

Data visualisation tools provide a view of the customer journey beyond marketing

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13 Nov 2017

Most organisations today are taking a more data-driven approach to everything from sales and marketing to operations and human resources. Yet few of them have the real-time reporting information or the integrated, holistic view of their businesses that they need to truly maximise the value of their data and analytics.



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In many organisations, it can take six weeks or more to receive reports in a format that anyone in the business can understand with a glance—based on data that might already be out of date. What's more, data often sits in siloes scattered across the enterprise; even where consolidated reports are available, they may exclude many parts of the business.

The result is that the sales team may have data on hand about orders placed and fulfilled as well as inventory levels, yet little insight into how marketing has helped to achieve conversions or how many complaints the service team is fielding about a particular product line. Distribution and production might have sales forecasts, but no data about customer satisfaction.

Bringing it all together

The marketing department, meanwhile, may be happy with its brand health tracking, ad reports, social media monitoring and web analytics, yet struggle to accurately attribute the impact of marketing spending on sales. Indeed, few marketing departments can yet model the impact of different channels and touch points on customer conversions.

Thus, one of the largest challenges that organisations face in becoming more data-driven is to bring data together from different systems across and within departments to provide the big picture about how customer behaviour, sales, branding and marketing efforts, production, customer service and other facets of the business interact to drive sales and profits.

It is here where the latest data visualisation tools can play an important role, allowing executives to turn the data from different systems, channels and departments into purpose-built dashboards that offer a view of how their business is doing. They provide visual cues of the customer journey that spans from finance to operations to sales and marketing.

New insights unlocked

Suddenly, new insights are unlocked for everyone in the business. Consider a car manufacturer and its dealer network as an example. With access to richer data from production and sales, marketers can begin to really optimise performance. They can see how sales of the new car model are performing by region, perhaps gaining insight into how well regional marketing and advertising activations are working.

It becomes possible to get a view of how online customer engagements are bringing people into the showroom as well as the halo effect traditional branding advertising has on sales. Sales and marketing can correlate a dip in customer satisfaction (reflected in negative social sentiment and complaints to dealers and the call centre) with a drop in sales. They can look into inventory and fulfilment data to see whether a colour or model going out of stock has hurt sales.

Getting to this level of insight demands some level of data consolidation, standardisation of data formats and effort to clean and de-duplicate dirty data. With robust data governance and a sound data architecture, data visualisation tools can provide a common 'truth' that can be shared throughout the business – from the marketing team to the CEO.

Visual dashboards and reports can be shared and discussed between various disciplines, enabling better strategies and cross functional collaboration. These tools can automate the process of pulling data from different sources into a single view, allowing different users to customise the dimensions, metrics and segments that matter to them.

A process-driven approach

It takes a process-driven yet agile approach, focusing on answering the right questions with relevant and accurate data. In our experience, when C-suite executives start digging into the wealth of data the rest of the organisation has, they start small but soon find they need more and more data sources to answer the new questions their initial queries raise.

The result is better customer knowledge, engagements and experiences, used to craft strategies that grow the business. The results: a full understanding of the customer journeys, from pre-purchase to post-sales. This can help marketers craft engaging experiences that secure conversions and drive profitable business growth.

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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