

# Customer Journeys in 2021: A Three- Part Strategy for Upping Your Game



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Digital marketers have been talking about the promise of customer journeys for years. The vision of great customer experience has never been closer to reality than now, in 2021. Customer expectations are higher than ever and most companies are now competing on customer experience. It has become the strategic imperative.

Consumers feel so strongly about great customer experience that they are willing to pay a 16% price premium for it (PwC). The marketer's workflow is not the customer journey. Never lose sight of the fact that the customers are the drivers and marketers are the pit crew. As a marketer, it's your job to remove the obstacles in your customers' paths, facing your own obstacles on the way. Unified customer profile, artificial intelligence, decision engines, one-to-one personalization, omnichannel orchestration—why are these such hot topics today? And what should you be doing about them?

## Why Customer Journeys Matter to Consumers

Customers are digital, unpredictable, and easy to lose. At least 32% of customers stop doing business with a brand they love after only one bad experience (PwC). This speaks to how easy it is for a brand to slip when it comes to delighting the consumer.

Consumers have broad criteria for evaluating customer experience (CX) and choosing relationships. Sure, low prices are great, but 77% of customers, especially Gen Z, are choosing businesses that share their values (Havas). They want your company to care about the environmental impact of making, delivering, using and discarding a product. They want your company's support for communities the customer cares about.

## Why Customer Journeys Matter to Businesses

The consensus among business leaders is that the future of their companies depends on great customer journeys. A customer journey is the decisions made by the customer as they interact with your brand through whatever means available to them. It's your job as a marketer to make that journey as frictionless and enjoyable as possible. Unified customer profiles—real-time data that comes from *active listening* and intelligent decisioning—combined with omnichannel orchestration and execution via all desired delivery channels are the technology underpinnings of great customer journeys.

The investment has big payback for business as well as for customers. Companies that deliver superior customer experience bring in 5.7 times more revenue than their competitors ([RetailCustomerExperience](#)).

Customer experience drives over two-thirds of customer loyalty, more than 'brand' and 'price' combined ([Gartner](#)). But most consumers continue to be disappointed by brands. They are struggling through paths that are steep and strewn with obstacles.

A marketer's own path to achieving customer journey excellence has historically been just as steep and boulder-strewn as today's average customer journey. In a way, it's tougher for the marketer, because she carries a heavy pack of tools and can't quit the journey just because it's hard.

## What's Changed with Customer Journeys in 2021

But the situation is changing dramatically, now, for three reasons:

- The marketer's pack is getting lighter, because the tools have improved so much, taking a great leap forward in 2021.
- The tools take over more of the work, eliminating and automating what was formerly a lot of heavy lifting or even just not possible given the scale of billions of data points.
- More than 8 out of 10 companies now compete on customer experience ([Gartner](#)). No surprise that currently 83% of executives feel that unimproved CX presents them with considerable revenue and market share risks ([Forbes / Arm Treasure Data](#)).

## Three Things You Should Consider for Your Customer Journey Strategy

How can you take advantage of these changes, both long term and immediately?



1. Know your customers and engage them in their timeframe, aided by real-time customer insights & engagement.



2. Keep the messages & offers consistent throughout the journey, using modern omnichannel orchestration & execution.



3. Automate decisions with AI, to artfully use the billions of data points created every second to achieve in-the-moment personalization at scale.

# Know Your Customers and Engage Them “Now”

In the best customer journeys, the customer encounters exactly what he needs and wants, at the right moment, and he rewards a business by committing to it.

Great, but how do you recognize customers, know useful things about them, and know what they are doing *right now*?

A unified customer profile pulls together all the useful customer information — behavioral, transactional, financial, and operational — from all the systems that create and observe it. Once you have a comprehensive view of each customer, you can listen more effectively. Signals from customer actions—however nuanced or granular—are not only more complete and timely, but are more detectable. By fusing these diverse data together, suddenly you have engageable insights. You can discern why customers are engaging, and better predict what will excite them. You can drive more responsive and personalized customer journeys and design better segments for your campaigns.

In the past, the unified profile has reflected the past—last year, last month, last week. With the advent of real-time capabilities, you can interact in the customer’s timeframe, responding immediately to the signals coming from customer behaviors. “Real time” is your conduit to the customer’s “now.” For example, a media site texts breaking news about a quarterback to all fans of a certain football team, capturing customer traffic from customers who want to know more. Or the instant a customer takes up an offer while online, they’re removed from the text blast that makes a conflicting offer.

Most companies today are rich in data volume, but only 23 percent of executives rate their organization as “very strong” in their speed of gaining accurate insights ([Adobe Digital Trends](#)).

Without the insights and the real-time data, companies fall back on simplistic segments and history. They treat “Chrome users on Sundays” as a uniform segment and show content that was popular last month. This situation is so widespread that only 14% of customers report being happy with business communication ([EY](#)).

But your company has a customer profile, right? Maybe even a few different ones? Data sources are built into every tool used by marketers and customer-facing organizations—there’s no shortage of data. But the point is to have a ‘single source of truth’, not a bunch of disparate data sources—as good as they might be. Chances are, not one of them on its own is enough to inform or power the connected customer journey.

A unified real-time customer profile is fundamental and essential to journey-wide customer engagement. If your digital marketing, email campaigns, purchase and support history, are not fused together—and augmented with fresh insights—customers are destined to hit unproductive detours, or worse, dead ends. Imagine a customer reacting to a great text offer (sent at the perfect time, with irresistible wording) pursuing it via your mobile app, and on arriving curbside to pick up her item, to not have her item waiting for her when she gets there. Ball dropped. Poor customer experience.

How organizations approach technology infrastructure is a key variable in their ability to quickly assemble and understand customers and digital signals. Organizations using a cloud-connected platform to integrate their customer and marketing data, either solely or in concert with existing systems, are more than twice as likely to be “very strong” in speed to insight than companies with an in-house platform or ad hoc solutions ([Adobe](#)).



# Harmonize Marketing Actions and Individual Engageable Moments

Your customers expect to seamlessly shift among channels while experiencing their customer journeys and your marketing campaigns. Brands with effective omnichannel engagement programs keep 89% of their customers ([Aberdeen Group](#)). Adobe recently found that companies with the strongest omni-channel customer engagement strategies enjoy a 10% Y-O-Y growth, a 10% increase in average order value and a 25% increase in close rates ([Adobe AEC Impact](#)).

But 87% of consumers think brands need to do more to provide a seamless experience. ([BRP](#)) Marketers agree: sixty percent said that if they were a customer of their own digital experience, they would "possibly" or "definitely" get frustrated ([Adobe DT](#)).

What does it take to modernize your omnichannel customer journey, and deliver consistent personalized experiences across channels?

Let's face it, managing customer journeys can be a tricky business. Whether you're a lifecycle marketer or a product manager, you're trying to strike the balance between 'marketing to' and 'having a conversation with' your customer. Harmonizing these efforts has been challenging—if not impossible—in the past. Not only have marketing teams often operated in their own swim lane, with their own demand and conversion goals, but disparate tech stacks have perpetuated a siloed approach to CX.

If a centralized cross-channel profile is the engine to power customer journey management, a unified application that sits on top of it is the cockpit where the action takes place. Imagine an application that facilitates cross-journey workflows and at the same time connects customer insights and impacts every step of the way. Practitioners want intuitive journey and message design tools that can easily access brand assets and content—as well as clear goal-setting, analytics and reporting—in a single canvas. Less heavy lifting, more productivity. The lack of streamlined workflows connecting interactions across the customer lifecycle—from marketing through operational notifications—has hobbled marketer productivity and effectiveness since the advent of digital marketing, but it is within reach in 2021.



# Automate Decisions to Achieve Personalization at Scale

If they had positive experiences throughout the customer journey, 65% of respondents say they would become long-term customers of a brand ([Forbes / Arm Treasure Data](#)).

Of course you want your customer journeys to be brilliantly nimble. All you have to do is support the million different steps customers might take, and the trillions of ways they might take them. In today's B2C environment, billions of customer records and events occur daily, reflecting billions of decisions.

This is not work for humans. You need automation for modeling, predicting, and decision making, handling tens of millions of messages per minute. But having AI somewhere in your portfolio doesn't cut it.

You need an intelligent, automated decision engine to analyze customer context and choose the next best action for a customer, in a manner that supports your business goals. You need AI to create and use models strategically to find the best results. You need reliable predictions on customer engagement, optimal times for messaging, and proven content. With this intelligence, you can achieve a level of personalization that spans the journey across time and channels, a journey that is personalized to the customer's "now". And all these capabilities need to share the same data, the same business goals, and the one window you use for all things customer.

In this environment, your emails hit customers when they are most likely to read them, with the most engaging subject lines. When using your mobile app, customers see content that is most likely to interest them and keep the interaction moving forward. This

intelligent decisioning and prediction platform would instantly know the next best action at first touch, such as for a customer arriving at a product page from a Google search.

## Summary

Most companies aren't in position to bring their customer journeys up to customer expectations. Workflow, legacy tech, and a lack of digital skills are the top three barriers to great digital experiences.

In addition to the unified customer profile, the single canvas, the AI and decisioning engine, your company must be organized, measured and motivated to use them. There must be a strategy and goals to support the changes that customer journey improvements invariably demand.

A good starting point is understanding your company's plans for a unified customer profile, and what technology limitations might impede adoption of cloud native services that will put the unified app at your fingertips.



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