Orchestrating the customer journey for retail success.

Four personalization instruments to tune up digital engagement.

The digital economy is in full swing—and full of twists and turns. The customer journey used to follow a much more linear and predictable path. But as the digital ecosystem expands, online and offline channels have converged. Customers now interact with brands in so many different ways, different places, and at different times that orchestrating a harmonious shopper's journey can be challenging.

American conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein once said that Ludwig van Beethoven's real genius was his gift for always knowing what the next note should be. Like Beethoven setting the tempo and guiding the musicians in a symphony, retailers must hit all the right notes and conduct a unified and personalized customer journey across multiple touchpoints online and offline. And they must do so at scale amid volatile external challenges— shifting market conditions, inflation, global supply chain disruptions, and a tight labor market.

This guide explores how retailers can successfully orchestrate personalized customer journeys everywhere they lead. You'll see what instruments they're using to drive personalization efforts and get tips on how you too can compose great customer experiences and inspire loyalty.

Four instruments for personalization at scale.

Ecommerce is not commanding the same amount of growth as in recent years when online channels became the primary means of shopping during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. And the cost of goods and rising inflation may be taking a toll on consumer confidence as well. Still, 53% of retailers surveyed in Adobe's 2022 _Digital Trends — Retail in Focus_ report expect demands on their organizations' digital experience to accelerate in the coming year.

As the world continues to evolve into a digital-first paradigm, consumers expect and demand experiences personalized to their individual needs and interests. To create the types of experiences that truly impact customers in a positive way, you need to go beyond generic personalization and provide hyper-personalized experiences across multiple channels.

"The idea of personalization is not new. But achieving _personalization at scale_ is the new imperative for retailers," said Michael Klein, global director of industry strategy at Adobe.

Delivering personalized experiences to thousands or even millions of customers across multiple channels is challenging because it requires both the right data and the right tools. When data and tools are perfectly tuned, you can test, refine, and optimize your content and use the power of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to achieve personalization at scale.

"We no longer live in a world that can be run on business rules managed by human beings. To achieve personalization and be relevant in all channels, retailers must be able to automate and use the data and information they have in real time," said Klein. "That requires tapping into machine learning."

If you're just embarking on your personalization journey, the best advice is to start small—with strategies like personalized emails or basic product recommendations—and work your way up to composing more complex personalized experiences.

71% of consumers expect **personalization**.

76% of consumers get **frustrated** when they don't find it.

Source: Forrester

Victoria's Secret, the leading specialty retailer of women's lingerie, prestige fragrance, body care, accessories, and athletic and loungewear, began its personalization journey with relevant product placement content and offers on its website, like "trending now" recommendations on home pages and landing pages and "matching items" on product pages. Once they felt comfortable with simple personalization, they moved on to more complex initiatives like supporting trigger emails, direct mail, and push notifications as well as digitizing its reward card program for an easy customer redemption experience online.

"We are setting out a goal to really connect the customer journey off-site to on-site and vice versa, and consolidating and unifying the solutions that are in our ecosystem. We've even played with adding the customer's name to user-based recommendations to add that extra personal touch," said Jenna Brunner, director of digital products for personalization at Victoria's Secret.

Using a powerful optimization tool that combines unified customer profiles, AI, ML, and multivariate testing, Victoria's Secret can now target different audiences with relevant content, such as presenting acquisition messaging to non-credit card holders to encourage them to sign up for a Victoria's Secret credit card.

Victoria's Secret has advanced in its personalization efforts and can now connect offer experiences from email back to their website and app, differentiating the experience for varying customer segments. High-value customers, for instance, might receive a timed promotion set to expire after an hour, while non-high-value customers are given matching product recommendations in their cart to drive higher order value. Thanks to a refined personalization strategy, revenue from the digital business has increased 15% over a 12-month period.

For any brand, orchestrating the most meaningful experiences requires testing and refinement. It's a process of mixing in some personalization—such as personalizing an email with the subscriber's name or sending discounts for products viewed on the website—and advancing to more sophisticated experiences driven by testing, AI, ML, and automation. These more complex capabilities allow you to conduct hyper-personalized experiences

and develop purposeful relationships with every single customer—
and that's the true magic of personalization at scale.

To successfully orchestrate harmonious customer journeys, your
personalization efforts can be divided into four parts, much like
the four instrument sections of an orchestra. Each instrument plays
in coordination with the others to create a symphony in much the
same way that the four personalization instruments below work
together to create personalization at scale.

- **Instrument 1**—a strong data foundation that yields a unified view of
  the customer in real time.

- **Instrument 2**—intelligent and dynamic content that can adapt to your
  customers' rhythms.

- **Instrument 3**—journey orchestration to personally reach customers at
  every interaction and on any channel.

- **Instrument 4**—journey analytics to measure, analyze, and report on
  it all.
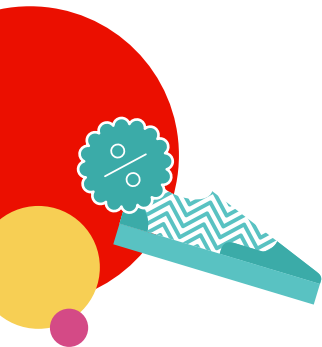
Hit all the right notes with unified customer profiles.

Just as a strong strings section is the core of any symphony, a strong data foundation is the core of your relationship with customers and audiences. When you can band together all your data and analytics into unified customer profiles and audiences, you can determine every shopper's interests and needs.

The best experiences are those that prove you know your customers. For example, as a home improvement store, you might send an email offer to a customer who has recently moved. If you're an outdoor retailer, you might send a recommendation for skis on sale during a customer's first visit to your website because you know they live in Colorado and ski season is about to begin.

According to Adobe and Econsultancy, 78% of retail respondents say that personalizing in-store experiences based on online behaviors will be either "important" (40%) or "critically important" (38%) for meeting customer expectations. But pushing out personalization at this level of maturity requires breaking down data silos and harnessing the power of all your data to build real-time unified customer profiles.

Yet a recent study commissioned by Adobe and conducted by Incisiv shows that while many retailers value personalization and real-time communications, they don't possess the technologies to deliver these types of experiences. Only 44% of retailers personalize more than half of the customer journey. It's an overwhelming task to translate hundreds of data points into a cohesive view, and integrating customer data remains a fundamental challenge for many brands.

" Having a unified profile of the customer that gives you a holistic view is the foundation and holy grail of getting to true personalization.

Michael Klein
Global Director of Industry Strategy, Adobe

To get a holistic view of the customer across all channels and orchestrate connected customer journeys, you must be able to identify who the customer is, centralize that data in one location, and tie that customer to a unified profile. With the help of AI, you can segment, test experiences, and bring all your different data together from multiple sources to create and enhance customer profiles in real time. You can then use those privacy-ready profiles, combined with precise targeting capabilities, to create personalized experiences that inspire customer loyalty and increase revenue.

AI and ML, for example, keep track of shoppers' past interactions and can tell if they've shopped for similar items or viewed the item multiple times but haven't yet purchased. This information comes in handy when someone abandons their cart. With the help of AI, you can predict the next best action that will drive the customer toward the experience or offer most likely to prompt conversions.

The Home Depot picks up the rhythm with personalization.

10x faster to deliver personalized experiences.

62% growth in personalized campaigns.

Source: Adobe

Using unified customer profiles powered by AI, Dick's Sporting Goods gathers information about customers across channels as interactions occur. With a real-time pulse on the shopping journey, Dick's can meet its objective of creating relevant and meaningful content for every customer in the moments when it matters most.

Let's say a first-time visitor to a store comes in for some tennis gear. That interaction will be followed up with tennis-related content, like a discount on tennis balls, rather than an irrelevant discount on, say, camping gear. Dick's is also able to provide more value to loyalty program members by personalizing perks.

"We have always prioritized meeting the customer where they are, whether that is inside a retail location or digitally through our ecommerce platforms," said Steve Miller, SVP of strategy, ecommerce, and analytics at Dick's Sporting Goods.

Another retailer able to bring all its data together exceptionally well is The Home Depot, which unifies all customer data for a 360-degree profile of customers. The company's business intelligence team also uses analytics and segmentation technology to combine various data groups into a unified customer profile. This allows them to target homeowners looking for the perfect kitchen faucet or paint contractors who purchase in bulk.

> " Instead of separating metrics from online and offline channels, we focus our attention on capturing everything, including website activity, in-store sales, call center volume, return volume, order cancellations, and much more, thus enabling us to make the best decisions to improve the shopper experience across all touchpoints.

Ranjeet Bhosale

Director of Online Analytics and Business Intelligence, The Home Depot

Having all this data in one place, including behavioral and real-time information, means the company can crunch the numbers to find instant insights. It can quickly test offers, promotions, and web designs to constantly improve online experiences. An experience that used to take 10 days to build can now be pushed out to customers in as little as 24 hours. All these efforts get information to customers faster, which means they're finding merchandise quicker and not getting lost during the journey. Creating unified profiles has helped The Home Depot increase its personalized campaigns by 62% year over year.

Not only is having a full view of the customer essential to delivering relevant offers and recommendations that make your customers want to buy—but it's also essential for building loyalty and keeping your customers coming back. And if you're not equipped to deliver these kinds of experiences because your data remains siloed or you can't transform that data into insights, you risk losing more than just an opportunity to deliver personalization—you risk losing the customer for good. In today's competitive environment, that's something almost no retailer can afford.

Tune up your understanding of the customer when you:

- Centralize all your customer data—offline and online—in a single location

- Create unified profiles of your customers from that data

- Keep those profiles updated in real time so you can offer in-the-moment personalization

- Use analytics and segmentation to further refine your personalization efforts

Don't miss a beat with intelligent content.

The next step in personalization should be dedicated to developing content that further nurtures your relationship with the customer. Just as percussion instruments keep a steady, consistent beat, relevant and personalized content should be delivered at the right time and place throughout the entire shopper journey.

Creating content that's right for every customer, every channel, and every device requires creativity and a certain level of technical savviness and sophistication.

The challenges retailers face creating custom content include everything from needing content in different size formats (smartphone, tablet, desktop, in-store kiosk, and so on) to needing content in different mediums (video, look books, size charts, and so on). Let's not forget, content must be produced in multiple languages for global audiences. Add to this the need to keep the experience and content consistent as customers move from one channel to the next and the task becomes even more complex. Trying manually to do these things at scale simply isn't possible.

When it comes to orchestrating customer experiences, there are no soloists. It's time to add in some AI and ML accompanists and make sure every employee is empowered to create all the content variations needed to conduct smooth customer journeys. Content creation is now an enterprise-wide endeavor. Marketing and creative teams need to collaborate with IT and customer experience teams to meet the demands of personalization at scale. It's time to break down silos, bring teams together, and give them the power of AI and ML so they can get the right content to the right people at the right time and place.

67%

of consumers want their content automatically adjusted to suit their current context.

Source: Adobe

To manage all these aspects of preparing and delivering content, brands must streamline and automate processes. When AI is built into every experience, you can deliver the best performing experiences—all automatically.

AI and ML make it possible to dynamically adapt content to every channel's specifications, like auto-cropping images and video or summarizing text. One method includes user-friendly drag-and-drop templates that let you create the content once and then reuse components of that content across any channel, such as web, mobile, apps, IoT, single-page applications, and in-venue screens.

For Currys PLC, formerly Dixons Carphone, being able to create once and publish everywhere has been a game-changer. Previously, its website existed on a very traditional web platform.

Creating web pages or adding dynamic features like scrolling images required programming and HTML knowledge, which meant any changes needed significant planning and lead time, limiting the merchandising team's ability to respond effectively to changing markets. Now, the team can create an entirely new campaign in 15 minutes or make a small update to copy in less than a minute.

> " We find that there's often a window of opportunity to engage with the customer, particularly with major releases for new products. If we miss that window of opportunity, it's very easy to lose market share. That's why it's so important that we can get campaigns out there as quickly as possible.

Harry Sohal
Former Product Owner, Adobe Experience Manager, Currys PLC

Besides being able to quickly create content and reuse content snippets on any channel, having a tech solution with powerful AI has increased the speed and scale of personalization for Currys. "We can utilize artificial intelligence to reach out to more customers in a personal way by removing the manual task of creating audiences and matching them with top experiences," said Sohal.

Finally, you can continue to push your ability to deliver great content even further with the help of other tools that make it easy to find and reuse content. The athletic apparel brand Under Armour, which produces hundreds of thousands of creative assets, moved five terabytes of data into a digital asset management system. It also reimagined the governance of digital assets, creating an automated and consistent approach to tagging and workflows, including the use of smart tags and smart crop, which are powered by AI and ML technology.

"With creative assets stored across multiple tools and departments, it could take hours or even days to gather the content required for a campaign or event. We needed a central repository to make it easy to use our creative assets," said Ben Snyder, former IT product owner at Under Armour.

> We're already saving time and money by making our creative assets more accessible, and we're eager to keep exploring the benefits.

Ben Snyder
Former IT Product Owner, Under Armour

The ability to quickly find content or create unlimited variations of content and then deliver those variations across any device or channel is a lot less work for you and your team. It's also the only way to deliver personalization at scale.

Compose fast and fresh content when you:

- Give your team access to code-free templates and reusable components

- Create unlimited variations of interactive multimedia experiences from a single piece of content

- Use AI and ML to increase the speed and scale of personalization

- Keep your content consistent across all channels by managing your campaigns from a single platform

Build to a crescendo with connected customer journeys.

Without woodwinds, those lush, melodious symphonies wouldn't sound the same. You may not even be able to distinguish their sound, but they're adding texture and color to the entire experience. It's the same with a customer journey that jumps from channel to channel, touchpoint to touchpoint, creating a smooth experience at every turn. Which is why the third instrument of personalization is to implement an agile and scalable application that can help you compose and conduct personalized, unified, and timely customer experiences across any app, device, or channel for a smooth journey.

12% Only 12% of companies are optimized for real-time customer journeys.
Source: 451 Research

Panera Bread is committed to orchestrating frictionless experiences and allowing customers to order when, where, and how they want. As the volume of customer touchpoints increases across digital and physical channels, the handoff and communication between channels become even more important. Signals across the website, mobile app, and in-store activity need to be understood collectively and linked to a loyalty program that is over 40 million members strong. Which is why Panera Bread has invested in customer orchestration technology that refines the ways in which customers re-order food and choose pickup options while also ensuring that customers receive offers that are relevant.

"Personalization campaigns are essentially won on the margins, where a few carefully selected data points will produce the conversion necessary to make a real impact on the business. It speaks to the high expectations of guests today, where every interaction needs to be relevant, simple, and engaging.

George Hanson
SVP and Chief Digital Officer, Panera Bread

It's a journey that may look something like this—A customer on a tight work deadline places a lunch order online for curbside pickup. Panera's geo-fencing technology automatically notifies the café when the guest drives into the parking lot. A team member brings their order out right away. The experience is smooth so far, but once they return to work, the customer realizes their summer fruit cup is missing. A few clicks in the mobile app and they get a credit to apply to their next order.

Australian supermarket Coles is also focusing its personalization efforts on managing scheduled omnichannel campaigns and one-to-one moments for millions of customers from a single application. It's now set up to optimize the entire customer journey with intelligent decisioning and insights gathered by AI and ML. Enhancements to the shopping and brand experience include personalized recommendations and offers sent at just the right time and on the customer's preferred channels, as well as more consistent and trusted experiences across online, mobile, app, click-and-collect, and in-store touchpoints.

> A significant proportion of the Australian population turn to Coles for their daily shopping essentials, and they rely on an experience that caters to their diverse needs.

Ben Hassing
Chief Executive of Ecommerce, Coles Group

Consider the following scenario—Coles schedules an automated campaign that sends post-purchase surveys to all customers who have bought products online in the last week. Some orders experienced delays due to in-transit issues. Rather than sending out the scheduled email to customers who have not received their purchase, Coles instead can send them a personalized email apologizing for the delay and offering a discount code along with product recommendations based on past purchases. The company can also use the application to send real-time, behavior-based communications like a push notification for the customer's favorite iced tea once it's back in stock.

Tie every customer interaction together when you:

- React to real-time customer insights and signals with modern omnichannel orchestration and execution

- Harmonize the customer journey for one-to-one customer engagement and marketing outreach with a single application

- Connect all cross-channel interactions with scheduled campaigns so the customer gets individualized and meaningful communications

- Incorporate AI and ML to surface predictive insights and automate decisions throughout the customer journey

Listen to your audience with real-time analytics.

Just as the brass section adds power and panache to the orchestra, analytics add power to your personalization efforts. Personalization starts with an understanding of how your customer behaves. Listening to the analytics that come in as you conduct the customer journey helps you refine the personalization program you're delivering.

Brands need a way to measure and analyze the impact of their customer profiles, intelligent content, and connected customer journeys—but customer data exists across a variety of online and offline data sources, and an omnichannel view can be difficult to parse together.

Data from all directions.

Direct mail

Web

Social

Store

Email

Display ads

SEO/SEM

Customer account

Mobile

Call centers

In the traditional insight workflow, data must go through multiple teams to be collated and analyzed, making it impossible to act on real-time insights. These days, the customer journey moves in real time and won't wait while you acquire those insights.

Personalizing experiences in a digital-first world necessitates a shift to a journey-centric analysis, one that can measure and report on the full journey beyond just the web and app experience and easily bring in additional data sources from CRM, finance, shopping tools, or offline POS data to determine how predictable and successful marketing efforts are. A single, purpose-built platform with low to no code reduces reliance on business intelligence teams so that any user—analysts, marketers, or admin—has access to cross-channel analytics and can find the insights they need to enable the next best experience, not just the next best ad to deliver. And they can do it immediately.

> " Retailers have no shortage of data. And they're not short on reporting. What we're solving for with customer journey analytics is being able to give the relevant information and insights to the business stakeholders who need them, whether they be in marketing, merchandising, or operations, and then being able to get to that truth as quickly as possible.

**Michael Klein**
Global Director of Industry Strategy, Adobe

A brand can, for example, see the impact on call center costs when they run A/B testing on a website update. It takes just a few minutes to build a metric that can identify the exact pages on a website that drive high call volumes to the call center.

You can also tell if people are more likely to make an in-store purchase when an automated campaign triggers a push notification with a discount offer. You don't have to create three or four different experiences and then wait to get statistical confidence on which experience works best. AI and ML interpret the data for you—and before you even get to full statistical confidence, they've determined which experiences are performing well and will slowly drip qualified traffic to those winning experiences.

Measure customer applause when you:

- Use a solution that aggregates analytics from all channels

- Run analytics on a low-to-no-code platform that reduces reliance on IT

- Make all insights easily accessible and understandable to any person who needs them

- Implement a reporting engine designed for customer intelligence that includes unique visualizations and tools for each role in the organization
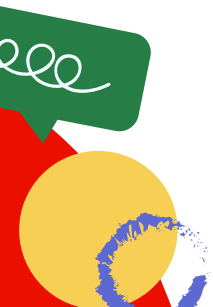
Personalization played to perfection.

The four sections of an orchestra—strings, percussion, woodwinds, and brass—each play a different role but fit together seamlessly to contribute to the melody, harmony, and rhythm of a symphony. The customer journey is much the same. Each interaction builds on the other to power personalization at scale. Sometimes the goal is to engage, sometimes it's to educate, sometimes it's to convert, and always it's to retain.

Brands must connect every customer movement to a broader customer journey composed of online and offline experiences. It takes:

- A unified understanding of the customer

- The ability to dynamically create and deliver personalized content and offers

- Connected customer journeys across physical and digital ecosystems

- A way to analyze the effectiveness of it all

Where you are with your personalization at scale efforts will determine what instruments you use and how you combine those tools with other technologies.

Adobe has been at the forefront of cross-device analysis, tying first-party data to a single user and helping brands understand the full customer journey. "If someone wants to start from scratch, we can help them do that with a full implementation," said Klein. "But we also have a flexible enough ecosystem and solutions that customers can start where they're at, and they'll get great value from each individual solution."

With these instruments in your tech stack and paired with AI and ML, you can create experiences customers love. And equally satisfying—those experiences can also drive revenues that exceed your expectations.

Learn more about orchestrating digital experience masterpieces.

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