eBook

The Essential Guide to Content Personalization: the Science That Drives It and How to Start Using It

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Executive Summary

As much as 70% of the marketing content created by brands goes completely unused as marketers struggle to find quality online real estate in which to display their content. In addition, the proliferation of channels and information, an increasing variance in audiences, and fragmented data are all contributing to this major problem for content marketers.

The Solution: Content Personalization

Personalization is one way to boost ROI, and brands are already investing in it. In essence, content personalization, also known as content targeting, is about adapting what marketers can offer on an individual basis.

Why is it effective? Because the science behind personalization and choice enables content personalization to counteract 3 psychological phenomena, all related to the “paradox of choice“:

• It reduces “analysis paralysis“ - overthinking that leads to inaction
• It cuts the rate of horrible decisions - making a random decision due to the vast amount of information
• It prevents user disorientation

Key facts about content personalization:

• Personalized content offerings, combining contextual and behavioral hints, increase conversions by up to 300%
• Personalization helps marketers better understand the buyer journey: for example, our customers learned that up to 40% of conversions take place on pages without any forms
• Personalization helps marketers generate online leads at a much lower cost - $3 to $6

A “How to Get Started” guide concludes this paper.

Hope you find it both educating and entertaining!
The Challenge: Plenty of Content, Limited Real Estate

There are good reasons why 86% of marketers use content marketing: it delivers engaging relationships, consumer value and measurable success for brands. As more marketers bought into this way of communicating with prospects, their content libraries and knowledge bases kept growing, offering an abundance of information. But where can they display it? Premium online real estate remains limited. Indeed, as much as 70% of marketing content created by brands goes completely unused. Content marketers are now facing their biggest marketing challenge - getting eyeballs to even notice their content.

Those who succeed, then face 3 second order challenges:

Proliferation of channels and information

There’s a simple reason why most of the decision-making process is completed before prospects engage with vendors: it’s easy to do. There’s plenty of useful content, everywhere, and on so many channels and devices. To address the infinite choice prospects now have, marketers employ multichannel marketing, which is actually all about choice. Here are some numbers for each channel, according to the DMA Fact Book:

- Websites and publications - about $40 billion is spent annually on search and display ads
- Email - 416 commercial email messages is the average number an email user receives each month
- Mobile - nearly two-thirds of commercial email messages were opened on mobile devices - not a huge surprise, considering that 50% of American adults own smartphones and the average smartphone user spends 2 hours and 22 minutes on their phone every day.
Variance of audiences

There is another outcome from multichannel and device marketing: marketers attract new audiences seeking content. This audience consists of individuals with very different goals, attention spans, and means. To move more prospects along from awareness, through consideration, and on to purchase, businesses need many more touchpoints with such audiences, on many more channels: owned media, paid media and earned media, which in turn can further increase the audience’s diversity.

Fragmented data

With the proliferation of customer data from owned media (marketing automation systems, web analytics, CRM) and earned media (social databases), businesses now have an unprecedented amount of information about their customers and prospects. Yet, much like in the departments where they are used, these systems rarely communicate sufficiently for understanding customers as individuals. Rather, the customer identity is fragmented and spread throughout organizations, with no higher level context. Marketing, sales, customer success, and other departments that come into play throughout the buyer journey each see a different piece of the profile.

To sum, marketers need to find new ways to interact with visitors through their content, and to make these interactions more meaningful to impact business results.
The Solution: Content Personalization

Personalization is one way to boost ROI, and brands are already investing in it. In essence, content personalization, also known as content targeting, is about adapting what marketers can offer to the person's location, device, and most importantly - preferences. Companies want to provide helpful, useful information to readers, but they also want to tailor these fact-finding missions to give visitors the feeling that the experience is designed just for them.

The Science Behind Personalization and Choice

Customers are more satisfied when offered a choice. But infinite choice does not lead to greater satisfaction than limited choice. Creating a large, diversified pool of content can be an effective strategy, as it helps to cater to a bigger audience. But on the individual level, each visitor is either exposed to only a fraction of it, or forced to comb through large amounts of information and compare this information to other providers' resources. It can be overwhelming, and it does not reflect the buyer's experience you would like to offer your potential customers.

With so much content and information on each site, content personalization helps marketers to:

1) Reduce “analysis paralysis”
Analysis paralysis is a state of overthinking a situation so much that a decision is never made. This happens when the problem or solution is perceived as too complicated.

2) Cut the rate of horrible decisions
“Extinct by instinct” (also known as “death by intuition”) is the opposite of analysis paralysis. When presented with a lot of options, some people simply choose randomly. When this occurs in a business situation, the chance of
randomly making the right decision is very low, especially for companies offering multiple products and services. With more and more of the decision-making process happening before the visitor ever gets to your website, you want to make sure that the final stages in the buying journey are easy to understand and clear.

3) Prevent user disorientation
With user disorientation, visitors get lost along the many funnels your website offers. This is especially evident in websites that offer numerous products, services and content, and it typically results in high bounce rates.

Solving Marketing Challenges

Personalization aims to deliver a personal experience that establishes a relationship between the individual and the brand. This can come in plenty of shapes, forms and channels – from email to content recommendations to special offer direct mailings with a handwritten signature. Content personalization enables marketers to increase engagement and conversions using the information they already have.

Content personalization directly addresses several challenges marketers face, including:

The late stage in the buyer journey: according to CEB, 57% of the customer purchase decision is complete before a customer ever contacts the business. Google adds that the average prospect consults with an average of 10.4 sources before making a decision.

Reluctance to take part in the content-for-info game: 98% of visitors remain anonymous, making it very difficult to decide where they fit within your array of desired personas.

Speed: According to Kiss metrics, the median business site load time is 3 seconds. The majority of visitors leave after just 15 seconds - leaving only 12 seconds to engage with these anonymous visitors who already know what they want.
The Numbers

In terms of hard numbers, and taking variables such as industry, audience diversity, web design and others into account, personalization can literally transform your marketing.

Marketers who have used personalization should also look at some intangibles, such as user experience, data privacy and similar factors.

Here are 6 facts about content personalization that you should know:

1. Personalized content offerings, combining contextual and behavioral hints, increase conversions by up to 300% according to our data
2. Personalization helps marketers better understand the buyer journey: for example, our customers learned that up to 40% of conversions take place on pages without any forms
3. Personalization helps marketers generate online leads at a much lower cost - $3 to $6
4. An Adobe study recently reported that marketers cite personalization as the most important capability required for marketing in the future
5. It is impossible to personalize the online experience manually – so don’t try
6. Segmentation is knowing something about people. Personalization is knowing something about a specific individual. Hence, personalization is not the same as segmentation. So, you’re probably not using personalization, even if you thought you were.
How to Get Started With Content Personalization

Personalization requires that you have the right tool and have a plan for making it a seamless and enjoyable experience for website visitors. To start, you should:

1] Determine the Primary Business Challenge

You need to first decide what problem you want to solve. Only then can you determine how you want personalization to work on your site and what type of tool you require to meet your needs.

Here is a handy guide for the different personalization opportunities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>Pre-requisites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous prospects</td>
<td>• Conversion into known leads</td>
<td>• Web</td>
<td>Web personalization technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conversion into new business</td>
<td>• Mobile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known prospects (leads)</td>
<td>Conversion into new business</td>
<td>• Web</td>
<td>MAP or CRM</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Email</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mobile</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>• Retention</td>
<td>• Web</td>
<td>• MAP or CRM</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Up-sell</td>
<td>• Email</td>
<td>• Cross system data collection for customer analytics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cross-sell</td>
<td>• Mobile</td>
<td>• Meaningful database</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past customers</td>
<td>• Re-acquisition</td>
<td>• Web</td>
<td>• MAP or CRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• New business</td>
<td>• Email</td>
<td>• Cross system data collection for customer analytics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mobile</td>
<td>• Meaningful database</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2) Don’t Overlook the Channel

Channels have a direct effect on your success. If you are focusing on lead qualification through multiple fields on your forms, make sure your paid media campaigns are set to desktops only. Why? Well, conversion rates on mobile are significantly lower than on desktops. You probably never thought the width of the human finger would play such a crucial role in conversions for anything other than a wedding ring, but that’s just the way it is.

3) Combine Personalization With Segmentation

Many marketers already use intelligent segmentation: by discipline, industry, or geography. You can follow this logic by also segmenting your content into different groups and let personalization tools choose the most relevant content for each visitor. This is especially effective for companies that have a few products, and need to cater to different buying personas.

4) Focus on Optimizing

Content personalization is about optimizing each touchpoint with a current or prospective customer to better engage with them. Improving your personalization techniques should be the focus. This will enable you to move from rule-based segmentation to automated personalization, saving you time and making the most of your content efforts. Personalization requires that you have the right tool and have a plan for making it a seamless and enjoyable experience for website visitors.

5) Choose Wisely

The marketing tech sector is booming, and has nearly quadrupled over the past two years. To compare content personalization vendors, you need to ask the right questions. Use the template at the next page to choose the right one for you:
## Content Personalization Vendors - Comparison Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vendor1</th>
<th>Vendor2</th>
<th>Vendor3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct value</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does it target individuals or segments?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can it identify an anonymous visitor's interest using digital behavior analysis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does it react in real-time?</td>
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<td>Does it work on all devices?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Additional value</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Can it help you optimize your digital advertising?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can it help you optimize your content marketing?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Making life easier for your MAP and CRM data</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Can it send information to, and pull information from your MAP in real-time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can it be integrated with any CMS, COS and CRM?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Not making life harder for yourself</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Can it be implemented quickly?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does it require ongoing (and super time consuming) rule setting?</td>
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</table>
Summary: Boosting Content ROI

It is very difficult to influence an anonymous visitor’s behavior, especially in the “age of the customer,” when prospects are more independent, educated and connected than ever.

Content marketing is one of handful proven ways that help companies increase conversion rates through the sharing of information. However, measuring success and optimizing it remains a challenge: only 21% of content marketers are successful at tracking ROI.

The technology of content personalization automatically boosts conversion rates by addressing known psychological phenomena, and vendors can provide analytics that help measure and optimize the performance of your content.

Give it a try.

ABOUT BRIGHTINFO

There are only two ways to grow your business online: increase traffic or increase conversion rates. BrightInfo does both.

BrightInfo revolutionizes the way businesses sell through content with real-time personalization, leveraging content marketing to offer the most relevant content to each anonymous visitor – dynamically, in real time and on each page visited – be it on your website, on professional publications, or both.

Businesses that run BrightInfo increase lead generation by an average of 30%-50%.

BrightInfo requires no configuration, customization or integration and delivers value within minutes of sign up. Its unique content analytics further improve content marketing ROI for businesses. Visit www.brightinfo.com to learn more.