Out of the Fog, Into the Cloud

Sure, everyone talks about the marketing cloud. But what does it *really* mean to marketers on a day-to-day basis?

The customer of today expects a customized experience both professionally and personally. This means B2C and B2B marketers must be able to analyze data and act on it in real-time to foster engagement, improve the customer experience across all channels and, ultimately, boost conversion rates.

For many organizations, marketing cloud solutions are the key to making that a reality.

"All of the capabilities of marketing clouds have grown over the last few years," notes Ellen Valentine, a Marketing Evangelist with Silverpop. "Marketers in general are comfortable with cloud-based applications—the only real misconceptions of the cloud come from others outside the marketing department, who simply don't understand their capabilities."

And those capabilities are vast, from digital marketing and lead management to customer experience and journey management across social, mobile and email. A typical marketer often doesn't start out utilizing all of the features of a cloud-based system.

"The marketing cloud is an a la carte system," says Valentine. "A company might use landing pages or SMS, and it might not. The beauty is that you can use a cloud system for two years and then decide that you want to add [another capability] like progressive profiling to get more data on your clients."

The rise of the marketing cloud continues to have momentum because of unfulfilled needs, says Jay Henderson, Director of Offering and Product Management at IBM. "Marketers have been underserviced from a technology perspective, and that's starting to be rectified. The cloud delivery model has a bunch of appealing aspects, including the ability to make instant upgrades with little investment and roll out new innovations quickly and easily."

EASE OF USE

The cloud is where it's at for many companies, because most marketing organizations simply don't have the resources available to maintain servers and installed instances.

"That may be an option for very large enterprises that want to maintain control onsite, but outside the Fortune 100, most customers don't want to be in the business of server maintenance," says Valentine.

Of course, while marketing clouds offer a variety of options,

BEFORE YOU BUY
THE QUESTIONS TO ASK

A marketing cloud solution can be a significant investment for a marketing organization. Before you make your decision, there are many variables to consider.

"One of the challenges is that because these systems do so much the RFP is almost useless—if you have a list of things that you want to do, all the major players will say they can do it," says Scott Brinker, president and CTO of ion interactive. " So the question becomes how do they do it? How does it map to the programs that you want to be executing?

Brinker suggests mapping out some specific hypothetical situations to present to your prospective vendors. Create an example of a campaign and how you'd like it to perform. Then, take that example to your potential vendor partners and ask them to show you how it would work with their solutions. "You'll get a reality of what it would be like to work with their platform."

It's important for marketers to explain to vendors what their business environment is like, and share their their long and short term goals, agrees Ellen Valentine, Marketing Evangelist at Silverpop.

"Use-case scenarios of how things related to your brand will play out [when using a marketing cloud system] can help give you perspective," she notes.

"Before making any decisions, marketers should map their business goals to the underlying technology and know what pieces of their process they want aligned to the marketing cloud", says Jay Henderson, Director of Offering and Product Management at IBM. "Does the suite you're considering have the capabilities that you need?"

Some areas are easier to access than others when it comes to evaluating marketing cloud systems—content management and web experience, for example, typically tend to offer what you would expect in terms of features and performance, says Brinker. It gets a little more specialized when you look at technology capabilities for offerings like marketing automation—how different vendors deal with issues like data (and people) who are decentralized can make a huge difference.

There are cloud solutions for businesses of all sizes, says Brinker. "The idea of software as a service being the primary way marketing gets its technology capabilities seems to be a good thing. Just understand what your costs are going to be long term and the extent of your commitment. Know what you're getting into."

Marketers need to figure out what makes the most sense for them to invest in, to create a core infrastructure they can surround with complimentary capabilities, says Henderson. "We need to create more coordinated customer experiences."

marketers who want to adopt these solutions may already have other existing systems in place that they're not quite ready to jettison, and that means everything has to be able to work together seamlessly. Thankfully, says Scott Brinker, President and CTO of ion interactive and Editor of ChiefMarTech. com, marketing clouds are getting better at "connecting the dots."

"Marketing clouds are making tremendous progress," notes Brinker. "A lot of companies still might be at a point where they don't have 'one ring to rule them all'—large companies might have products from multiple vendors. But you're seeing more effort going into supporting a [diverse] ecosystem."

"We see continued movement in easier integration between products from different vendors," adds David Raab, principal of the consultancy Raab Associates. "Of course, it isn't always as easy as it sounds, but there's a lot of effort going into integration."

According to IBM, an enterprise-level organization today might use more than 36 disparate marketing technologies. The importance of connecting all the data from these systems is why IBM just launched the Universal Behavior Exchange (UBX) to give marketers a simple interface to act on customer insights from different sources.

"Marketers have many fields that they want to integrate and the challenge is that marketers can become beholden to IT to unlock this information," says Valentine. "It becomes much easier in the cloud if everything is all in one platform and you don't have to extract information across smaller on-premise systems."

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DIFFERENT NEEDS

While both B2C and B2B marketers of all sizes can benefit from tapping into the cloud, each side of the fence has different needs and concerns.

Think about all the different gaps that can exist within marketing organizations, notes IBM's Henderson. There can be gaps between channels, different

CUSTOMER INSIGHTS
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

A study by Econsultancy earlier this year found that 90% of marketers agree that personalizing the customer experience is critical.

That's great—except that a sister study revealed that nearly 80% of consumers don't think the average brand understands them as an individual.

Econsultancy conducted two studies, the first with marketing professionals from 276 consumer companies, most with revenues in excess of $1 billion. The second study featured responses from 1,135 U.S. consumers.

A look at the results shows an apparent disconnect between what marketers think they can (or want to) achieve when it comes to communicating with consumers, and what is the reality.

Eighty percent of marketers strongly believed they have a holistic view of individual customers and segments. These marketers also have faith in their ability to deliver strong experiences offline (75%), online (69%) and via mobile (57%).

But, only 47% said they delivered relevant communications. The people seem to agree: only 35% of the consumer respondents said communications from their preferred retailer were usually relevant.

"The goal of providing the right message to the right person at the right time is now just a part of the larger puzzle. The real challenge is providing the right experience for the right person at a time that's right for them," said Stefan Tornquist, Vice President, Research for the Americas at Econsultancy. "At the center of it all is the marriage of marketing and technology and a commitment to innovation that's driven by individual customer needs."

"We all have smartphones and the number of devices and channels available has gone through the roof," notes Jay Henderson, Director of Offering and Product Management, IBM. "Consumer expectations have risen and they want to interact with brands—but, they want brands to be delivering more relevant messaging At the same time, a revolution is happening for marketers as more new technology is at their disposal."

One issue is that many marketers don't have the right mix of technology to truly deliver exceptional customer experiences across multiple points of contact. Only 37% of the marketers surveyed said they felt their organization had the right tools, and only 34% said they thought they were doing a good job of linking their online and offline customer experiences.

For their part, consumers are willing to do their part to improve relationships with brands—if it is a brand they truly want to engage with: While only 37% were interested in sharing personally identifiable information with an "average" brand, 61% were willing to do so with a brand they trust.

"The customer is in control but this is not the threat many marketers perceive it to be", said Deepak Advani, General Manager, IBM Commerce. "It's an opportunity to engage and serve the customer's needs like never before."

departments, and owners of various company functions—not to mention the gaps between different types of technology that may not speak to each other. "Every organization has issues to overcome, whether they are B2B or B2C, or if the purchase cycle is longer and considered, or shorter."

For many B2B marketers , it all comes down to nurturing. After all, it might take 18 months to convert a hand raiser to a customer—if they're even ready to purchase at all.

"We're seeing B2B marketers want to get more personalized and be more intelligent about the process," says Valentine. "They want to help the buyer along and understand their unique needs."

In contrast, B2C marketing is still typically much more promotional, particularly at the end of the year as brands ramp up deals for the holidays. As with lead nurturing in B2B, marketing automation can help get these messages out to the right people at the right time.

For many marketers on both the business and consumer side, social remains a Holy Grail. There's a strong desire to aggregate data from many social channels and keep tabs on individual conversations about brands that might need attention.

"Marketers have been doing this in very basic, manual ways through tools like Hootsuite, but it needs to become more efficient and automated," says Valentine. "They know they need to tap into that social piece but so many marketers are overwhelmed not only by the data but by requests from internal customers. They know [social data] is out there and they're looking for solutions."

All marketers today need a content framework to

THE CLOUD IN ACTION
SLAMTRACKER SCORES FOR US OPEN

For most of the year, the United States Tennis Association operates like a small business. But for the two weeks of the US Open every year, the USTA's data processing needs rival that of the largest bank or big box retailer.

That's why for the 2015 US Open this September the USTA turned to IBM to deploy a suite of predictive analytics, cloud, mobile and social technology to capture, analyze and deliver real-time scores and insights to tennis fans.

The goal was keep fans up to date on the latest results of matches at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, whether they were courtside or keeping up at home on their mobile device.

Streaming analytics technology automatically identified record-breaking achievements on the court in real-time, which the USTA could then share with fans via social media and USOpen.org. And, the IBM SlamTracker app offered deeper analytics of player performance patterns that could impact the outcomes of matches, such analyzing where a ball lands and how far a player runs. More than 41 million data points from eight years of Grand Slam player, match and tournament data is also analyzed through SlamTracker.

IBM also has embedded social sentiment data into SlamTracker, providing an analysis of Twitter conversations about players while they are on court, including measurements of volume and tone of the sentiment over the course of the match.

A social share feature allowed fans to share these insights via Facebook. Redesigned mobile apps developed by IBM Interactive Experience in collaboration with the USTA also helped keep fans connected to the action and offered an interactive second-screen engagement.
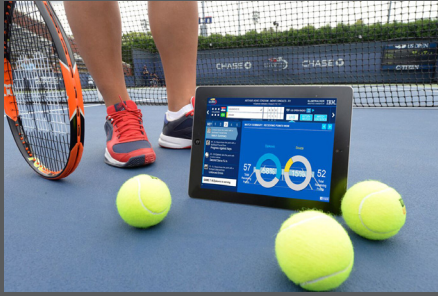
help fuel their communications channels, and the cloud can help here as well.

"Everyone is mapping out the buying cycle and inventorying their existing content to identify gaps for certain personas," says Valentine.

Personas come into play as you're trying to create a more individualized contact process, adds Raab. "You have to take personas into account but you must do it in a meaningful way."

When it comes to creating marketing personas, Valentine sees marketers divided into haves and have-nots. "Some understand the importance and are embracing [the concept], and others are just doing a segmentation approach such as looking at people geographically, rather than [figuring out] who they really are."

IBM Commerce recently introduced Journey Analytics as part of its cloud offering, to help marketers tap into those personas and look across the buyer's journey to not only see what messages were really making an impact—but where there might be a chink in the armor. "We knew it was top of mind for many customers," says Valentine.

SILVERPOP
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About Silverpop

Silverpop, an IBM Company, is a cloud-based digital marketing provider that offers email marketing, lead-to-revenue management and mobile engagement solutions. Silverpop Engage — the foundation of the IBM Marketing Cloud — uses customer data and individual behaviors, collected from a variety of sources, to inform and drive personalized interactions in real time. IBM Marketing Cloud powers the delivery of exceptional experiences for customers across the buyer journey by leveraging key data, providing analytical insights and automating relevant cross-channel interactions. As part of IBM Marketing Solutions, Silverpop helps make it easier to design meaningful customer experiences across applications, devices and time, accelerating today's results and tomorrow's ambitions. Silverpop is trusted by more than 5,000 brands around the globe. For more information, view our demo and visit silverpop.com.