



WHITEPAPER

THE POWER OF PERSONALIZATION IN B2B CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Solving the 7 challenges to digital success

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THE POWER OF PERSONALIZATION IN B2B CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

As consumers, we like things easy, fast, efficient and convenient. We have grown accustomed to connected user journeys where each touchpoint makes sense, and barriers are kept to a minimum. But, as a B2B customer, your experiences may still vary.

While B2C has always been more direct, approaches are still being held back by yesteryear's legacy practices. Journeys from the research phase through to purchase are still considered overly complex and drawn out, requiring too many people and too many steps.

In today's digital world, B2C transactions have become faster and more efficient thanks to the development of new technologies. B2B marketers and leaders are finally following suit. In their 'Customers 2020 Report' experience management firm, Walker, predicted that by the end of 2020, customer experience in B2B marketing would have overtaken price as the

key brand differentiator¹.

PERSONALIZE FOR SUCCESS

To deliver on customer service expectations in a B2B context, marketers and business owners need to meet their needs, not just as a customer, but as an individual as well. Personalization is the key to this. By leveraging the data that customers produce through various touchpoints, B2B marketers can tailor their messaging and offer greater engagement and smarter targeting.

Mastering B2B customer experiences is not a matter of simply adapting to the B2C

approach: it is about building and fostering a digital, long-term business relationship. Personalization for business customers is significantly more complex because of how many different recipients there may be. Buyers, marketing managers, CEOs, end users: the list goes on. To reach the right people, it takes a multidisciplinary approach that involves more aspects of the business and its leadership. By aligning goals and cultivating a mutual understanding of marketing needs, company CIOs, CMOs and CDOs can collaborate to create experiences that put the customer in the center of everything.

PERSONALIZATION AT SCALE

While we know that personalization can be a powerful tool, employing strategies at scale brings about its own sets of challenges. How can you have specific messages for large audience sets while remaining budget-efficient at the same time?

In this whitepaper, we are taking a closer look at the power of personalization and customer experience in B2B marketing for forward-thinking business leaders, including the main challenges that need to be tackled, and what roles need to be created or invested in.



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THE B2B DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

When selling a B2B product or service, remember that **there is still a real person on the other end.**

At its very core, B2B marketing has the same goals as B2C marketing: to appeal to customers or end-users so that they purchase products and services. Just like in B2C, the landscape of B2B marketing is changing rapidly. B2B marketers are now adopting many of the techniques and technologies used in the consumer sector.

Today's business customers are inherently more digitally native than their more analogue-based predecessors and expect better mobile interactions, faster technical support, omnichannel touchpoints, peer-reviews and a fully connected digital experience. Anything less than what an average consumer company can do will already turn them towards competitors.

Markets have never been more competitive, and customer choices have never been so diverse. And, with 77% of B2B buyers stating that their latest purchase was very complex

or difficult², the market is ready for something better. As well as making the journey more intuitive, B2B marketers need to take context

into account, as some business products are inherently complex. While there's no way to make products less complex, making the experience of procuring them as smooth as possible is essential.

Here are some of the areas in which B2B marketing must meet the experiences of increasingly digitally-savvy customers:

INSTANT GRATIFICATION

The world moves fast, especially in the workplace. The timeliness of responses – and by extension – the overall customer service needs to be fast and efficient. Your customers expect prompt answers from emails and social media posts, and the 'please wait at least two working days' is not going to cut it anymore.

They expect customer experiences that make them feel valued, and that they can fully place their trust in you.

PERSONALIZATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

B2B personalization enables marketers and business leaders to create content and experiences that are more targeted and specific for the recipient, potentially leading to



a retention rate of up to 89%³. However, the psychology behind it is different from a typical B2C approach. In many cases, B2B customers are engaging with a service or product because it's their job, rather than something they personally want. This means that the approach will need to be angled towards their professional needs, rather than personal interests. By acknowledging this situation, B2B marketers will be able to foster more credibility through better contextual communication.

Through the power of AI and real-time data, the messaging can be tailored for every stage of the buyer's journey, helping to service them with the information they need; and ultimately increase revenue.

LOYALTY

A study published by eMarketer showed that over 58.7% of global internet users consider

earning rewards or loyalty points⁴ as one of the most valued aspects of their shopping experience. While loyalty points are nothing new, knowing which ones to offer is where the

nuance lies. By retaining customers through more targeted loyalty efforts, businesses can reduce acquisition costs, increase revenues, and increase their marketing spending efficiency.

LESS PHYSICAL INTERACTION

The events of 2020 and 2021 accelerated the adoption of e-commerce and remote working, with many businesses looking at digital channels as a long-term investment. According to McKinsey, more than 75% of B2B buyers

favor online channels and remote interactions⁵: a trend that will only continue to evolve, even in a post-pandemic world.

CONNECTED COMMERCE

According to eMarketer, e-commerce sales

grew by 26.3% in Western Europe⁶ which is only likely to continue growing in years to come. To facilitate this, connected commerce solutions that allow transactions to occur anywhere, anytime and over any device are becoming increasingly common and necessary

According to research from the International Data Corporation, **more than two-thirds of the CEOs** from leading global companies **are shifting their focus from traditional and offline marketing practices to digital strategies** in order to meet customer expectations. And, of those CEOs, **34% of them believe that they will navigate through a complete digital transformation within 12 months of the process.**



Keep moving. Keep innovating.

The most important takeaway we can give you is this: **keep moving. Customers, competitors and disruptors aren't sitting still, and neither should leading businesses.** Customers crave meaningful digital experiences that make their lives increasingly more convenient. **They want to be recognized immediately and pick up from wherever they left off** – on any channel. Whether they want to compare products, follow an order status or modify their delivery, they want to do so seamlessly across every interaction.

This new reality presents many challenges to companies. As a distributor or brand manufacturer, you need to understand where your customers are and where you want to go. By taking that first step, wherever you are starting from, you will already be ahead of those who are standing still.

THE ROLE OF THE C-SUITE

Creating connected, personalized B2B customer experiences that increase revenue takes both an organizational and cultural shift. Shifting into a digitally mature organization will take all hands on deck, but there are three roles in particular that have never been more important for this transformation.

THE CDO - DRIVING

Many would argue that digital transformation, data and technology are essential for modern B2B success, which has led to the creation and rise of the Chief Digital Officer (CDO). By having someone who can understand and harness emerging technology to meet the ever-growing digital needs of B2B customers, organizations can ensure that they do not get left behind by competitors.

CDO PERSPECTIVES:

NEEDS:

- A reliable digital landscape
- Partners for growth
- Budget and commitment
- Support from all levels

GAINS:

- Delivering on KPIs
- Affecting core business
- Making their mark
- Driving industry forward

PAINS:

- Arranging and connecting data sources
- Changing legacy processes
- Bridging technology gaps



THE CHALLENGES THAT CDOS FACE

Digital transformation is never easy when you consider legacy systems, internal and external pressures, budget constraints and competitors. While CDOs can wield the power for true change, their goals are not without challenges. But, as we know, challenges can also quickly turn into opportunities.

CHALLENGE 1 – IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH PERSONALIZATION

There is no doubt that personalization is business-critical, and while the idea itself makes sense, the sheer scale of implementing such solutions is no small task. To become customer-centric, businesses need to start right at the beginning with an outside-in lens. They need to fully understand customer needs and profiles, which in turn will affect how solutions will be built and implemented.

The actions of the CDO will be intertwined with that of the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), who will also have their sights on customer-centricity – but from a different perspective. For the CMO, budgets and timelines are essential, and while digital transformation will undoubtedly positively affect these in the long term, the short-term investment of effort and money will be a pain point. Both roles will have to work together with a mutual understanding of each other's priorities.

CHALLENGE 2 – MAKE THE COMPANY DATA-DRIVEN

At the heart of effective personalization lies data, and within that data lies the insights that B2B marketers crave. To get a full view of customer needs, preferences and preferred communications methods, personalization needs to be a core tenet of B2B efforts, rather than just an element. This takes a change of

culture and requires real work and investment.

Marketing automation is not the future: it is today. By employing machine learning, AI and advanced CRM, companies can create the data-driven marketing machine that they need to have. As part of this, the CDO will be working closely with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) to collect, arrange, and learn from all possible data sources.

CHALLENGE 3 – THE COMPANY NEEDS TO TRANSFORM DIGITALLY

Having a data and personalization strategy is heavily dependent on the company culture as a whole, and whether they are adequately primed for true digital transformation. To succeed, all levels of the business – from the boardroom to the juniors – need to take the time to learn new processes and make the most of the new tools available.

By having everyone on board, all customer touchpoints will organically benefit. But the work does not end there. True digital transformation is not just about updating everything: it is about taking those building blocks and leaving the door open for easy scaling, expansion and upgrades. With emerging tech always around the corner, being able to adopt quickly is just as important as the initial transformation itself.



DIGITAL MATURITY IS A CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION

Embracing digital should be at the heart of every company which has to face any of the challenges. The roadmap towards e-commerce success and omnichannel viability differs per market and per company. You will need to know where your company stands.

The Javelin model from the Javelin group describes a four-phase approach towards digital transformation and helps you to ask the right question at the right time.

PHASE 1: EARLY COMMERCE & MULTICHANNEL DEVELOPMENT

E-commerce is started and developed. A new team is put into place.

- How do you nurture a new e-commerce team?
- How to find the newly required digital skills?
- How do you grow your online sales?

PHASE 2: PHASED MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATION

E-commerce grows considerably (5%+). Requirements grow and lead to integration with IT, operations, marketing and merchandising. A shift in focus and internal culture is needed.

- Which functions need to be integrated? In which order?
- How do you retain your skilled workforce?
- How do you persuade «old world» colleagues?

PHASE 3: PREPARATION, MOBILIZATION AND CENTRALIZATION OF DATA & INSIGHT

Data and insight are centralized. A customer-first mindset develops in the company and results in better digital experiences. The spot on the horizon takes shape.

- When are we capable of putting the customer first?
- How do we capture and utilize customer data?
- What is our end-goal?

PHASE 4: FINAL RE-SHAPING OF OMNICHANNEL ORGANIZATION

Optimized, personal experiences across all channels. Product information, purchasing, order tracking and logistics function across all channels. Collected data is analyzed and used to improve experiences.

- How do we create a single, seamless experience across all channels?
- How do we continuously improve and personalize the customer experience?
- How is the responsibility for the customer secured in the whole company?





By determining your e-business maturity, you will find your own state of readiness for the new challenges you face today.

DO NOT SKIP A PHASE UNLESS YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY SURE

When you see the clear business case to step up your game, you will need to begin preparations and mobilize for change.

You may be tempted to jump to phase four and fully embrace omnichannel. However, that would put a dire, long-term restraint on resources and revenue.

Being committed to a project of this scale and impact would leave your company vulnerable to sudden changes in your market.

Each phase will bring new unforeseen hurdles that need to be taken and cleared. Any long-term vision can only work with an underlying practical business approach.

THE CMO – PUSHING FOR INNOVATION

B2B marketing has never moved faster. The global pandemic took 2020 and turned the way the world does business on its head. In their 2020 report, PWC highlighted that the number of companies investing in omnichannel experience has jumped from 20% to more than 80%⁷. This unstoppable force of progress is driving industries forward faster than ever before – and threatens those who don't keep pace.

Enter the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO). Storyteller, growth driver, customer champion, innovation catalyst and everything in between. The ongoing evolution of technology means that they never sit still and that their goals must constantly shift against an increasingly demanding customer base.



CMO PERSPECTIVES:

NEEDS:

- Strong support from leadership
- Customer brand loyalty
- Open doors for ongoing growth

GAINS:

- Standing out from the noise
- Agile responses to business requests
- Increased customer satisfaction

PAINS:

- Changing company culture
- Constant change of technology
- Strong data capability and understanding

CHALLENGE 4 – ENGAGING YOUR CUSTOMERS

All CMOs know that they need to engage customers, but that is easier said than done. In a world where they have had more data than ever, knowing how to interpret and action on that data is another thing entirely. Besides identifying the most valuable information for a particular campaign, they must weave learnings from insights through all relevant touchpoints: no small task.

For instance, consider a customer who has visited a business site and browsed for some time before leaving. Do you bombard them with retargeted ads? Follow up with an email? This is where close collaboration with the CIO makes the difference. By aligning on goals and connecting touchpoints, CMOs will be empowered with insights that can make a real difference.

CHALLENGE 5 – TO OWN THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

B2B customer experience has shifted due to expectations set by the quality of B2C experiences. B2B customers are already likely to be fluent in the world of online shopping and therefore know what a good buying experience looks like. For CMOs, this means that the entire customer experience needs to be watertight and that all relevant touchpoints are consistent both in message and quality.

For example, imagine a disparity between a mobile and desktop experience. With a staggering 91% of B2B buyers using mobile for searching, they expect vendor websites to provide a fast and easy experience. If at any point they leave the funnel from a quality desktop experience and move to a mobile platform that is slower or has limited functionality, they will get frustrated very quickly and will likely drop out.



THE CIO – DELIVERING ARCHITECTURES THAT DELIVER SUPERIOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Technology is now central to B2B communication and CIOs have quickly shifted from being a functional facilitator

to an important strategic leader within an organization. It is not about managing IT systems anymore: it is about understanding technological trends such as AI, mobile-first experiences and personalization to ensure that the business remains competitive and agile.

CIO PERSPECTIVES:

NEEDS:

- Reliable, futureproof IT solutions
- Open-minded leadership
- Budget allocation for digital agility

GAINS:

- Data security compliance
- Support for business growth
- Increased customer satisfaction

PAINS:

- Overspending
- High expectations
- Stakeholder resistance
- Fast-moving competition

CHALLENGE 6 – IMPROVING DIGITAL BUSINESS STRATEGY

The pressures that CIOs face come from both internal and external stakeholders. Colleagues and business partners will also expect their experiences to be fluid and hassle-free, with easy access to the information they need to perform their jobs. Business customers will share these needs, with the added expectations for friction-free, connected interactions that remain valuable, relevant and intuitive.

The very nature of strategy requires that CIOs look at both the micro and macro aspects of business goals. While the bigger picture is always the ultimate aim, it is far too easy to lose sight of the quick wins that can be achieved beforehand. By working together with CMOs and CDOs, the CIO will have the holistic view they need to make meaningful change across the board.

CHALLENGE 7 – KEEPING PACE

Technology moves fast, and CIOs must keep pace with a constantly changing competitive environment.

There are always emerging technologies around the corners, industry disruptors and agile competitors who offer both threats and opportunities.

CIOs will need to successfully deliver digital services that are more customized, innovative, and competitive. As part of this, they will understand and convey the value of technologies such as blockchain, advanced software architectures and AI, together with the justification for investment. However, budgets are not limitless, so they will have to weigh pros and cons to ensure that the money, time, and effort go to the right place.





CDP FOR MASTERING THE B2B CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND PERSONALIZATION

The Customer Data Platform market is expected to grow from nearly 2 billion EUR in 2020 to 8,5 EUR billion in 2025⁸. For many B2B marketers, it has become an essential tool in their ongoing efforts to increase personalization and gives a significant advantage over competitors still using more traditional methods. These six key questions about CDPs will help you understand the benefits and value derived from having one in your tech stack.

WHAT IS A CDP?

Customer Data Platforms are managed systems that facilitate a unified, persistent and agile database of customers that provides a single view across many different viewpoints.

WHY DO YOU NEED A CDP?

The main objective for companies of all sizes is to ultimately offer the right product, to the right people, at the right time. In order to maximize the opportunities for this to happen, marketers need to communicate to target audiences efficiently and engagingly. By providing a single point of data for B2B marketers and leadership, organizations can better maintain and grow their market share within competitive sectors.

WHAT DO YOU USE A CDP FOR?

A CDP is used to manage previously fragmented data across multiple touchpoints, such as customer locations, budgets, purchase history and preferred shipping methods. This provides the capability to track and understand customer behavior across a number of

channels, which in turn allows businesses to make informed decisions based on what their customers truly need, and when.

What kind of data does a CDP work with?

CDPs are very flexible and can organize a range of different data sets. The most common streams include transactional data (previous purchases, purchase frequency, empty carts), campaign behavior (clicks on email campaigns, shares on social media, open rates), online activity (bounce rates, organic traffic, traffic sources) and customer service data (past history, issues resolved or unresolved).

HOW WILL A CDP ALLOW YOU TO PERSONALIZE?

By using a CDP, you'll be able to develop customer intelligence at a more granular and individual level. Through insights across multiple channels, users will be able to have a fuller picture of their target customer and, therefore, be able to create better experiences with more effect.



THE VALUE OF A CDP FOR DIGITAL LEADERSHIP:

CDO:

- A reliable and futureproof digital solution
- A catalyst for digital transformation
- An easily justifiable investment in technology, with measurable ROI
- Parity with competitors

CMO:

- A full view of target audiences
- Significantly less message wastage
- A better view and meeting of KPIs
- Actionable post-campaign insights

CIO:

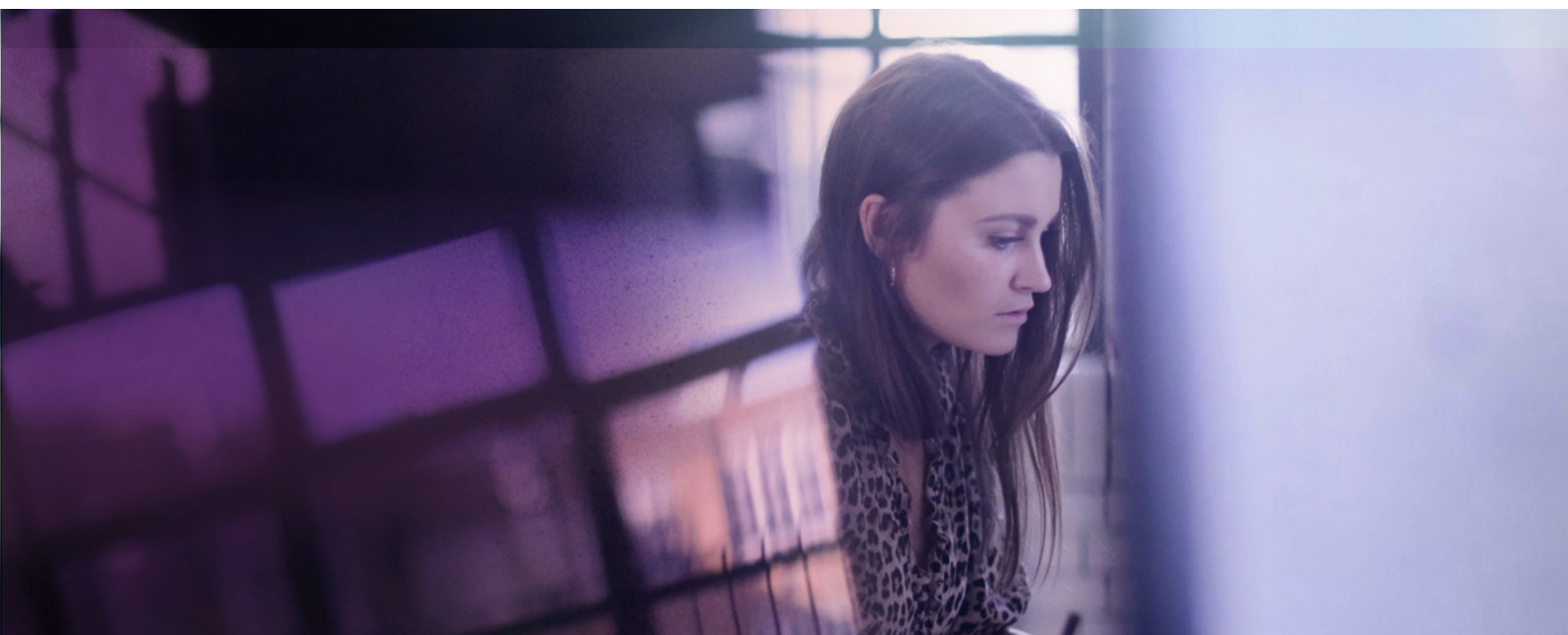
- Better data collection and storage
- Easy integration into existing architectures
- Easier ROI understanding for stakeholders
- A way to remain futureproof and agile

CHOOSING YOUR CDP

Every business will have their own needs, so their CDP solution will need to solve their particular challenge. If you are thinking about implementing a CDP, think about your primary use cases (outbound marketing? Sales?), the types of data that you'll be handling (for example Facebook or Salesforce), how the solution will integrate with your existing tech stack, and how to ensure that your team will be able to use and maintain it throughout employment.

Want to know more about CDPs?

Check out Bloomreach's comprehensive e-book that will help you understand the value a CDP can bring to your business here.





THE BLOOMREACH + SQLI APPROACH TO CDP

Through a unified and single-customer view, achieving efficient **omnichannel marketing is more than just a goal – it's a reality.**

As a leader in their field, Bloomreach leads the charge in Commerce Experience, **pushing the standards of unified customer and product data to new levels using cutting-edge technologies.**

CDP can be a powerful tool, but all platforms are not built equal. By combining the minds, talent and technology of Bloomreach's CDP and marketing automation capability, a better kind of e-commerce has emerged.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

The combination of Bloomreach's advanced commerce experience technology with customer data processing means that addressing the challenges of today's CIO, CMO and CDO can be successfully met, head-on. With the right tools, they can solve the several challenges to digital success:

1. Improve customer experience with personalization
2. Make the company data-driven
3. Enable digital transformation
4. Know and understand customers
5. Own the customer experience from A-Z
6. Employ better business strategy
7. Keep pace with a dynamic industry

THE SQLI APPROACH

As a full-service digital agency, we are here to craft experiences that go deeper. By building and growing your digital business value, we help you to define and exceed your digital success. We are e-business builders and thinkers who are eager to understand what makes your business move forward:

CONTACT US



We create business value by digitization.

Putting your customer first means embracing digital. We help you grow your e-commerce and deliver the best digital experiences that delight your customers.

We build the architecture that delivers value.

The growing digital landscape calls for an evolutionary approach. We are here to make that happen for you.

We make your IT both future-proof and innovative across all touchpoints.

Overcome the challenges of today and set the pace for tomorrow.

We are committed to your digital success.

As your long-term partner, we consider your success to be our success.

We approach your business challenges with a can-do mindset.

We are the partner that bridges the gaps between IT, business and marketing.

READY FOR PERSONALIZING YOUR B2B CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES?

Contact Ellen Bex directly via Ellen.Bex@sqli.com or +32 497 21 90 70.



ABOUT THE SQLI GROUP:

Created in 1990, **SQLI is a European services group dedicated to the Digital world**, specialised in the design, implementation, global deployment and operation of omnichannel solutions. Its positioning as a commerce and technology specialist enables its teams of experts to provide long-term support to major European companies and brands in developing their sales and brand awareness as well as their internal performance **by reinventing the customer, partner and employee experience.**

Its 2,100 employees work in 13 countries: France, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, South Africa, Morocco and Dubai. In 2020, the SQLI Group generated revenue of €214 million. **SQLI has been listed on Euronext Paris (SQL) since 21 July, 2000.**

ABOUT BLOOMREACH:

Bloomreach is the leader in Commerce Experience™ — empowering brands to deliver customer journeys so personalized, they feel like magic. **Bloomreach Experience**, the digital experience platform built for commerce, includes three pillars: **Discovery**, offering AI-driven search and merchandising; **Content**, offering a headless CMS; and **Engagement**, offering a leading CDP and marketing automation solutions. Together, these pillars form the only platform that combines the power of unified customer and product data with the speed and scale of AI-optimization, enabling measurable digital commerce experiences that drive real results. Bloomreach serves over 700 global brands including Albertsons, Bosch, Puma, FC Bayern München, and Marks & Spencer, and powers over \$250 billion in commerce annually.

For more information visit **Bloomreach.com**

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