

COLUMNS

## Single-channel approaches to customer conversations will not work

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By **Steve Gershik**

Another Valentine's Day has come and gone. However, the last thing we should do is put solid thoughts of relationships on ice for another 11 months, especially if we as marketers are expecting to do better with our customers and prospects in 2015.

Granted, we talk a good game. Much of the last 20 years in digital marketing have been devoted to attempting to mimic successful human relationships. That has consisted of reading digital body language, creating predictive marketing engines, and leaping enthusiastically on each and every new communications channel open to us.

And where are we now? Still about as clumsy a Casanova as ever, ham-fistedly bringing up in conversation a film someone watched six months ago, completely out of context and usually then the other party is busy attempting to do something different. That is not love. That is creepy.

So what is the answer?

**Force of sales**

One thing I do love about a customer relationship management company like Salesforce is that as a platform, it consistently enables teams to truly focus on and understand the individual as people. It enables sales associates to piece together and record what matters most to a contact, and create a genuine conversation with them. And it is the quest for the perfect conversation that is the basis for all good relationships.

That is also why marketers tend to be jealous of our colleagues in sales.

In the latter there is an opportunity to speak directly to people and build up that kind of rapport that until now, at least has only been possible between human beings, rather than a person on the one hand and a computer on the other.

In marketing and, particularly business-to-consumer marketing, "it's complicated."

If you are dealing with millions of individuals, actually knowing their name and what they care about is going to be tough. But there are signs that the great relationships built on tools created by Salesforce and others will soon be available to marketers as well.

**Morning after**

As anyone who uses a mobile phone knows, understanding and communicating with customers is something with which most organizations really do struggle.

I do not know about you, but I am tired of sharing my bed with a device that wakes me up at 4 in the morning to tell

me my daughter's virtual pet needs feeding.

But like I say: that is changing. Through the processing of billions of events a day, we really get to know everything about the mobile user. And that knowledge is the foundation stone of genuinely targeted, meaningful campaigns that, yes, are more effective, but perhaps more importantly when it comes to building relationships, less annoying.

The products and attitudes that can deliver genuinely relevant and delightful conversations are out there. Organizations that want to succeed tomorrow will start using them today.

That quest for perfect conversations does not stop at mobile, either. We would not put up with a partner who only spoke to us when we were at home.

Similarly, single-channel approaches to customer conversations will not work in today's always connected or omnichannel world. That is why our customers put great consideration into ensuring that mobile works alongside conventional online and even bricks-and-mortar channels to deliver seamless experiences.

AS A RESULT, marketers are beginning to enjoy the same relationship-building power that sales teams have enjoyed. And it is those tools that enable us to have our customers fall in love with us all over again. So in the spirit of Valentine's Day, marketers should seize the opportunity and really get engaged.

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