

OMNI CHANNEL MARKETING

DISMISS IT AT YOUR PERIL • By Mike Harley



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It's a typical Tuesday night in the Scott household, as Steve and Tracy cuddle on the couch to watch TV, Steve with his mobile phone nearby and Tracy surfing the Internet on her tablet as they both listen to the television and chat. They're about to celebrate their anniversary, and have been researching a fun weekend getaway for weeks now.

As the "Travel Channel" counts down the most romantic travel destinations, inspiration strikes. Tracy finds an inexpensive flight on a booking engine and buys their tickets, while Steve grabs his phone and searches for the best price for the hotel depicted on the show and reserves their rental car. He books and pays online, sending a copy of the confirmations to Tracy to keep on her tablet.

The next day at work, Tracy remembers that they need to make parking reservations, so she pulls up her social media profile on her mobile phone. Her mom had recently traveled for work, and shared with Tracy a discount offer for the parking facility. Tracy has never used the off-site location before, but her mom's recommendation and the discount offer on social media encourage her to give it a try. She copies the link and emails it to Steve at home, so he can reserve their parking on his laptop.

With a few clicks, their reservations are finalized, and Tracy and Steve are all set to enjoy their spontaneous anniversary getaway!

Evolution of the consumer purchasing path

The scenario depicted above is a daily occurrence in many homes around the world. According to a 2015

survey by global marketing and technology agency DigitasLBi, today's consumer uses an average of five connected devices in the purchase process, compared with 2.8 devices just one year ago.

The traditional linear funnel sales model is all but a thing of the past, even in the parking industry. Today's consumers follow any path they want, and can reach your business in a multitude of ways. It has become the responsibility and challenge of business owners to reach their customers how they want, when they want, along with remembering customer preferences and anticipating their needs.

The challenge of 'omni-channel marketing'

Omni-channel marketing (OCM) has become a buzzword in the marketing space recently, but what exactly does it mean? At its best, OCM is a multichannel approach to selling a product or service that focuses on creating a seamless, integrated and consistent shopping experience across all channels, whether desktop, mobile, tablet, telephone or in-person.

What makes OCM challenging is integrating all these channels and consolidating the data across each channel to arrive at a cohesive snapshot of the customer.

To the business owner, omni-channel marketing can appear daunting — so many platforms to consider, so much content to create, and lots of complicated technology to deal with. While omni-channel does involve planning and focus, in today's marketplace, OCM has become a necessary undertaking as your customers expect more in their online shopping experience.

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Where's the best place to focus? Where your customer is!

With so many platforms available today, it's easy to become overwhelmed very quickly. The key to OCM is not about hitting as many channels as you can, but rather integrating seamlessly into the main channels that your customers are using to create an experience that is natural, uncomplicated and, above all, useful.

A helpful exercise for you as the business owner is to test your current user experience to understand your customer's journey. Utility and simplicity are key when creating a positive online shopping experience.

How do you manage all of that data? Work toward a single view!

One of the biggest challenges for business owners with OCM is combining all customer data from disparate sources into a single view for interpretation. Unless you have built your marketing engine from the beginning with omni-channel in mind, it's entirely likely that you have different systems to manage different touch points.

Technology to integrate these touch points is what makes OCM possible, and very often, that comes at a price. When considering technology options, it's important to remember that the investment will ultimately pay for itself in increased revenue.

If you don't have the budget to invest in a data management tool, you can start by pulling in data from the different digital marketing sources that you are currently deploying and manually tie them together.

While interpreting all of these data seems like a big task, the information can provide valuable insight into other areas of the business,

in addition to marketing. Customer data also can be used to improve customer service and support, as you will know the most appropriate channels in which to communicate with your customers and be able to anticipate their needs based on past history.

How do you measure success? It's more than just ROI!

The ultimate goal is to show success in the most holistic way possible. You can start by digging into your data to determine which channels are providing the greatest opportunities for returns. Remember that there's more to attribution than just ROI; knowing which channels resonate with your customers will help you to design more effective campaigns and ultimately reduce your cost per action.

When should you deploy an omni-channel strategy? The time is now!

It's an unfortunate reality in the world of business that some of us are slow to accept change. The challenge today is that consumers are not.

Throughout the day, they are jumping from device to device with a level of comfort and ease, planning trips, business meetings, and making reservations and booking parking. Customers choose businesses that offer the best experiences, not only in-person, but now online, as well.

If you don't make the time and effort to engage in an omni-channel marketing strategy to integrate your marketing and technology to streamline your customers' online buying experiences, you can be certain that a competitor will soon come along that will.

Whether operating at an airport, cruise port, hotel or downtown lot, the time to immerse yourself in omni-channel is now.

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What is Omni-Channel?
SMC is the first company to deliver an Omni-Channel central reservations system with endless capabilities for its clients to create a homogeneous customer experience across all channels in multiple languages and currencies.