Mobile site experiences	36%
Emails	33%
Recommended products or content	17%
Marketing in social channels	16%
Mobile app experiences	12%
Search results	9%
Customer/technical support	5%
Other	3%
IoT experience	0%

WHAT AREAS OF THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR BRAND DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION CURRENTLY PERSONALIZE?

Chart source: "Customer Experience Comes First," Adobe, July 11, 2018.

test on multiple channels, but too many are still falling behind. Multichannel is only the first step. The testing and personalization efforts in those multiple channels also need to be seamlessly integrated in order for you to deliver consistent experiences. For example, if you're a credit card company presenting a personalized offer to a customer for 50,000 bonus points, that offer should be consistent on all the channels your customer interacts with. In order to do that, the solution must allow you to recognize the customer as the same person across all the channels they use to interact with you.

POTENTIAL GOTCHA:

Some vendors tout being able to execute on multiple channels and touchpoints, but they're not able to integrate personalization across these different interaction points to create coherent, orchestrated experiences.

Question to ask:
Does the solution allow you to recognize an individual customer as the same person regardless of the channel or touchpoint where the interaction occurs?

In regard to channel integration, be sure to check how seamless those integrations actually are. Does the solution provide a single delivery platform that unifies the different channels into a single workflow accessible through a single UI, or are some channels on separate workflows, creating disconnects and data silos? Are some channels missing certain features or capabilities? Does the integration require custom programming to make it work? If so, how much time and effort is involved? Can you trust the guarantees that the custom integrations will function as they should? Is the solution designed in such a way that, as new interaction channels emerge, you'll be able to easily integrate those into your testing and personalization workflow so you can continue to create consistent, omnichannel experiences?

Question to ask:
Does the vendor offer a single delivery platform encompassing a library for browser interactions, mobile SDK for mobile apps, and a server-side API for testing and personalizing beyond the browser?

Enterprise scale and governance.

The personalization space is all about return on investment. It's one of the few technologies that enables you to easily show management how it's helping your organization reach revenue objectives and business KPIs. But the ability to actually meet those objectives will be hindered if your experience optimization solution can't grow with your business. Too often organizations invest in a solution and discover soon after deployment that they're already pushing the boundaries of what the solution can do. It's hard to grow your personalization program if the solution powering it is already near or has reached its limits.

Regardless of the size of your business today, you need to know that your personalization solution can grow as your needs do. That doesn't mean growth just in terms of people, it also means growth in terms of targeting new customer touchpoints, adding new lines of business, and extending your global reach. And since your use case complexity will grow as your organization does, make sure the solution you invest in can keep pace in all the ways you need it to.

The ability to scale with growth should also include the ability to provide governance controls for organizations with multiple lines of business and multiple global locations. Depending on a business unit's industry or geographic location, it might have regulatory concerns that don't impact the rest of the organization. From a risk management perspective, you might need to have controls in place to ensure separation of duties. If you work with a marketing agency, for example, does the solution allow you to give the agency access only to what it needs and nothing else? To determine the extent of the governance controls provided by the solution, evaluate what they specifically offer in terms of access control, user rights, roles and responsibilities, tailored visibility, change logs, collision detection, and workflow governance.

Recognized leader in personalization.

Experience optimization technology has become critical in marketers' efforts to create personal and relevant experiences across all the different interaction points that customers use today. The success or failure of an organization's efforts to create positive, consistent, and relevant customer experiences rests largely upon its investment in personalization and its relationship with the solution provider Named as the only Leader in "The Forrester Wave™: Experience Optimization Platforms, Q2 2018," a Leader in the 2018 and 2019 Gartner "Magic Quadrant for Personalization

Engines," and the only Leader in "The Forrester Wave™: Digital Intelligence Platforms, Q2, 2017, Adobe Target delivers on all the key experience optimization elements covered in this buyer's guide. Many of the largest enterprises in the world, including more than 60% of the Fortune 100, trust Adobe Target for their testing and personalization needs. The solution provides the most comprehensive experience optimization capabilities in the marketplace, including automated A/B and multivariate testing, coordinated cross-channel personalization, and AI-powered automation at scale. In fact, in 2017 Adobe Target won the Data & Marketing Association's (DMA) Innovation Award for its AI-driven ability to automate personalized experiences with a single click.

Adobe Target takes the guesswork out of personalization so that every experience you deliver is the one your customers want. And as an integral part of Adobe Experience Cloud and powered by award-winning Adobe Sensei AI technology, you can enjoy the benefits of AI-driven testing and personalization; flexible, comprehensive, and timely reporting; unified customer profiles that seamlessly combine customer information from a wide array of data sources; coordinated experience optimization on all the interaction points your customers use; and the ability to scale with your business.

To learn more about how Adobe Target can help you deliver exceptional customer experiences, visit
https://www.adobe.com/marketing/target.html