

Acquia
EXPERIENCE DIGITAL FREEDOM

***HOW DATA DRIVES
THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE***



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Making It Personal

Consumers and the brands that market to them seem to agree on one thing: You have to make it personal. Recent Acquia research on customer experience, involving 6,000 consumers and 600 marketers, demonstrated this quite clearly.

On the one hand, consumers say:

 **80%** “I would be more loyal to a brand that showed they really understood me and what I was looking for.”

 **76%** “If a brand understands me at a personal level, I’m more likely to be loyal to them.”

On the other hand, marketers say:

 **83%** “Personalization for customers and personalization for potential customers is part of our marketing strategy for the next 12 months.”

And marketers understand that personalization has to remain consistent across channels. They expect technology to facilitate that consistency:

 **84%** “I need my various marketing technology solutions to work together to create one cohesive experience for the end customer.”

This cohesive experience is inevitably made up of individual experiences and those experiences are digital. But what exactly is a **“digital experience?”**

“You cannot market globally anymore. You need messages that resonate with a single person... a single industry.”

- An Acquia Customer

SECTION 1

Defining Digital Experience



Defining Digital Experience

Digital experiences consist of all interactions between consumers and brands taking place via digital channels. These channels include websites, email, social media, digital advertising, apps, and even products, platforms and product ecosystems (including online marketplaces such as Salesforce AppExchange).

Marketing today is increasingly focused on **influencing customers** through these digital channels, which essentially comes down to creating, managing and orchestrating digital experiences across the customer journey. And doing that requires **understanding, tracking and, ultimately, personalizing** these experiences.

Data drives this process. Data enables brands to see what consumers are doing – how and where they are interacting with the brand – and, more importantly, data makes it possible to craft and influence those interactions.

Of course, brands collect so much customer data in digital interactions that the primary challenge to effective digital experience comes down to a brand's ability to work with data. We refer to all the steps that a brand must take to do this effectively as “the data journey.”



Asking the Right Questions

According to Tony Bailey, SVP of technology at Digitas, an Acquia partner, when crafting successful digital experiences, there are **three major questions companies must consider**:

1. What do consumers want from your brand and what do they expect you to do for them?
2. Do you have the data you need to meet these expectations?
3. What can you do to remove friction in digital journeys and where can technology help you meet your goals and support change?

SECTION 2

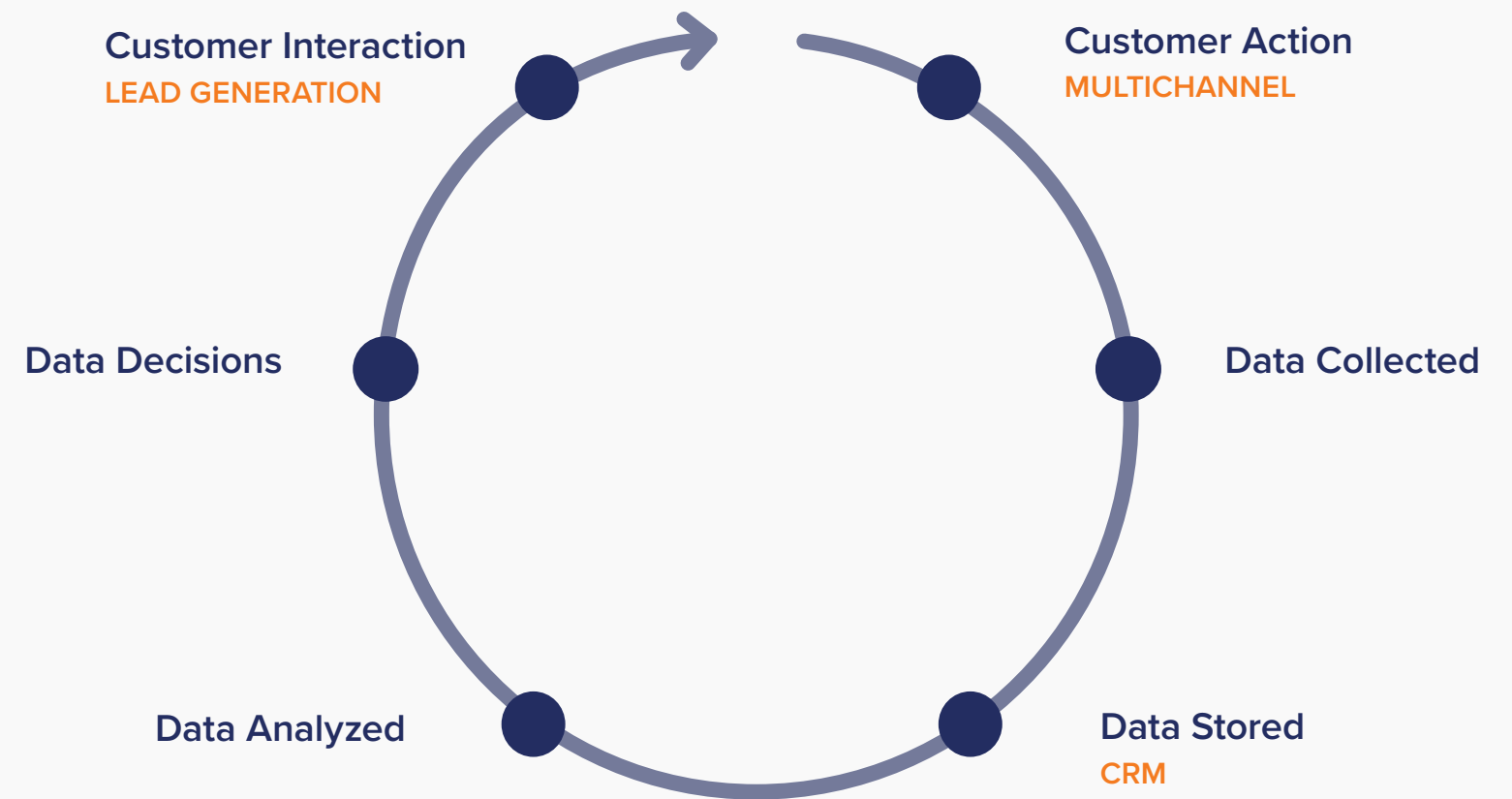
The Data Journey



The Data Journey

At the highest level, there are two aspects to the data journey that every brand must undertake: Data Collection (identifying and collecting customer profile data to store and/or organize in the CRM) and Data Action (taking action on the data from the CRM, e.g., showing personalized content to a web visitor).

While there are many potential substeps at each phase, the entire journey can be visualized in this way:



Data Collection and Storage

When it comes to data collection and storage, there are two related goals that brands pursue. First, they seek to create a comprehensive, 360° view of each customer. Second, brands seek to “score” each individual to understand where they are in the buying cycle, the likelihood of making a sale and more. The first set of data points will inform how the experience gets personalized. The second set will influence the specific experience that the brand delivers to this customer (intended to move them through the steps of the customer journey).

The journey starts with a customer action that allows marketers to collect data (the customer visits the website, downloads a content asset, engages with a social media promotion or an ad, etc.) and eventually ends with an outbound interaction (a personalized web experience, an email recommending additional content, a special offer, etc.). As straightforward as this framework may seem, it is fraught with challenges in reality.



Context Is Everything

The first step to creating better experiences is listening to what your customers are telling you when they open an email, visit a web page or add an item to their online shopping cart. There is an unprecedented amount of data available today. Brands just need to learn the right way to respond to it.

“You should be reacting to what customers are sharing in a way that makes sense,” David Mitchell, CTO at VMLY&R, an Acquia partner, says. The need to individualize messaging and activate it across multiple channels, regions and divisions is a necessity for digital marketers who want to earn consumer trust.

“That’s why personalization tools, like Acquia Lift, are so critical because they help you combine, reuse and redistribute in a productive way. It means you can apply messages in the right context without having to rewrite everything,” David says.

The challenges begin with data collection. First of all, you need to determine what specific data you want to collect and how you will collect it. Figuring out how to collect data (through forms, through cookies, etc.) is a technical challenge. Figuring out what data to collect is a business challenge that is determined by business strategy as well as technical constraints.

Other data collection challenges involve manual steps for data entry and storage. Manual steps become necessary in the absence of automated methods for bringing together clean and attributed data collected from different channels via diverse platforms or solutions. Naturally, whenever manual steps are involved, data collection can be plagued with inaccuracy and lack of consistency.

Challenges associated with data storage arise from the fact that each unique solution collecting customer data represents a potential data silo. To be truly actionable, data needs to be consolidated in a single system of record, serving as a **single source of truth** for customer data. The system that brands most frequently rely on to store their customer data is their CRM. Transferring data into this system requires technical expertise because mapping data from one source to another (i.e., Drupal → Salesforce Sales Cloud) involves knowledge of both systems' data models.



Taking Action: From Analysis to Decisioning

Customer data is most valuable when it can be employed to personalize and improve digital experiences. It can only be so employed if it has been turned into actionable intelligence. For this reason, the next phase of the customer data journey involves analysis (**what does the data say?**) and decision making (**what should happen next?**).

Some of the challenges brands experience in this phase stem from an inability to adequately aggregate their data during the storage phase. **Silos remain.** Other challenges are related to business strategy, insofar as they have not clearly defined the types of analysis they want to perform on the data.

In the research Acquia conducted on the customer data journey, two thirds of the customers we spoke with focused primarily on improving data collection, indicating just how challenging this stage of the data journey can be. **The remaining third were focused on data analysis**, with a range of applied analytic methods including everything from basic, statistical analysis to predictive modeling and forecasting.

“We have access to 1 million data points; that’s not the obstacle here... the real obstacle is [identifying] what pieces of data are valid and what is usable to me or meaningful given a particular circumstance.”

- An Acquia Customer

Data analysis drives decisions at two levels. On the strategic level, brands analyze the data they have collected to inform a number of marketing activities – market segmentation, content creation, demand and lead generation, customer retention efforts, etc. On a tactical level, they use this analysis to guide the actual personalization of specific digital experiences. While such personalization can take the relatively coarse form of personalization by customer segment, e.g., personalizing digital experiences based on geography or industry, it can become increasingly granular, depending on the solutions being used, the accurate identification of the customer and the completeness of that customer’s data profile.



Customer Interactions Lead to Customer Actions

The ultimate outcome of data collection, storage and analysis is a **data-driven customer interaction**. If that interaction is appropriately personalized and designed with the goal of driving the next relevant step in the customer journey, it should result in further customer action. In this way, the cycle begins again, ideally with a continuously deepening understanding of the customer and increased engagement with the brand.

Unfortunately, things don't always work out that way. Instead, brands find that they don't have all the data they need to make the most strategic decisions or achieve the levels of consistent personalization their customers expect. Thus, in order to manage digital experiences more effectively, they seek to improve data collection.

Sometimes this means connecting with external data systems, payroll and ERP systems, for example, or even third-party systems. Sometimes this means incorporating other types of data, such as sentiment data gathered through social listening tools, in the analysis and decisioning process.

What's the bottom line? A data-informed digital experience strategy starts with data collection. With better data collection, brands can get more value out of their marketing automation tools and continuously improve their personalization efforts. And when personalization improves, so does the digital experience, bringing greater **customer engagement, loyalty and, ultimately, spend**.

When customer interactions are appropriately personalized, they should result in further customer action.

Tear Down Those Walls

No matter what, coordinating and personalizing customer experiences across all channels requires the ability to **eliminate these data silos** and **unify customer data**.

Todd Barker, senior director of technology at Acquia partner Grey Midwest says, “The digital ecosystem has become **enormously complex**, and one of the biggest hurdles I’ve seen our customers face is that much of their consumer data is siloed in different systems. Breaking down these data silos in order to build a holistic view for each individual consumer can feel overwhelming, but the result of doing so can have a profound effect and **dramatically improve both consumer satisfaction and business results.**”

SECTION 3

Measuring Digital Experience



Measuring Digital Experience

Digital marketing has long appealed to marketers thanks to its promise of total, closed-loop visibility into marketing activity. At least in theory, any interactions brands have with customers through digital channels – in other words, any digital experiences – should be trackable and thereby measurable. Of course, as many digital marketers have discovered, tracking and measuring digital experiences is easier said than done.

Looking back at the customer data journey we have just described, we find a parallel journey that brands must undertake. Yes, they need to **collect, store, analyze and use data to create a 360° view** of the customer and improve digital experiences across the customer journey. At the same time, brands also need to collect, store and analyze data to measure the **effectiveness** of those digital experience efforts and digital marketing initiatives.

To track the effectiveness of digital marketing – **websites, email campaigns, search marketing and online advertising, etc.** – brands use a host of metrics:

- Actual vs. predicted web traffic
- Bounce rates
- Email opens
- Click counts (per option)
- Unsubscribes
- Bounces
- Site visits
- Specific page visits
- Webinar attendance
- Registrations
- Asset download frequency
- And so on...

Collecting relevant digital marketing data is becoming increasingly simple. Point solutions today tend to include basic data capture and analytics functionality. The real challenges lie in determining **which metrics actually matter to the business and how best to use the data to improve marketing efforts.**

Consume, Interpret, Respond

To address these challenges, companies – especially resource-constrained companies in the mid-market – need two things. First, they need **dashboards** that make it easy for them to consume and interpret data. Second, they need concrete **guidance** regarding how to act on the data.

Sometimes, in order to respond meaningfully to the data, a change of tactics and/or strategy is called for. In these cases, companies may need an **external advisor** to help them formulate logical next steps. In other situations, guidance can and should take the form of **rules-based automation**. In such cases, companies can let the data drive next-best marketing actions.

The Right Tools for the Job

Creating and delivering engaging and effective digital experiences is hard enough. **Measuring the effectiveness** of your efforts and continually improving them adds a whole other level of complexity to the digital marketer's responsibilities. In order to address this complexity, marketers need the proper tools. In fact, they need a **coherent and flexible platform** that can not only support their current marketing approach but also adapt to emerging marketing needs.



SECTION 4

What Are the Platform Requirements for Digital Experience Management?



What Are the Platform Requirements for Digital Experience Management?

While different types of businesses have their own specific digital experience needs, all organizations start at the same place. The table stakes for digital experience management begin with a **content management system (CMS)** upon which a brand's website is built, and a **customer relationship management (CRM)** solution where customer data is stored. Since email remains the leading customer communication tool, brands need either an **email service provider (ESP)** or a robust marketing automation system. Once lines of communication have been established, organizations increasingly require a means to personalize the messages they send.

This makes personalization and optimization tools the next fundamental piece of a digital experience platform. Both personalized and generic messaging benefit from **digital asset management (DAM)**, so depending on the size of the organization, a DAM solution may also be necessary. Finally, many organizations will also need some kind of e-commerce platform and, as the need for data management becomes critical, a **customer data platform (CDP)**.



Beyond these table stakes, there are literally thousands of tools and modules that companies could integrate into their digital experience stack. For this reason, and because there is **no all-in-one tool** that can address the diverse and constantly evolving digital experience needs of companies today, brands should seek flexibility and openness in the solutions they choose.

In other words, **it's not about finding something that does everything**. Instead, it's about building your digital experience stack on an open foundation that is capable of integrating with any other solutions you may need as your business and your requirements grow.

Because there is no all-in-one tool that can address the diverse and constantly evolving digital experience needs of companies today, brands should seek flexibility and openness in the solutions they choose.

SECTION 5

**Data Strategy Fuels Digital
Experience Management**



Data Strategy Fuels Digital Experience Management

Customer data is key to digital experience management. But collecting, analyzing and leveraging customer data requires a data strategy. In many ways, the customer data journey truly begins with this strategy.

Here are three things you can do to accelerate your customer data journey and deliver the kinds of consistent digital experiences that create loyal customers:

1. Clearly Define the Data You Need

In order to collect the right data, you need to know what you're looking for. And that means having a clear understanding of what you need your data to do. Is your data meant to help you better understand and segment your market? Do you need the data to evaluate and improve your marketing activities? Or should the data help you create a comprehensive view of your customers to enable increasingly more refined personalization?

The answer might be all of the above. The important thing is to identify the purpose(s) of your data collection so that you know exactly what data you are actually going to collect and use and can prioritize your efforts based on any constraints, such as data limits in CRMs, that you may have to contend with.

2. Integrate Your Systems and Silos

Modern marketing relies on a plethora of platforms and solutions. And companies have been challenged to find a single solution that will collect, store, analyze and deploy the data needed to deliver and manage digital experiences. That being said, Acquia has long been committed to the development of an open, configurable framework that brings together a number of tools – from content and digital asset management to data collection, storage and analysis to personalization – that begin to fill this gap. With the recent acquisition of AgilOne’s CDP capabilities, the critical elements of this framework are now in place.

The key to this framework is extensibility. Business requirements, along with customer expectations and the channels you use to engage with your customers, will continue to evolve. Accordingly, the solutions you choose need to be extensible – that is, able to integrate with any new or emerging solutions your business requires. The need to be extensible and adaptable should also serve as a reminder to carefully think through any customization of the tools you rely on. It’s easy to customize for current requirements, but it’s also easy to accrue “technical debt” this way, making it more difficult for your solutions to adapt over time.



3. Segmentation Before Personalization

Optimally, the digital experiences you create will become increasingly personalized. Of course, it takes time to collect and analyze all the data that truly refined personalization requires. For this reason, focus first on improving the segmentation of your customer base. Use data collected from individual customers initially to assign them to a segment, and use that segment's characteristics for the first level of personalization.

Through further interactions, you can build out that customer's profile to drive more refined personalization. Eventually, you will be able to deliver the consistent personalization that customers expect and, more importantly, that drives conversions. But you need to build up to it. Along the way, however, with a focus on better data collection, more insightful analysis and increasingly personalized interactions, you will build the robust, adaptable and scalable marketing practice your brand deserves.

Find out how Acquia empowers marketers to deliver digital experiences that convert customers [here](#).

ABOUT ACQUIA

Acquia is the open source digital experience company. We provide the world's most ambitious brands with technology that allows them to embrace innovation and create customer moments that matter. At Acquia, we believe in the power of community — giving our customers the freedom to build tomorrow on their terms.



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