



COVID-19 Retail Response:

5 Ingredients of a Digital-Led Strategy That Drives Business Results



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It's clear that [traditional retail models](#) are being challenged, and we are in the midst of a rapid, ongoing evolution in the industry. This evolution has been driven by advancements in e-commerce and digital marketing, as well as consumers' increasing penchant for [buying goods online](#).

In response, the most agile and adaptive brands have discovered that embracing a stronger online retail presence and prioritizing a digital-led strategy, one that allows them to engage their customers across more channels, yields 91% greater year-over-year [customer retention](#) rates compared to businesses that don't (Aspect Software).

What's more, even well-established retail brands now have to face a more menacing threat — the COVID-19 outbreak. Again, the more responsive of these brands are finding that the only way to mitigate the unavoidable losses of brick-and-mortar sales due to the pandemic is to make their online presence a priority. And quickly — whether they're ready, or not.



Those who have embraced omnichannel marketing are already poised for success, and they're the most likely to weather the global economic impact of the Coronavirus. But what are these omnichannel brands doing so effectively to remain poised for success as the shape of their business changes?

For every company, the answer varies. However, among all of our clients successfully driving revenue with an omnichannel or online strategy, five key similarities exist — successful brands:

- ▶ Unify their customer data
- ▶ Focus on the entire customer lifecycle
- ▶ Engage with customers at every touchpoint
- ▶ Deliver 1:1 personalized customer experiences
- ▶ Align their strategies and tactics to business outcomes

We compiled some of the best insights, stories, and pointers that our clients shared on the [Marketer + Machine Podcast](#) so you can learn from these hidden gems.

01

Unifying Your Customer Data

Channel, device, historical, behavioral, transactional, identity, and qualitative data are all continuously generated by consumers. With the right technology, these millions of digital signals occurring each day can be captured and collected to create more personalized interactions. It's the goal of the marketer to find a way to harness and unify this almost limitless amount of data.

Unifying customer data is crucial for a successful digital-first strategy, because data — particularly your first-party data

— is integral to everything you want to do as a marketer. It's essential for the marketing use cases and tactics you aim to execute, and without it, you won't be able to engage your customer in a meaningful way.

This is especially true as you engage customers online. Moreover, having multiple sources of data displaced or siloed not only leads to incongruency in your marketing efforts, but you'll sacrifice time and energy as you attempt to bridge the gap.



“I definitely think that [step 1] is having that single view of the customer. I think that's one of the most critical pieces. Having a single view of inventory then enables you to capitalize on that data that you do have by executing a great omnichannel or unified commerce marketing and shopping experience for those customers.”

Shane Lenton · CIO, Cue Clothing Co.

The best data contains valuable insights about customers' buying patterns, preferences, location, level of engagement, content preferences, and more. And unified customer data links various touchpoints, connects the dots between numerous disparate interactions, events, and purchases, and creates a 360-degree view. That's why success in today's shifting retail landscape is predicated on a brand's use of their first-party data to create 1:1 marketing that can actually accelerate business outcomes.

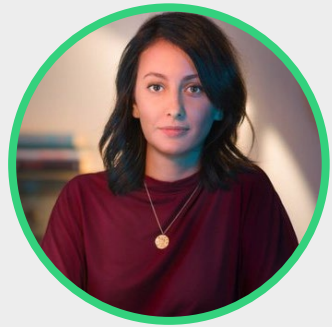
02

Focusing on the Entire Customer Lifecycle

Customer lifecycle marketing is one of the most undervalued overarching strategies for e-commerce and retail companies. Modern retailers capitalize on opportunities across each lifecycle stage: acquisition, growth, retention, and win back.

Acquiring new customers is more costly than growing existing business. This is an important point for brands needing to drive business outcomes while conserving resources — such as those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This notion of growing existing business underscores the value of nurturing, servicing, and helping customers get from point A to point Z — lifecycle marketing! This feat is nearly impossible to achieve at scale without an AI-enabled marketing platform.



“We wanted to catch customers in purchasing at the right moment. Before we were looking at our lifecycle segments — we had X amount of churning customers that we needed to bring back, but by that point [when it was too late], they [already] defected, they lapsed. We wanted to market to them right before they were about to make a purchase. That’s what AI did for us. Rather than wait for a customer to lapse and then reach out to them with a communication email, we used AI to see when an individual was about to lapse and then [proactively] communicate to that person.”

Alexandra (Simion) Vancea · Head of Marketing, BrandAlley · @AlexandraSimion

The customer lifecycle journey is a fluid, non-linear process, and marketers must be completely aware of each individual, where they’ve been, and where they’re going.



“We're definitely part of the increasing trend towards personalization and more individual content. We've come a long way from the times we would send everyone the same piece of direct mail... then we were grouping people and giving them the same treatment based on similar behavior. And now we're moving to more and more [personalized] interactions... when we look at retention and preventing churn, we look at people's individual login history. We look at their behavior history to see ‘hey, are they actually still actively engaging with us or are they dropping off?’”

Sandra Wroe · Head of CRM, WorldRemit

The best approach to customer lifecycle marketing is to match your customers' experiences with proactive digital-led marketing strategies — including personalized content — at every stage of customer interaction in a truly channel-agnostic fashion.

03

Engaging with Customers at Every Possible Touchpoint

The beauty of omnichannel marketing is that it places the customer at the core, ensuring a consistent, unified experience at every touchpoint as opposed to simply enabling that touchpoint. Multichannel means many, but omnichannel means all (the customer is at the center).

Sometimes, omnichannel marketing isn't an option. We've seen how the COVID-19 epidemic renders traditional retail operations impossible, save for the few retailers deemed "essential." For many brands, offline retail is temporarily obsolete. But as these brands transition to online retail, they should consider the primary driving force that makes omnichannel so successful: keep the

customer at the core of all your marketing.

For retail brands who are starting to shift their focus to online, it becomes more imperative to engage with their customers at every possible touchpoint. Consumers around the world are growing to expect this high level of customer-centric marketing, even if they don't explicitly say so or consciously know it.

Take Cue Clothing Co. Like all of us, the brand had to start somewhere, and their story might help to inspire your own as your company transitions.

CUE[®]

Case-in-point: Cue Clothing Co.

Cue Clothing Co. is Australia's largest local manufacturer of fashion merchandise — and that's no accident. The 52 year-old brand stitched together an entire digital customer journey to epitomize an omnichannel CX. Now, Cue Clothing Co. uses customer data to provide a frictionless experience for customers regardless of touchpoint.

Any team member can view a customer's purchase history, frequency of shopping, and preferences — whether in-store, online, via customer care, live chat, or any other channel.

An omnichannel approach enables a 360-degree unified customer view. With that foundation in place, you're set to do even more.

“When we talk about a [‘single view of customer’](#) and ‘single view of inventory’ across all channels, that helps [attain a true] omnichannel perspective. We've seen our business evolve from what was a single channel into multichannel and then to omnichannel to provide that consistent experience — then to where we are today which we call “unified commerce.” [For customers, omnichannel] will feel like we're [always able to] have a consistent conversation with them.”



Shane Lenton · CIO, Cue Clothing Co.

Once [the tech](#) was in place, the specific tactics Shane used as part of their strategy include:

- ▶ A compelling rewards/loyalty program
- ▶ Mended on- and offline data for connected shopping experiences
- ▶ Eliminated the “guest checkout” option on their website (which drove customer registrations)

Lenton realized they needed a customer to self-identify (by registering during the checkout process) to achieve true omnichannel. By removing guest checkout, they found that 80-90% of in-store shoppers are actually “known customers.” So most transactions are attached to repeat customers. Lenton also wanted to ensure all channels could communicate in real time to stitch everything together.

It's about having your systems talking in real time. Whether customers are shopping with you in-store, online, with the customer care team, or any touchpoint, it's critical to get the foundation right... [then, it's really about] finding the right platform from a marketing automation perspective where you can start capitalizing on these foundations that you've built and start using machine learning to provide a personalized experience for customers. Once those things are done, you can really see far greater attribution and return on investment.”



Shane Lenton, CIO, Cue Clothing Co.

Cue's story illustrates how a foundation of a single customer view can also pay dividends in retention, loyalty, and revenue.

As a marketer, your aim should be to engage your customer across every touchpoint possible. This ensures your audience has a wonderful experience with your brand on each and every channel. The focus is on building a stronger relationship between consumers and your brand through whatever channel the customer happens to be using at any given moment. Keeping this in mind will be imperative for your digital strategy.

With push messaging, we want app users to sign up for a daily push notification [in lieu of email]. The fact that we can offer that push rather than yet another email... is [helping] drive nearly 8% of our app traffic now. A very big chunk of our customers have signed up for this, and it's driving a lot of traffic."



Shane Lenton, CIO, Cue Clothing Co.

04

Delivering 1:1 Personalized Customer Experiences

Customer expectations continue to skyrocket as brands like Amazon, Apple, and Google set the standard for what “good” looks and feels like. Worth noting, these are also brands with a strong online retail presence.

Saying they are successful in online retail may be an understatement — these brands have dominated. Early on, they realized that 1:1 personalization is no longer optional, nor is it a nice-to-have — it’s a must!



“The bar is being set really high for customer expectations and relevancy. The way to bridge the gap of personas to segmentation to individualized marketing is a challenge. The marketers that can do that right and work with the right technology platforms to help personalize that message for right, relevant, valuable experiences are the ones that will win. And frankly, customers are going to expect it.”

**Chris Seahorn · SVP of Marketing
& Merchandising, eBags · @seahorn**

Due to similarly situated companies in a given market – and the over-saturation, variation, and choices of products – personalization is the de facto “X factor” that may be the difference between a loyal customer and no customer.



“When I came to [Runtastic](#) five and a half years ago...our content was ‘so-so’ – it was more of something we did when we had time or when we got around to it, but the quality was not great. Now, we recognize that there’s so many similar products out there – not just in our industry, in a lot of industries – and the question is, ‘how are we going to differentiate ourselves?’ The answer is through content – meaningful, targeted content that all comes back to this idea of personalization.”

Stephanie Peterson · CMO, Runtastic (2012-2018)

Of course, one increasingly important aspect of personalization includes its close cousin: experiences.

Where a mid-sized retail brand might lack in sheer size, reach, or mindshare, it can compensate by creating differentiated experiences (particularly in-store) in a way competitors likely can't.



“Shopping centers, especially, are moving away from retail and going into entertainment. Some of the larger centers are going like 30% retail, 70% experience. And if you're in retail, you're looking around saying ‘how do I fit into this?’ Most companies that have retail outlets do the majority of their sales through those outlets — for us, it's almost 80% of our business.”

Michael Doyle · Head of Marketing, City Beach (2016-2019)

As the IoT and sphere of connected commerce continues to expand, the distinction among shopping, experiences, and gamification is blurring.

05

Aligning Objectives to Strategies and Tactics that Drive Business Outcomes

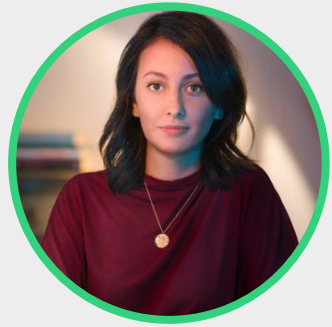
The traditional “tech-first,” “build-your-stack” mindset has pervaded the collective consciousness of hundreds of thousands of e-commerce marketers for the last decade.

But, this is all backwards... and goes against the foundational Marketing 101 knowledge we were taught and have since forgotten due to mass tech distraction.

Instead, successful online retailers are turning the tables, starting with what they actually want to achieve... then figuring out how to make it happen using this model:

- ▶ Start with Goals (what do we need to achieve?)
- ▶ Move to Strategy (How are we going to get there?)
- ▶ Consider Tactics (what specific campaigns/activities will drive value?)
- ▶ Look at Technology (what software can help us achieve these?)

Brands that have adopted this approach see dividends in revenue and quicker time to value.

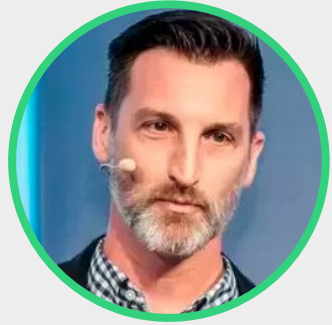


I absolutely love it [your new strategic dashboard] – it’s literally a dream come true... When we first used Tactics, it was such a fresh new way of deploying strategies for selected customers. We can test new programs, find new ways of communicating to customers, and just a different way of doing it compared to anything we’ve done with the past... with Tactics, you could have five different strategies that can be used right away [to meet Objectives].”

Alexandra (Simion) Vancea, Head of Marketing, Brand Alley

In this pattern of thinking, you’re suddenly free. You’re not trapped by what software can do, but freed to find software that propels you toward the things you need to get done.

And once you land on the solution to help achieve your goals, that particular platform should tell you how to achieve your goals with embedded industry knowledge and pre-built campaign blueprints/strategies based on data – like the [Emarsys Customer Engagement Platform](#) was designed to do.



Many marketing teams and businesses suffer from a technical knowledge gap and lack of business introspection, opening the door to snake oil sales people pitching empty software and false promises. Things are changing, but most software still demands an unreasonably high level of technical knowledge to assess, implement and maintain. The best-of-breed software solutions are now actually considering the business user in the design, knowing that fast and full platform adoption delivers loyalty better than complexity. Emarsys is City Beach's ROI engine — making what we're doing more efficient and providing the tools that free up my team to focus on innovation. Emarsys has revolutionized our experiences as marketers and its new marketing platform, which contains all creative elements and the data specific to my sector, will take our ability to deliver seamless, unforgettable campaigns for the omnichannel shopper in this connected era to the next level."

Michael Doyle, former Head of Marketing, City Beach

Conclusion

For a successful digital-led strategy, you must ensure your customers receive the same experience and messaging through each and every channel. A consistent brand image and message provide more than a heightened sense of familiarity with your brand. They set the stage for:

- ▶ Increased customer retention rates
- ▶ More first- to second-time buyers
- ▶ The ability to move churning or defecting segments back to active
- ▶ Proactive, predictive, personalized marketing
- ▶ Higher AOV and greater revenue over time

Many of the retail brands we work with set the bar for what a results-bearing digital strategy looks like. There is no perfect set-it-and-forget-it strategy — it's really just about getting started, finding the right channel balance for you, and remaining as flexible as you can to meet your buyers when, where, and however they desire — and that makes for a successful digital strategy.

**Want to know more about
how a digital-led strategy can accelerate
business outcomes for your brand?**

[Head to emarsys.com/demo](https://emarsys.com/demo)



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