Marketing Automation isn't Dead — It's Evolving

 By Paige O'Neill, CMO, SDL

In recent years, marketing automation has started to gain a negative reputation. Consumers are fed up with being spammed; and as a result, they are deleting, unsubscribing and disengaging. However, just because marketing automation includes "automation" in its name, it doesn't mean that every communication powered by marketing automation technology is broadly blast to all consumers. Considering that marketing automation is used by 59 percent of B2B Fortune 500 companies, it's evident that the organizations using the technology are doing something right to effectively engage with customers. The key, however, lies in not relying on the technology itself. For successful marketing efforts, the right blend of automation and personalization are required.

We know that customers are increasingly dynamic; they interact with brands on a variety of devices and channels, leaving contextual clues behind at each touch point. This data can tell brands a lot about each customer — from where they are located to their past shopping history and preferences. When coupled with these insights, marketing automation loses its impersonal touch. Automation technology is needed for efficiency and speed, but contextual data allows each engagement to be personalized for each customer. For example, if a brand wants to get the word out about its sale of the season, each message should be personalized based on how much that consumer has shopped there, if they typically shop online or in-store and more.

As part of this personalized approach, marketers should also keep in mind a consumer's age and generation. Generally, baby boomers and millennials have varying preferences when it comes

to shopping and engaging with a brand. Specifically, research from SDL shows that while 70 percent of those aged 55+ prefer in-store browsing is their top resource for shopping research, this is only the case for 57 percent of those aged 18-29. While it's important to treat each customer as an individual, there are overarching preferences for each generation that should be kept in mind as a guide.

Finally, even with all of these contextual clues being used to personalize customer engagements, it will fall on deaf ears unless the brand is speaking the language of the customer. According to an SDL study, 32 percent of millennial consumers in English-speaking countries prefer a language other than English and 46 percent of millennials are more likely to purchase if information is in their preferred language. While it might seem obvious to keep language in mind, this is not always a priority for brands. Considering that many U.S. consumers don't speak English, it's important to look past location and consider language and culture. Otherwise, marketers risk their messages being lost in translation.

Ultimately, marketing automation on its own *will* produce those unwanted, non-personalized marketing messages. This approach is just not successful in today's consumer-driven world. Marketing automation isn't dead, but the traditional marketing funnel is. Smart organizations looking to prioritize customer experience are flipping the traditional marketing funnel on its head — starting with the customer, not the campaign.

***About the Author:** As Chief Marketing Officer of SDL, Paige O'Neill brings almost 20 years of experience in senior marketing roles. She uniquely combines product marketing expertise with an extensive background in communications and PR and a passion for developing thought leadership programs that build strong awareness and differentiate companies from the competition. Prior to SDL, Paige served for over three years as Vice President of Marketing for integrated marketing*

leader Aprimo. Her thought leadership, messaging, demand generation and communications programs contributed to rapid growth and a successful acquisition by Teradata. Paige also served as the CMO for two early-stage startups, Aravo Solutions and GreenRoad Technologies, as well as for PHH Arval, where her efforts contributed to an acquisition attempt by GE. Prior to PHH, Paige spent a decade at Oracle Corporation leading a variety of marketing initiatives.