GET REAL.

Making the most of your customer's journey in real time.

2016

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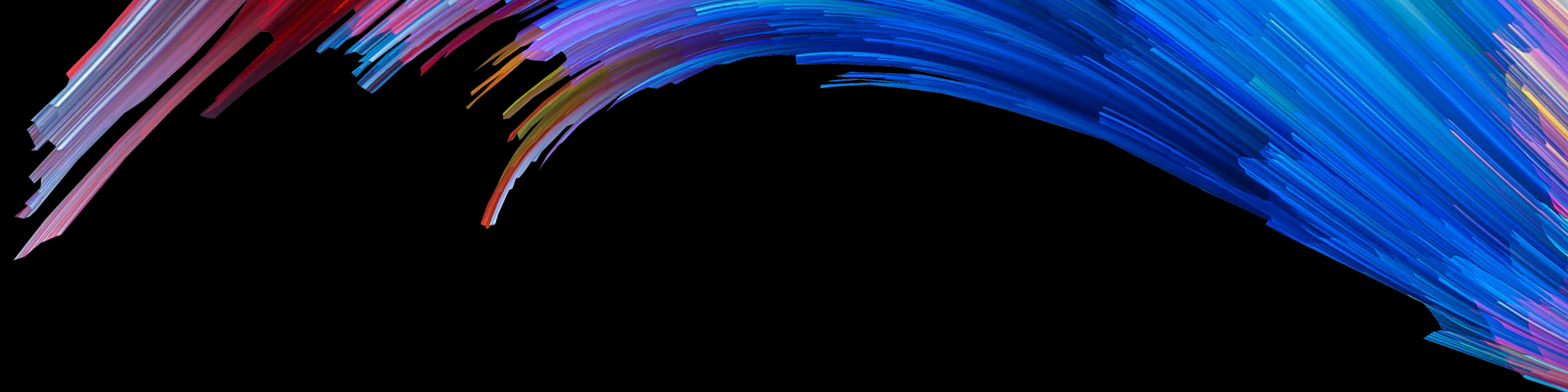
Your customers are on THE LOOSE.

They've broken free from the customer relationship management (CRM) and clickstream-tracking systems you've used to keep tabs on them. Now they're swerving unpredictably and often anonymously from device to device, channel to channel. What's more, they've escaped from the sales funnel that once guided them gently but firmly from awareness to purchase.

Now, in the wild, they're more prone to sudden and unexpected movements, such as camping on review sites or trekking unbidden to your website to perform detailed research. Sure, they're still willing to pursue an offer or product advertisement that's delivered to their inbox or web browser, but only if it's especially compelling and relevant.

These newly empowered consumers have taken the reins and are guiding their own journeys, navigating uncharted paths. For marketers, there's no corralling these customers or reversing their course. The only solution is to meet them where they are and break through the noise with relevant and meaningful real-time experiences.

"Delivering a great customer experience used to be about brand consistency—the same logo, the same stylistic treatment—but now we're finding that it's about the experience," says Andrea Fishman, a partner in the digital services practice of consulting firm PwC. "The great customer experience has to be a continuous experience with a brand and a consistent level of service across all the different channels, whether you're online, whether you're in store, or whether you're remote."[1]

The good news is that your customers aren't alone in feeling empowered these days. Marketers, too, are facing exciting new capabilities. Now they have the ability to know their customers better than ever before and react to their behavior by presenting tailored,

individualized content at the very moment it's most relevant—even if the customer switches channels or devices. Although the customer journey isn't taking place along the same well-worn paths, you can find your customers along the paths they blaze—and do so instantly.

This could mean sending one customer an app notification about a sale on an item he's been researching, just as he passes by a retail store. Or, after a customer places a banjo in her online shopping cart, generating a list of instructional videos that match her musical tastes, along with a few recommended accessories.

When done well, real-time marketing transforms brands into authentic and trustworthy guides along the customer journey, forging deeper relationships and more impactful conversations.

"The most exciting thing for us about digital marketing is helping customers along their journey in terms of the projects they're trying to do," says Mike Amend, former VP of online, mobile, and

omnichannel at The Home Depot. "We don't think of it as marketing for marketing's sake, but really it's, 'How do we engage our customers to make them aware of new products that can help them in the projects they're working on, to save them time or money?'"[2]

The great customer experience has to be a continuous experience with a brand and a consistent level of service across all the different channels, whether you're online, whether you're in store, or whether you're remote.

Andrea Fishman
partner
digital services
PwC

On the **RIGHT** path.

Marketing like this can be tough because individual customers can be hard to track as they flit from store to smartphone to laptop. This means that moments of opportunity can happen fast, so you need to be ready to address them in real time. It requires a flexible, adaptive approach to content creation and campaign design, not to mention a strong commitment to data-driven customer analysis and strategy.

The tools to achieve that vision exist and are rapidly improving the ability to track users across devices and channels and to respond instantly and contextually when customers signal that they've reached a milestone in their journey.

"The promise of [this technology] is that it's doing a lot of the number crunching for you, showing you the real-time customer insights that are most worth your focus, such as location, helping you refine the experience," says Drew Burns, principal product marketing manager for Adobe Target. "Marketers don't have time to assign huge teams to focus on this, so instead [companies like Adobe] automate the number crunching and analysis for you, so you focus on the areas that are most troublesome or pleasing, and introducing change as needed."[3]

One critical piece of this technology, for example, is analytics. Investments in real-time analytics are on the rise and will play a crucial role in the future of marketing. In fact, Gartner predicts that by 2018, 60 percent of digital commerce analytics investments will be devoted to better understanding the customer journey. Also by 2018, organizations that have navigated the new journey well enough to excel at personalized customer interaction online will outsell slow-to-act rivals by more than 30 percent.[4]

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60%
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The promise of this analytics-based approach is that you'll be able to dig deeper, says Bruce Swann, senior product marketing manager for Adobe Campaign.[5] The first step, he says, is analyzing a customer's engagement with your brand, which could be anything from browsing your website to answering a survey or using social media.

Then add predictive analytics, which uses the past behavior of similar customers to forecast your customer's future actions." You'll be able to identify opportunities and anticipate what the consumer is likely to do next," Swann says.[6] When a consumer decides to engage, the marketer wants to know the next best action or offer—and real-time analytics makes that possible with greater insight than ever before.

With the **RIGHT** offering.

For real-time marketing to be successful, you must first learn all you can about your empowered customers: what they're like, what they want, and where they are. Then you can send tailored messages in moments of opportunity.

For starters, the raw data you need to better understand your customer is stuff you probably already gather, such as customer purchase records, campaign responses, and website traffic. This so-called "first-party data" has always been highly valuable, and in the context of real-time interaction management it's even more so, because your own data is likely the only data to which you'll have real-time access.

It's also worthwhile to include additional data, such as the availability of inventory. For example, if you direct a customer to a nearby store for a particular item, you'll want to be certain that the store is open and the item is in stock.

The next challenge is translating that data into a clearer, more useful picture of the customer. This is the job of

analytics: applying complex data science modeling techniques and serious number crunching to your raw data, and spitting out something much less complex. What emerges is a more complete picture of the customer, the journey, and the opportunity.

If you know everything a prospective customer ever looked at on your website, know where and when each visit occurred, and can see the natural progression of the site visits as the customer moves from evaluation to consideration, then you know a lot about that customer's journey. If you know what they ultimately purchased, and when, and what they bought (or didn't buy) at the same time, then you know even more. That's where analytics comes in.

"This is the ideal opportunity for rich marketing attribution," says Raj Sen, group product marketing manager for Adobe Analytics. "Old-style marketing attribution was all about last-click attribution, knowing whether the customer hit 'buy' or responded to email or bought offline. Now, if

you're able to stitch together all the stuff that moves them down the path to final purchase, and to see what their path was from awareness to consideration to purchase, then you know the most effective channels and campaigns to lead another individual down the path."[7]

All of that knowledge already is within the grasp of every major seller, because every seller tracks website and purchase activity. There are two primary challenges to unlocking it: internal coordination and cross-device authentication.

PREPARED
for every encounter.

Internal coordination means cooperation and collaboration between different teams and software systems. Specifically, marketers need to combine data from two primary, disparate systems: the CRM software that holds transaction and customer service data, and the software that tracks website traffic.

This can be difficult for a couple of reasons. One potential pitfall is organizational. The sales, customer service, and web teams may not be used to sharing information at all, let alone in real time. The second is technical. Older CRM interfaces and databases may not have been built for sharing data instantly with analytics software, requiring substantial retrofitting or upgrading.

A Gartner examination of customer journey analytics suggests that the journey to realtime will be taxing for organizations, warning of a "relatively long list of systems that may require either data extraction or some type of integration. As a result, many companies see the implementation of customer journey analytics as a daunting project that's further exacerbated by limited resources."[8]

Yet, implementing analytics is the key to real-time marketing.

READY for anything.

The challenge of piecing together different actions by the same customer is substantial. An in-store smartphone search. An at-home tablet search. A technical question for a call-center rep, followed by an online order placed from a laptop. There's no simple way to associate the smartphone user with the tablet user or the laptop user, so analytics tools create separate profiles based on the activity of each device.

"It's a difficult proposition for the marketer to know that all those different people [on different devices] are the same. But it's coming together," Swann says.[9]

Here's how it works. The system collects separate profiles and records and holds that data, biding its time until a customer authenticates on multiple devices—perhaps by logging into a mobile app or by opening an email that had previously been opened on a phone. Once that connection is made, the system retroactively pieces together the entirety of the customer journey. That end-to-end understanding is critical because it's the only view that can give marketers a comprehensive picture of the customer journey—from the email campaign

that sparked awareness to the content marketing piece that spurred additional research, to the brief dalliance with a competitor, to the display ad offer and web chat that sealed the deal.

Software tools are even becoming sophisticated enough to connect devices without user authentication. The system gathers enough anonymous but similar data that it can predict that multiple devices belong to the same user.

This level of insight isn't just nice to have. It's an essential component of next-generation marketing. "Companies without an integrated view of their customers will inevitably fail to shift from campaign-based marketing to contextual marketing," says Sheryl Pattek, an analyst at Forrester Research.[10]

How cross-device stitching might work.

A customer walks into a home improvement store in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and pays cash for a quart of greenish paint. From the store's perspective, this interaction doesn't generate much data about the customer, only a purchased item and a location. Except for one thing. At the last minute, the cashier convinces the customer to create an account to note the name of the specific paint color, "Frosted Sage." The store learns that the customer's name is Abby and that she lives in nearby Rockford.

Consumer behavior

Linked laptop

Cross device stitching

Linked tablet

Linked smart phone
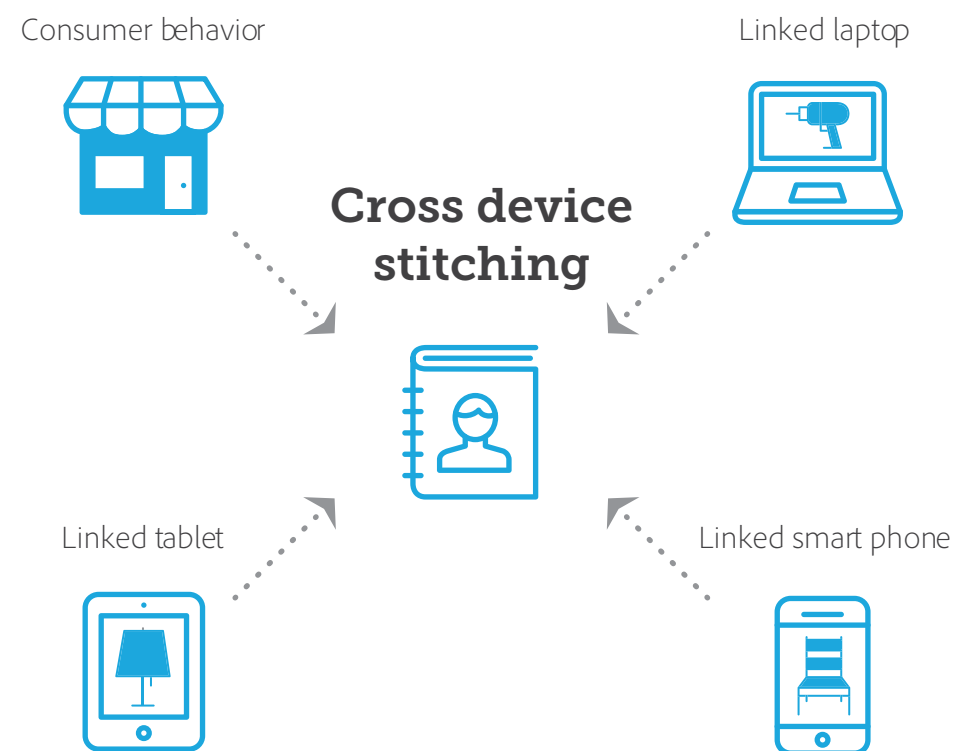
That's useful information, but still not a lot to go on—at least until Abby returns home and visits the retailer's website on her tablet that evening. She finds a complementary shade of paint called "Aegean Mist" and logs in to her newly created account to create a list in which she can save the color.

This login represents a convenience for Abby, but it's a bonanza for the retailer. Its system recognizes that the network Abby uses is one that also facilitated a half-dozen other recent visits to its website: three from the tablet, one from a smartphone, and two from a laptop. Using probabilistic matching algorithms, the system links Abby's three devices into one unified history that yields a trove of information. Taken together, the searches include products such as tile, lighting fixtures, and appliances, suggesting that Abby is pursuing a much larger project, perhaps a full remodel of her kitchen. Instantly, the retailer gains a clearer, fuller picture of Abby's journey, and its marketing messages to her can be recalibrated based on its new, deeper understanding of her project, journey, and progress.

There are two substantial benefits to this single view of the customer. One, the retailer has gained the insight it needs to interact with Abby in real-time as she proceeds further. It can now recognize Abby's smartphone so that when she pulls it out in the store the following day and logs in to an in-store Wi-Fi network to read paintbrush reviews, the retailer can deliver relevant content such as recommended brushes or offers. Its content-serving abilities grow smarter as its understanding of Abby continues to develop based on her activity on the site and as it learns about her tastes from the products she searches and selects. The more Abby interacts, the more helpful the retailer's suggestions become.

The second benefit is that the retailer can use its understanding of Abby's journey to help predict the journey of similar customers in the future. When it learns that a customer named Serena in Reno, Nevada, had a nearly identical series of website visits prior to making her first paint purchase, it can make recommendations based on Abby's experience. In a flash, the retailer becomes more helpful, to both its current customers and its future ones.

With eyes OPEN.

Again, most sellers already collect the first-party data necessary to generate this sort of insight. To expand your knowledge even further, you can incorporate additional data beyond sales and traffic information to place your customers into demographic or psychographic segments beyond the regional, gender, and device preference information collected when the customer authenticated. Some of this additional data may be proprietary, gathered during loyalty program signup or app usage or through a form associated with an offer or survey. Or it may be collected through an ad network through which you're running a campaign.

Then there's second-party data, essentially first-party data collected by a partner company—for example, a company in a different industry that markets to a similar consumer—that can be useful to better understand your customers' broader interests. Social media listening tools provide yet another means of tracking customer preferences by analyzing the reviews and comments they post publicly across the Internet. And aggregate, anonymized third-party data further helps you with audience targeting by offering groups of highly specific segments.

"We don't need [personally identifiable information] because often what we're looking for is trends and predictive variables," says Adobe's Drew Burns. "It might be your region, gender, family, or employment status, and you're just looking to find groups that are predictive based on what you want the customer to do."[11]

Marketers are pros at segmenting their audiences and anticipating behaviors based on characteristics such as region, age, gender, purchase history, and income. Today, it's possible to identify additional categories that may be less instinctive but can prove to be highly effective once matched with the appropriate messaging and delivered in the right context.

For example, analytics software defines highly specific and targeted audiences that traditional segmentation techniques may miss. Audience clustering, for instance, recognizes groups of customers behaving similarly and builds profiles around those behaviors, even if the behaviors weren't predictable even a short while ago. In a real-time context, this can be very valuable because new clusters can form quickly.

The magic of real-time marketing

is transforming momentary insights into content that's useful and relevant because it's tailored both to an individual and a particular circumstance.

Say, for example, that the headlining artist at a music festival surprises his audience by appearing on stage in a top hat and tails. Suddenly, a new audience emerges: indie music fans who buy future concert tickets along with 1800s fashion items. Related analytics techniques include propensity modeling, in which the system predicts the way different audiences will respond to various campaigns based on the results of previous campaigns. It then serves the content that is most likely to be effective to each audience.

Similar techniques can be used to match individual customers with best-fit campaigns. Say a customer fits into two different, promising audience groups— perhaps do-it-yourselfers and first-time homeowners, in Abby's case—and her history of engagement on your site closely resembles an established visitor profile that you've had success in converting. The system can predict which group provides the strongest match, as well as which correlated marketing strategy is most likely to be compelling. From there, the system can automatically structure outbound marketing so that Abby receives the content most likely to be helpful and isn't inundated with simultaneous campaigns triggered by different observations.

With all that data available, "you can get super granular," Burns says. "But sometimes if there are too many variables in play, it's ineffectual. That's where the algorithms help you discard the stuff that's not worth your time."[12]

How to consider the physical journey.

Analytics will help you visualize your customer's progress along their figurative customer journey. But what about their actual, physical journey? It can be invaluable to know your customer's physical location so that, for example, you can deliver an offer or recommendation if they're near one of your retail locations. This sort of geotargeting is best achieved if the customer has your smartphone app, but it can also be achieved with a Wi-Fi network login such as Abby's, as described previously.

Geolocation data provides contextual information that can be used to inform your marketing. For example, if the customer is commuting, that could be the perfect time to deliver a tailored message. If the system recognizes that the customer is at the opera, then location information could serve as a catalyst not to contact that customer until later. If the customer is at a trade show where you're making a big product announcement, you can invite him to your booth for a demonstration rather than sending him the email campaign that will go to the rest of your customers.

The more you know about the preferences and circumstances of your customers, the more specific you'll be able to be when engaging them. The magic of real-time marketing is transforming momentary insights into something more lasting—useful and relevant content.

How context can lead to better content.

The ability to pinpoint crucial opportunities along the customer journey, not only in hindsight but as they occur, puts marketers in a great spot. The next challenge is translating that insight into hyper-relevant content that is tailored to both the moment and the individual.

Success depends not only on creating smart content, but may also require rethinking your fundamental approach to marketing. Independent, uncoordinated, channel-based teams and strategies won't cut it if your aim is to create a unified experience that follows a logical progression across channels and among brand-initiated and customer-initiated interactions. Forrester's Pattek says that a customer-centric, cross-channel approach may necessitate substantial organizational change to bring the different channel partners into alignment.[13]

One solution is to funnel all campaigns, strategy, and content into a central, digital hub that regulates marketing interactions, as well as upcoming outbound marketing, with individual customers based on real-time information. If the customer triggers a spontaneous marketing message based on a web search or location, a preplanned email can be canceled to minimize the risk of customer fatigue. Or if contextual information suggests that the customer is not in a good place to receive a planned offer, the system can change the offer.

Adobe's Swann explains: "If you're an airline and you send me an offer that's time sensitive, there's a danger that I could open the offer too late and it could be stale. But if you have rules in place to leverage the context, then you can just serve the next best offer instead."[14]

How context can optimize content.

Contextualization can be driven by many variables, but three are particularly relevant to the real-time customer journey: temporal and location-based data, device type data, and data that indicates a change in the progress of the customer journey. Changes to those variables are likely to appreciably affect the customer's context, and they're also fairly likely to be visible to the marketer.

Here are a few ways that marketing content may change on the fly based on these context-specific variables:

- **Time and location.** If a customer is traveling, a daily deals site could modify its offer to feature a nearby small business. If it's 6 a.m., that business could be a health club. If it's 6 p.m., it could be a restaurant.

- **Device type.** If your next planned communication is a survey request but the system notes that the customer is using a smartphone, you could substitute a different offer that's more likely to trigger an instant response.

- **Journey milestone.** If the customer calls a sales rep because she's concerned about negative consumer reviews of a specific product feature, and your next planned communications were based on the assumption that the customer was still in the discovery phase, the system could substitute an email or display an ad emphasizing the product's strong performance or a favorable review.

How a responsive campaign works.

Traditional outbound campaigns are based on the marketer's sense of timing. They deliver the same series of messages to the same audience at the same time. There's still a place for that sort of campaign, but the defining campaigns in the era of the real-time customer journey will be triggered by a customer action or indication, rather than initiated by the marketer.

"Customers are in control of their real-time interactions," writes Forrester analyst Rusty Warner, and marketers "must therefore design systems of engagement that extend far beyond marketing's traditional purview."[15]

Fortunately, marketers already have the tools and insights they need to create these systems of engagement and generate content that capitalizes on in-the-moment opportunities.

In keeping with the data-driven DNA of real-time customer journey marketing, the new campaign begins with an if-then statement: "If Consumer X (included because she meets a set of pre-identified conditions) performs Action Y (visiting a store or web page, or signing up for an account), then serve Message Z and initiate a related campaign."

In other words, setting up a series of tailored, automated messages requires a lot of effort and foresight. For these messages to be delivered in real time, the content—and circumstances—need to be created in advance. That means planning for a lot of hypothetical X's and Y's and creating content to match.

"You need to be able to manage business rules to support that sort of campaign—to identify all those events and then know what to do with them once they're identified," Swann says. "It amplifies the need to have a central repository for all content regardless of the channel, and creates the need for a single platform that can all manage all of the rules you create."[16]

Says Burns: "If a consumer takes an action on something and the marketing team hasn't created a rule [to serve content when the action is taken], then nothing will happen. Someone must specify, 'When people click here and have X in their profile, serve them this certain content.'"[17]

What asset management adds.

The kinds of campaigns we're describing here place a premium on asset management. Marketers are creating content—combinations of text, photo, video, and design—intended to sway consumers. Yet these campaigns don't lend themselves to a traditional series of fixed, final pieces, but rather to a mix-and-match approach that adapts based on the individual receiving the message and other variables related to audience, context, and prior performance.

"Taxonomy and metadata management become really important in this environment," says Justin Edelson, product evangelist for Adobe Experience Manager. "You really have to be able to effectively tag and associate metadata with your assets so that they can be discovered later, and so that you can search on multiple axes."[18]

Another sort of asset that becomes more significant in the era of the dynamic customer journey is seeded online content. If your target customer is as likely to proactively research your product online as to be prompted by a marketing campaign, then you need to create searchable content that lives online that will help them along their journey. These can range from social media posts to thought leadership articles to compelling product pages, which serve as signposts to help customers in the wild stay on the trail. Later, when you've identified them, you can begin marketing to them specifically—and note exactly which top-of-the-funnel content began to draw them in.

Make the most of your customer's
JOURNEY.

For today's consumers, authenticity is key. We've outlined the various ways you can transform real-time moments into genuine, meaningful experiences and conversations. From implementing real-time analytics and tailoring content to considering all the context in between, you'll become what every journeying customer needs most: a wise and trustworthy friend.

Adobe can help.

If you're looking to make smart marketing investments for future campaigns, consider combining the real-time analytics solutions of Adobe Analytics, the advanced personalization capabilities of Adobe Target, and the cross-channel delivery of Adobe Campaign. Learn more about how we can help manage your campaign delivery, data, and content to make each customer journey seamless.

www.adobe.com/marketing-cloud/cross-channel-marketing.html

Adobe Marketing Cloud empowers companies to use big data to effectively reach and engage customers and prospects with highly personalized marketing content across devices and digital touchpoints. Eight tightly integrated solutions offer marketers a complete set of marketing technologies that focus on analytics, web and app experience management, testing and targeting, advertising, audience management, video, social engagement, and campaign orchestration. The tie-in with Adobe Creative Cloud makes it easy to quickly activate creative assets across all marketing channels. Thousands of brands worldwide—including two-thirds of Fortune 50 companies—rely on Adobe Marketing Cloud with over 30.4 trillion transactions a year.

https://www.adobe.com/marketing-cloud.html

[1] Andrea Fishman, partner, digital services, PwC, Adobe Summit, March 2015.

[2] Interview with Mike Amend, Adobe Summit, March 2015. Amend is now the executive vice president of omnichannel at JCPenney.

[3] Personal interview with Drew Burns, principal product marketing manager, Adobe, October 15, 2015.

[4] Jason Daigler, Gareth Herschel, Ed Thompson, Gene Alvarez, *Technology Overview for Customer Journey Analytics,* Gartner, May 2015.

[5] Personal interview with Bruce Swann, senior product marketing manager, Adobe, October 1, 2015.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Personal interview with Raj Sen, group product marketing manager, Adobe, October 14, 2015.

[8] *Technology Overview for Customer Journey Analytics,* Gartner, May 4, 2015.

[9] Interview with Swann.

[10] Sheryl Pattek, *Evaluate Marketing's Customer Life-Cycle Maturity,* Forrester Research, July 17, 2015.

[11] Interview with Burns.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Pattek, *Evaluate Marketing's Customer Life-Cycle Maturity.*

[14] Interview with Swann.

[15] Rusty Warner, *Demystifying Real-Time Interaction Management,* Forrester Research, February 20, 2015.

[16] Interview with Swann.

[17] Interview with Burns.

[18] Personal interview with Justin Edelson, product evangelist, Adobe, October 1, 2015.

Adobe