

## **The future of marketing. Enabling personalization and focusing on the content experience at scale**

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### **Abstract**

Optimizing company's customer understanding in order to build more profitable relationships is a real challenge, and as marketers are preoccupied about customer insight and the creation of customer value accordingly, they need to consider the many lessons to learn from the various innovative players, better understanding the marketing's goal of delivering adequate CX which is delivering value to the business, and the roles of both personalization at scale and MarTech within this context, connecting MarTech stack utilization to value. And as in the current landscape of performance-driven world the message matters more than the medium, marketers also need to help their customers think through their journeys, creating on a consistent basis unique and engaging content resonating with customers, and confirming that content marketing is building value over time, a proper content strategy being driven by data, measurable goals, and optimization to deliver a higher ROI. In what concerns content and demand B2B marketers, recent research revealed that they are both challenged to combine significant things if necessary. It is also well-known that business buyers are expecting brands to anticipate their needs and deliver personalized experiences, customer data being considered the key to this level of personalization. There is clear evidence not only that more and more B2B buyers are expecting the same buying experience as B2C customers, and of the benefits brought by the personalized content experiences, but also that marketers must focus on the content experience at scale, implementing the content experience framework.

**Keywords:** Customer first strategy; CX; Personalization at scale; Personalized content experience; Content experience framework

**JEL Classification:** L86; M31; O33

### **Learning from consumer packaged goods (CPG) in approaching a customer first strategy. Connecting data across systems in order to create a single customer view and taking control of company's marketing data**

In our last issue we focused on the relation between modern marketing, CX, CRM, customer trust and identity, witnessing the redefinition of the customer relationship with data so as to deliver value and contextually relevant CX, while applying best practices for data-driven marketing. We also highlighted the well-known preoccupations for a completely unified view of customer data, unlocking the data needed for personalization at scale and improving the ability to achieve true cross-channel engagement. (Purcarea, 2019) Two years ago, we also made reference

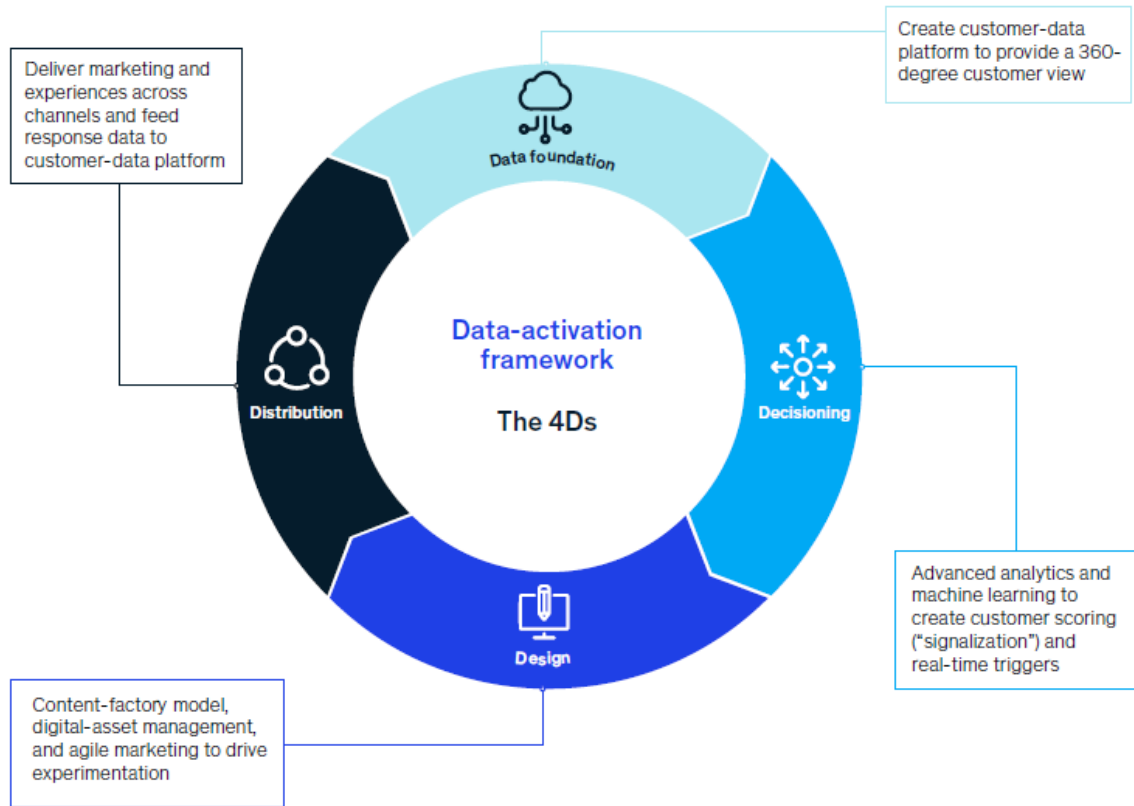
to the McKinsey's representatives who were asking business leaders the right questions with regard to what is to do to be customer first in the digital age (thinking about customer journeys rather than just touchpoints; creating a 360-degree view of the customer which everyone in the business agrees on and can access; truly understanding why customers are doing what they're doing; ensuring relevant communications and interactions with customers; having the right people on the teams, and the processes and guidelines to support them), developing the necessary two-way conversation with customers. (Gandhi et al., 2017)

As optimizing company's customer understanding in order to build more profitable relationships is a real challenge, the so-called "The 1-Day Catalyst", Denyse Drummond-Dunn, is continuing to pledge for taking into account the fundamentals of a customer first strategy for every industry, including for the hospitality industry (known as receiving the most comments online), by learning from CPG industries, and ensuring this way a continued growth. (Drummond-Dunn, 2019) She recommended considering the following aspects: moving from a return on investment (ROI)/return on relationships (ROR) to a return on engagement (ROE, keeping fans coming back); building relationships with strangers (having similar lifestyles to company's current customers) who could potentially become clients (by using customer co-creation); better understanding what is the best value (that is more important than price) for customers expecting recognition at every touchpoint, offering them the possibility to express their options; successfully innovating by considering more emotional and relational ways to ensure customer satisfaction; surprising and delighting customers by constantly upgrading company's products and services, considering that loyalty is now much more short-term; dialoguing, not just communicating (and avoiding this way to disappoint company's most engaged customers).

That is why the representatives of the reputed Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University pledge for true customer insight and the creation of customer value accordingly, developing a sound marketing strategy on the basis of: (Hennessy & Lecinski, 2019) talking to the end user (see for example "Channel Memberships" launched recently by YouTube); spending more time with the customer (frequent face-to-face contact and surveying, monitoring social media by using listening and sentiment tools); watching consumers as they attempt to buy company's product, helping them think through their journeys or their projects; watching these consumers using company's product or receiving its service and making them better or developing new ones; engaging end users as product designers, considering them as partners in company's product development, and stimulating a close relationship with them. They are also showing that there are many lessons to learn from the innovative smaller players.

Also recently, in May 2019, McKinsey's representatives underlined the marketing's goal of delivering adequate customer experiences which are delivering value to the business (this being considered the true prize of modern marketing), and the role of personalization in achieving this goal by acting accordingly along the entire customer journey in today's Omni channel world. (Flavin & Heller, 2019) Within this context, among other aspects, a simple and

effective organizing framework was presented to guide the solutions architecture and operating model (see the figure below):



*Figure no. 1: The solutions architecture and operating model should be guided by a simple and effective organizing framework, McKinsey*

*Source: Flavin, S. and Heller, J. (2019). A technology blueprint for personalization at scale, McKinsey, May, p. 3 (work cited)*

According to these McKinsey’s representatives, in order to enable personalization at scale it is necessary to have a clear picture of the necessary data and marketing technology (Martech) stack, considering the current need of Marketing and IT leaders to develop a shared vision about how these data can be made available across channels (see the figure below):

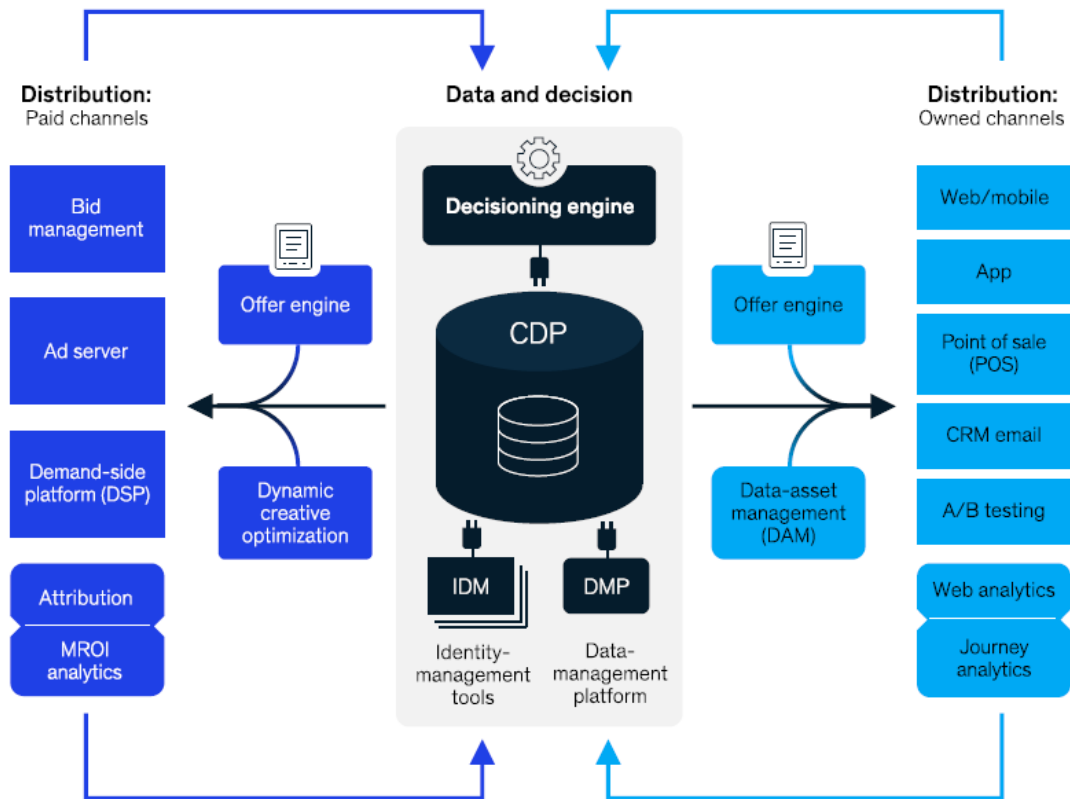


Figure no. 2: The data and martech stack to enable personalization at scale, McKinsey

Source: Flavin, S. and Heller, J. (2019). A technology blueprint for personalization at scale, McKinsey, May, p. 7 (work cited)

It is also interesting to note, within this framework, that according to the Marketing & Ad Tech Trends 2019 Roundup (curated by eMarketer, and sponsored and presented by Criteo), the purpose of much of MarTech (which become central to marketing activities) is still to facilitate customer-data-driven marketing. Among different aspects, this Roundup revealed that: failing to connect data across systems in order to create a single customer view (despite the fact that customer data platforms, CDPs, gained a strong foothold in marketing tech stacks, data integration is still very much a work in progress) represent a top obstacle, and in order to create a holistic view of the customer journey across channels it is necessary to unlock more of the data across systems; one of the biggest roadblocks preventing marketing professionals worldwide from implementing real-time analytics are the legacy systems (36%, followed by: data silos - 3%, organizational silos - 29%, multichannel complexity - 26%, insufficient budget/funding 22%; legacy processes - 21%), as shown by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services; the dots between everywhere consumers go (desktop, mobile web, in-app, in-store, social media etc.) are connected with the help of data, which also drives relevance.

Let's recall what Chief Marketing Technologist Blog by Scott Brinker highlighted two years ago (introducing a guest post by Doug Kessler entitled "The rise of the marketing data lake"): (Kessler, 2017) *fighting against data fragmentation and finding ways to unite the whole marketing stack at the data layer is the single most important imperative for every marketing operations team; marketing operations' improvement involves a marketing data lake* (see the differences between a data lake and a data warehouse in the table below) *in order to capture more data from more sources and really take control of company's marketing data (combining easier data sources for easy analysis, ensuring the basis for a single view of the customer, staying agile, and making company's data more reliable)*. Very recently, Scott Brinker pointed out that *when it's disconnected from value martech stack utilization is a misguided metric* (he started from considering the three overlapping aspects of martech, see the figure below). (Brinker, 2019)

Table no. 1: The differences between a data lake and a data warehouse

	<b>DATA WAREHOUSE</b>	<b>DATA LAKE</b>
<b>Data types</b>	Structured	Unstructured or multi-structured
<b>Database schema</b>	Schema-on-write	Schema-on-read
<b>Cost</b>	Expensive storage	Low-cost storage
<b>Ideal for</b>	Penny-perfect, super-secure financial reporting	Agile marketing analytics and decision-making
<b>Agility</b>	Difficult to add new reports and queries	Easy to add new reports and queries

Source: *The Marketing Data Lake* by Franz Aman and Anish Jariwala, cited by Chief Marketing Technologist (work cited)

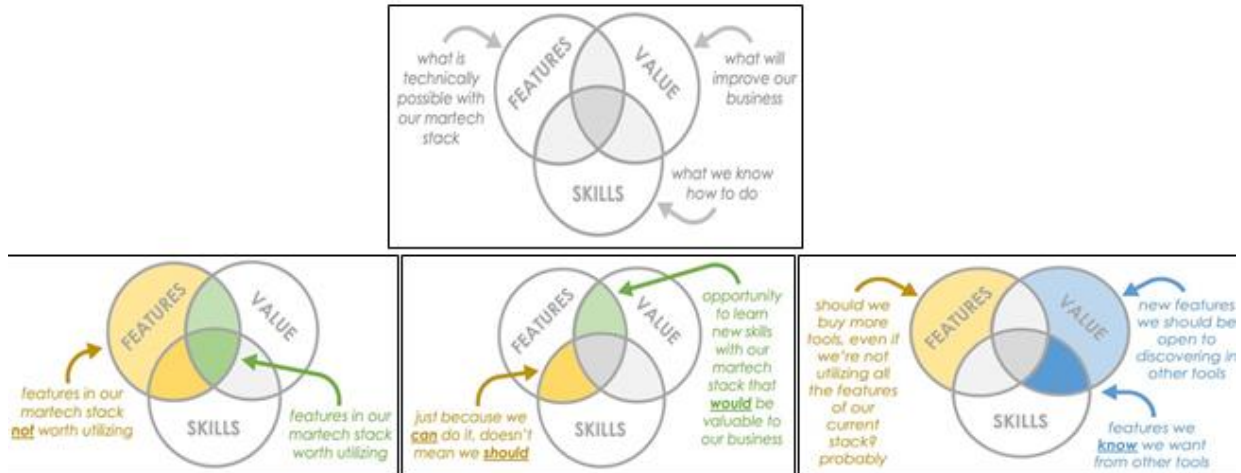


Figure no. 3: Three points about the utilization view of martech stacks (Brinker, S.)

Source: Adapted from Brinker, S. (2019). Martech stack utilization is a misguided metric (when it's disconnected from value), Chief Marketing Technologist, May 27(work cited)

On the other hand, while bridging the gap between marketing and technology, marketers should keep in mind what a world-class database marketer, Stephen H. Yu, explained recently with regard to how to throw away data if it doesn't generate any value. (Yu, 2019) In his opinion, this cleanup job should be done in phases: goal-setting; required type of predictions in accordance with the marketing goals; doing the full inventory, categorizing by data types (Personally Identifiable Data, Order/Transaction Data, Item/SKU-Level Data, Promotion/Response History, Life-to-Date/Past "X" Months Summary Data, Customer Status Flags, Surveys/Product Registration, Customer Communication History Data, Online Behavior, Social Media etc.); data acquired from third-party data sources, how are they stored, assessed, and updated; data refinement processes.

**A better content marketing plan reflecting that the message matters more than the medium. Comprehending how to measure content marketing, and deduce which buyer-persona-building method is right for each company/brand**

Helping customers think through their journeys or their projects also involves adequately approaching the company's marketing messages, by creating the right content, which is trusted and believed by people wanting to learn more through it, without being interrupted or interfered with traditional advertising. (Stelzner, 2019) Considered a strategic part of a larger marketing mix, content (videos, blog posts, white papers, eBooks, podcasts, webinars, SlideShare presentations etc.) should resonate with customers, reaching them where they are gathering, and making them care about them by better understanding what brands care about. Company's messaging strategy needs to confirm the capability of knowing what to say, how to say it, and to whom it is saying it and why (while creating content on a consistent basis).

As it was shown in the latest years, content marketing (which is considered the future of marketing) needs to work together with Search Engine Optimization (SEO, which cannot live without valuable content providing adequate solutions and adequately answering users' questions) so as to create synergy and maximize results, content marketing being useless without valuable SEO. (Postan, 2016) And within the new landscape of today's performance-driven world, where people are reached on mobile, SEO professionals need to look for ways to utilize unique and engaging content. (Elharar, 2017)

There is no doubt that content marketing is a strategic asset which builds value over time, and as marketing and advertising campaigns are not an investment, but a short-term expense of improving the performance of the business (ROI being considered the wrong metric for campaign-oriented marketing and advertising), generating the well-known long-term effects – content marketing impacting the general brand awareness: social media reach, brand mentions, media mentions, branded searches (Patel, 2018) – of brand building. (Rose, 2019) When measuring content marketing, it is necessary to confirm the double ability with regard to treat both each individual asset (as an expense helping meeting short-term business objectives in time), and the content platform and the by it created audience (as a long-term asset building increasing value over time).

On the other hand, the reputed Bryan Eisenberg (who underlined, among other aspects, that: (i-SCOOP, N.D.) the length of content has changed; there is a real need of continuing to focus on developing great content and make it easy to share, including in Email marketing which is the mule of Internet marketing) attracted our attention on how the so-called “personas” (understood as target customers who exist in the minds of company's team) are evolving as company's data around them evolves as well, being recommendable to deduce which buyer-persona-building method is right for each company/brand. (Agius, 2019)

### **When their prospective customers need it, content and demand B2B marketers are challenged to combine three things**

At the end of May this year, Paul Heald, CEO of BrightTALK, expressed the opinion that when it comes to B2B marketing authentic connections (not only information) are really challenging, and among buyers wanting making the right choice being high anxiety. Heald underlined what a recent Demand Gen report revealed (buyers are spending more time to make the right choices and are needing approval from internal spending committees), and remembered that both specialized groups of the large marketing teams, content marketers (focusing on telling brands' stories in powerful ways) and demand marketers (working to build the best possible audience for these stories), are challenged, when their prospective customers need it, to combine three things: personal empathy, reliable information and sales representatives intervention. (Heald, 2019)

With regard to the content marketing ROI, it is interesting to note that a study (released in October last year) by the Content Marketing Institute, MarketingProfs and SEO platform Conductor revealed, for instance, that only 49% of B2B marketers in North America measure their content marketing ROI. (Benes, 2019) As eMarketer showed, a study by Spiceworks revealed that among the most commonly tracked metrics when measuring content's performance are clickthrough rates, qualified leads and content downloads. While a study by SiriusDecisions, released in March this year, revealed the following ranking of the content performance-related metrics used by the companies of B2B marketers worldwide currently: 57% - page views, 56% qualified leads, 52% - unique visitors, 50% - downloads, 47% - SEO rankings, and 44% - average session duration.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that according to another Spiceworks report (the survey was conducted among 352 marketers from B2B technology companies of various sizes in North America and Europe, in October last year) the content type anticipated by respondents as to be used the most to drive leads were the webinars (50% of respondents plan to use them), while the content type anticipated by them as to be used the most to drive brand awareness (54% of respondents) and product awareness (62% of respondents) were the blog posts. (Nanji, 2019)

Allow us to also mention within this framework that at the beginning of March this year Pardot B2B Marketing Automation by Salesforce introduced their e-book entitled "B2B Marketing Trends: Insights from the Frontlines of B2B Marketing", underlining among other aspects the following: business buyers are expecting brands to anticipate their needs and deliver personalized experiences (customer data being considered the key to this level of personalization); B2B buyers are engaged by marketing and sales alignment; Account-Based Marketing (ABM) delivers consistently higher ROI than any other marketing method (ABM accounting for 28% of total user marketing budgets); as business buyers are expecting "Amazon-like" personalized CX, B2B marketers are adopting AI at high speed; intelligent B2B marketing decisions are driven by data which informs creative messaging, enables personalized CX through AI, and allows companies to measure their performance; business buyers are now savvier and more connected than ever. (Fultz, 2019) And indeed, in today's digital age content marketing is a must-have, a proper content strategy being driven by data, measurable goals, and optimization to deliver a higher ROI, as argued by Michael Brenner in April this year. (Brenner, 2019)

**Instead of conclusions: *Personalized content must be done the right way***

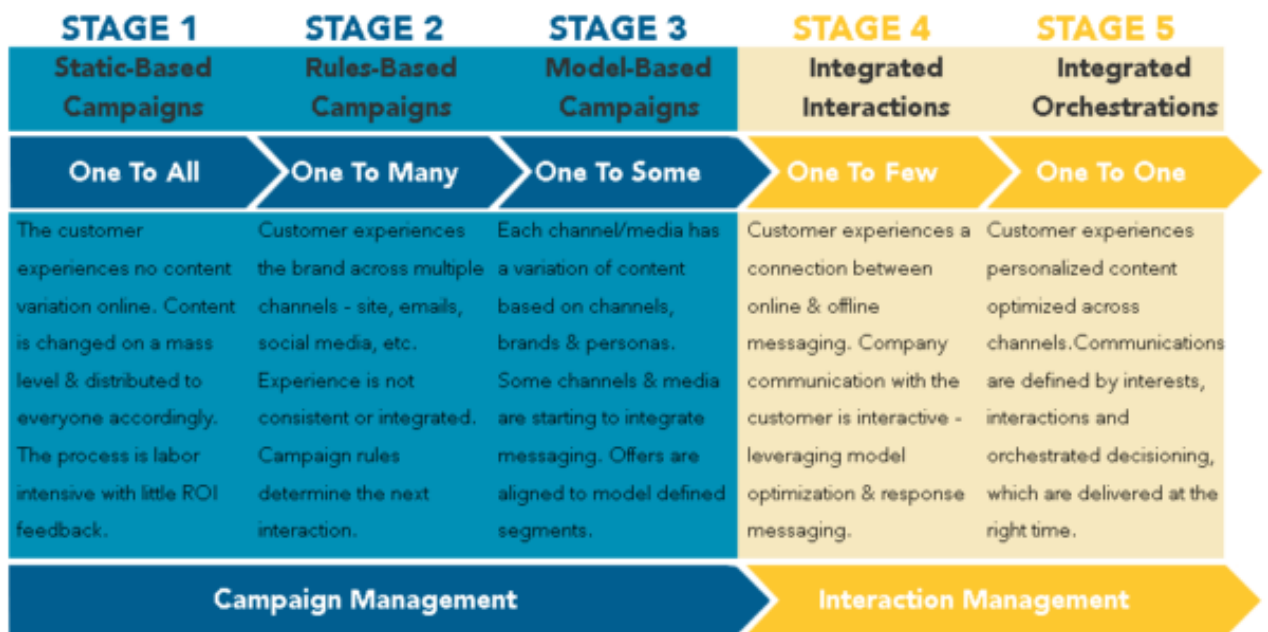
As Joe Lazauskas, Head of content at Contently and co-author of The Storytelling Edge, did say at Content Marketing World 2018 (being interviewed by Jonathan Crossfield, Chief consulting editor of the Chief Content Officer magazine), the city of our mind is illuminated by stories for which we are programmed, our brain lighting up when we're hearing them, making us remember and care. That is why content marketing works, content's pieces needing to be super



tailored to customers’ concerns, to have inside information, and to speak in a really understandable voice so as to make possible the connection with them. (Crossfield, 2019)

On the other hand, as recently argued by Larry Lubin, President of BlueRush, only it delivers value to the audience is a personalized content successful, and this within the context of the so-called “personalization paradox”: (Lubin, 2019) despite the fact that 86% of consumers admit they are concerned about their data privacy (data being defined by GDPR as a person’s “physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural and social identity”), up to 72% of consumers will only engage with personalized marketing messages (according to a new report from SmarterHQ). Lubin defined the five stages of personalization (as shown in the figure below), underlining that: the most effective touchpoints are created by brands in the stages 4 (“One to few”) and 5 (“One to one”); if there are deficiencies in transparency and disregard for boundaries then personalization becomes a problem; personalized content must be done the right way.

Table no. 2: The five stages of personalization



Source: Lubin, L. (2019). *How to Make Your Content Personalized but Not Creepy*, Content Marketing Institute, May 8 (work cited)

During a last year webinar Paige Gerber (Uberflip’s Director of Content Experience) and Chris Handy (Drift’s Customer Marketing Team Lead) showed that: *B2B marketers are focused every day on tactics, but strategies are the foundation, and content is bringing to life the most effective marketing strategies: inbound marketing, demand generation, account-based marketing, sales enablement*); according to Google, 80% of B2B buyers expect the same buying experience as B2C customers; content experience must be considered across all marketing programs; personalized content experiences lead to more engagement, better conversations,

more quality and more customers; there is clear evidence that experience matters (7 x conversion on gated content, 8 x your content reach, 60% increase in engagement); marketers must focus on the content experience at scale, implementing the content experience framework: centralize content (videos, blogs, eBooks, infographics, slide decks), organize content (audit content, tag content, organize by context, build navigation, define recommendations), personalize experiences (resource center, nurture campaigns, ABM campaigns, prospect outreach, knowledge base) distribute content (email, organic, social, paid advertising, direct mail), generate results (capture leads, score leads, drive engagement, gather insights, prove ROI). (Gerber & Handy, 2018)

While at the beginning of this year some words of Gary Vaynerchuk (Chairman of VaynerX, CEO of Vayne) attracted our attention: (Agius, 2019) “... Even though you’re selling to businesses, you’re targeting human decision makers. And humans will respond to your content. It doesn’t matter if you don’t have a team. Think about how you can create as much content with the resources you have.” And finally, just take a look at his “Content Pyramid”:



Figure no. 4: The Content Pyramid, Gary Vaynerchuk

Source: *GaryVee Content Strategy* in Vaynerchuk, G. (2019). *4 Key B2B Marketing Strategies for 2019*, January 5 (work cited)

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