

Context is king in the next wave of digital marketing

By Richard Mullins

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I recently attended a discussion with some colleagues and key clients, WPP STREAM Africa, around how to target digital marketing messages at an elite group of wealthy consumers, who don't spend much time surfing the Web or leave a trail of digital data behind them wherever they go.

These high net worth individuals are not on social media, nor do they rely on opinion pages in mainstream websites to make investment or purchasing decisions.

This group of wealthy consumers are jealously protective of their personal data because they know how valuable it is to the many people standing in line to sell them products and services. Rather than allowing themselves to simply be data points in a brand's web analytics tools and remarketing campaign, such individuals demand full control over their information as well as high level of personalised service from the companies with which they choose to do business.

Thinking ahead

I believe that they also represent the future for digital marketers since they are thinking about data in the way that most customers will in the years to come. As much concern as there is about the way that digital giants like Facebook and Google monetise their users' data, I expect to see more and more people start to think about their personal data as a value or currency. That means they'll be more wary about how they share it and that they'll expect value in exchange for this precious commodity.



Image via [123RF](#)

For digital marketers, this provides an exciting opportunity, though many brands and publishers will need to rethink their data strategies. There will be a shift away from thinking about data towards thinking about audiences - a move from targeting users with content towards speaking to them in context.

What this means is that we won't simply be targeting consumers with content based on behavioural or geographic data - we will also be targeting them according to what they're doing at a present moment in time. Among the contextual data we can use is the user's device (smartphone, tablet, computer), exact location (in a shopping mall, near a branch of your store), calendar and digital activity (looking for nearby restaurants).

Understanding customers

For brands that earn consumers' trust - and hence their customers' approval for their data to be used for enhanced

engagement - this is a great opportunity to create value. Equipped with rich, real-time context-bound information about what their customers are doing, brands will be able to understand customers at a deep level and respond to their needs.

But to take advantage of this opportunity, businesses will need to give a lot of thought to how they gather, use and manage customer data. Critical will be providing customers with incentive to share contextual data. That means companies must show they can be trusted with consumer information and that they will use the data in a way that benefits their customers.

Personalised engagements

Furthermore, there are many process and systems challenges that the average brand will face in collecting and making the most of this consumer data. They will need to put in place solutions that will enable them to gather and make sense of unprecedented amounts of customer data being generated, in an integrated fashion.

That means going beyond using data collected from digital channels and tools to leveraging this information to deliver truly personalised and relevant engagements with customers. Each customer interaction is context-sensitive and seen as an opportunity to deliver more meaningful engagements and influence with the audience.

Owning and understanding data is really about ownership of the audience, which is why companies who collect the cleanest, most relevant and most up to date audience data they can, plus show why consumers should be willing to share their information. Those that get it right will build a strong competitive advantage for themselves.

ABOUT RICHARD MULLINS

Richard Mullins is the director at Acceleration. He opened Acceleration's Johannesburg office in 2000 and has played an instrumental role in the growth of Acceleration in South Africa.

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