

Getting personalization to work for your company and your customer

December 2017

Personalization may seem complex, but the best companies know how to use it to drive growth quickly.

A successful personalization campaign may rely heavily on technology, but it also depends on a sustained commitment from management, an agile war room, and the judicious use of analytics. Kelsey Robinson, a partner in San Francisco who helps consumer-facing clients drive top-line growth, discusses what it takes to make personalization work.

What is personalization?

Kelsey Robinson: Personalization is all about how relevant I am to individuals across all of my interactions with them. In the context of retail, that might mean, what products do I show consumers? In the context of healthcare, that might mean, how do I make sure patients are taking their medicine? But basically, at every point of interaction along a customer's journey, it's about relevancy for the individual as opposed to just sending messages.

We asked consumers what's most important today in terms of how companies interact with them, and two answers came out on top across all industries. One is convenience. The other is personalization. Consumers are actually asking for it. They want companies to show them products and services that are specific to them and their needs.

Getting personalization right: Commitment and just getting started

Kelsey Robinson: It takes two things to put a strong personalization operating model in place. One is commitment. The most successful companies have leaders who know and talk about personalization as a really high priority and encourage their teams to try and fail and succeed.

The second major challenge is just getting started. Doing personalization can seem overwhelming, so it paralyzes organizations. It's best to just start to test one or two things. And you don't need a lot of people either. We have this concept of an agile war room, which is basically putting a marketer, a technologist, and a creative developer together in one room to do the work.

Inspiration and experience in launching an agile 'war room'

Kelsey Robinson: To get a war room off the ground and running, it's great to start with a source of inspiration. That could be competitors or adjacent-industry leaders who are great at personalization and have built successful operating models.

Many team members may not have been a part of a personalization war room before, so it's also really important to have at least one or two people in the room with some experience who can go through the process with the rest of the team by showing them how it works. They're the ones who can help get the campaign pilot up and problem solve by asking, "What do we need to go to actually get this out the door?" They're role-modeling how to run stand-up meetings, which begin each day with a focus on what needs to be accomplished. In the early stages of any war room, they are the leaders.

Using analytics to drive better personalization performance

Kelsey Robinson: Analytics plays a really important role in shaping the ideas and the pilots that a war room will actually run and the personalization tactics that we'll try. One example might be the knowledge that valuable customers make a second purchase within two weeks. That's a great analytical insight at the beginning of what might be a test to see whether we get more customers to make a second purchase within two weeks.

Analytics then enters into the process again when you actually launch those personalization tests to measure what worked and what didn't. We always use a test and a control group to make sure the personalized treatment a customer received actually drove different behavior and value to the company. Even if a test doesn't work, we can still use data and analytics to figure out things like, "Did it work for a subsegment of customers? Who did it work for? Who did it not?" That might help feed a brand-new test. So analytics becomes a very iterative, continual process for personalization. □