More Messages, Channels and Touchpoints. No Wonder Customers Are Confused.

Breaking Down the Multichannel Messaging Development and Delivery Challenge.
“If there’s one thing I’ve learned during my 15 years in sales, it’s that a lot of businesses don’t deliver a consistent, cohesive message when communicating with buyers. This can confuse prospects and customers, which may open the door to your competitor. Bottom line: When your marketing message is jumbled, you hurt your … well … bottom line.”

— Philo Howard, Business Unit Executive at IBM
While CMOs have been talking about delivering a seamless multichannel experience for years, the fact is, most companies are still failing on this front today. And, not without good reason.

Complexity has grown significantly. There are more stakeholders, technologies, channels and touchpoints involved in the customer journey than ever before. Add to this the explosion of customer data, message testing and personalization in marketing campaigns, and you have a potential disaster on your hands.

What do we mean by “disaster?” Complexity left unmanaged turns into chaos. Chaos is defined as “complete disorder and confusion.” Given the recent worldwide survey of CMOs conducted by The CMO Club, chaos is not far from the truth. The survey found that just 11 percent of respondents felt they had a sophisticated omnichannel strategy, meaning a cross-channel strategy that included online and offline channels, and 55 percent had yet to launch or had no plans to launch such a strategy.

A report published by IDC speaks to the multichannel customer-experience challenge CMOs face. “Today’s vendors have so many communication channels at their disposal that there are any number of ways to really mess things up.” The report states that CMOs must answer critical questions when it comes to delivering a clear, consistent corporate story throughout the customer experience, and gives these examples: “Is your customer being addressed the same way by your marketing communications and your sales communications? Is your customer receiving consistency in your communications whether he / she is online or offline? When your customer does business with your call center service personnel and then he / she visits your authorized reseller to pick up his / her new device, does he / she feel like two different people?”

In the experience economy we operate in today, CMOs have no option but to answer these questions and tackle the multichannel customer experience challenge head on. To do this, they have to face a simple fact: delivering a compelling and consistent multichannel customer experience reaches far beyond marketing. It impacts every customer-facing area of the business and every partner involved in the customer journey.

This paper explores how CMOs can break down the multichannel customer-experience challenge piece by piece. It shows how they can stop the chaos and put systems in place that will restore order to this critical facet of the business — systems that ensure their company is well-positioned to deliver a clear, compelling and consistent story throughout the customer journey.
What Multichannel Chaos Looks Like

The first step to solving any problem is to face reality. This starts by answering some fundamental questions: How am I currently managing the multichannel customer experience? What messages are we really communicating across critical touchpoints throughout the customer journey? What stakeholders and technologies are involved in the process? In most companies, these questions go unanswered — at least in any formal, documented way. Our experience working with hundreds of CMOs and marketing executives over the years paints a picture that looks similar to this:

Too Much Technology
(Not Enough Story)

A recent Accenture report stated, “Digital technologies have empowered today’s consumers to get what they want, when they want and where they want. So while consumers may have few problems moving from one media channel to another and from one device to another, business is having a hard time keeping up with them.”

For that very reason, CMOs and marketing executives have been focused on two things over the past few years: technology and data. A significant amount of time has been spent answering questions like: How are we using new digital technology to engage with customers? What technology solutions do we need to automate customer relationship management? What web analytics tools do we need to capture engagement and conversion metrics? How can we leverage technology to personalize each customer experience? These are all critical questions that need to be answered. However, the truth is, finding and implementing solutions that answer these questions has magnified the problem.

Try Everything (Prioritize Nothing)

Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, email, text messaging, webinars — we could fill an entire page with the explosion of communication channels companies now use to get their message in front of and interact with customers. The question CMOs must ask is, “Which channels influence and impact the customer journey the most?” They must ask, “How are we managing the messaging development and delivery process across all of these channels?”

“Many companies are in danger of overusing channels (simply because they are there) and giving their marketing teams a headache by putting quantity before quality.”

— Author, Matt Pigott

Today, companies have more tools and technologies through which messages are being distributed than ever before. The sheer number of stakeholders developing and delivering messages throughout the customer experience has also increased significantly. This is a problem for those companies that do not have a core story or message that is driving technology-driven communication and engagement. Technology has actually amplified and fragmented the inconsistent messages individuals consume throughout their journey with your company. In many cases, technology has increased customer confusion, not clarity, throughout the customer experience.
In many cases, technology has increased customer confusion, not clarity, throughout the customer experience.
Author and communications strategist Matt Pigott recently said, “There are different facets to every person but there is no such thing as a multichannel customer, rather somebody who desires to receive a consistent brand message across the wide variety of channels they use.” Pigott went on to say, “Today, marketers are operating in a largely customer-led environment, and the proliferation of channels provides consumers with wider choices and greater control over the buying process. Many companies are in danger of overusing these channels (simply because they are there) and giving their marketing teams a headache by putting quantity before quality. Irrelevant messaging, disjointed campaigns, offline material shoehorned into digital channels are just some of the mistakes that are made.”

More is not always better. CMOs have to leverage customer insights to identify and prioritize which communication channels have the greatest impact on the customer experience and perception. They must stop adding to the complexity and start breaking it down. They must prioritize which channels truly matter. Channel prioritization is the only way they can get a handle on the ever growing number of touchpoints they have in play throughout the customer journey.

**Change Strategy (Operate the Same)**

We’ve talked about how the explosion of technologies and channels has changed the customer engagement strategy for most companies. Now, with all of these changes, the question is how have business processes changed to align with the evolving strategy? Is your marketing department still organized by channel or communication vehicle? Have you implemented processes that drive greater connectivity and continuity from one channel or touchpoint to the next? Have roles and responsibilities been intentionally interwoven and aligned with the customer journey?

Forrester recently said, “Multichannel marketing is not about giving an existing team some new tools to go about the business of marketing. It’s a strategic initiative that will disrupt, and then transform, your current marketing processes. Your marketing team will be challenged to define new processes, learn new technology, and rethink their role in the company. Keep a constant program of communication and engagement to facilitate the change.”

Most marketing executives have been moving so fast, their engagement strategy has changed but they are still operating in legacy mode. They have simply layered these new technologies and channels on top of outdated operating models. This won’t work. Changing your strategy without changing how that strategy gets operationalized will never deliver positive, lasting business results.

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— Forrester Research
Personalize Everything (Confuse Everybody)


Personalization that is not anchored in a clearly defined corporate story is just random, free-form testing, adding to the chaos and increasing customer confusion. Most companies don’t have a comprehensive message that personalization is derived from. This is a problem. What are the people with the customer insights expected to base messaging strategies on? What do personalized messages, content and experiences connect back to? What messages are being intentionally threaded through the entire customer experience, irrespective of personalization or testing models? Personalization can kill brand positioning and differentiation faster than anything else in a poorly managed multichannel customer experience.

Deliver Integrated Journey (Further Fragment the Experience)

Every CMO strives to deliver a truly integrated customer experience, online and offline. The challenge is, most marketing organizations are still operating in silos, with each being managed and measured with different metrics, and functioning independently instead of as a whole. Marketing executives must align functional and operational areas of the business with a shared strategy. They must ensure each area is accountable for multichannel customer experience connectivity and continuity. How are the customer-facing areas of your business working together today? How are they sharing customer experience insights? What are you doing to bridge the divide that exists between marketing and other customer-facing teams across the company? To deliver a clear, compelling and consistent story throughout the customer experience, these teams must be operating from the same playbook and must be held accountable for the respective roles they play in the customer journey.

These are the five most common challenges we see companies face when it comes to delivering a clear, compelling and consistent message in a multichannel customer experience. Now that you have a clear view of what reality looks like in most organizations, let’s look at what leading CMOs are doing differently to improve this picture and what they are doing to break down the multichannel customer experience challenges outlined thus far.

To deliver a clear, compelling and consistent story throughout the multichannel experience, cross-functional teams must be operating from the same playbook.
How to Restore Law and Order
The opposite of chaos is order. To secure order in the multichannel customer experience, leading CMOs are operating differently in three fundamental ways: establishing a clear foundation for the multichannel experience; putting in place new operating structures and accountability; and implementing processes that drive connectivity and performance feedback.

Let’s break these down into specific action steps — steps that will ensure you can restore law and order to the multichannel experience your company delivers.

Put Down an Anchor (Establish a Messaging Platform)
The first thing leading CMOs are doing is establishing a core. That core comes to life in the form of a clearly defined and documented corporate story that crystallizes who the company is, how it should be positioned in the market, what the company does, what makes it different from the competition and the core value it delivers to customers. This story is organized and packaged into a comprehensive corporate messaging platform that serves as the single source of the truth. It is the entire corporate story told from end-to-end through consistent messaging that is organized into compartmentalized content (iterations of the story) and is leveraged across all communication channels and customer touchpoints. The messaging platform serves as the anchor or centering point for the messages developed and delivered throughout the customer experience.

Prioritize (Focus on Critical Channels)
With a sound foundation (messaging platform) in place, CMOs are ruthlessly prioritizing the channels utilized throughout the customer journey. Which channels have the greatest impact on engagement, conversion, retention and loyalty? Which channels positively or negatively impact customer satisfaction and perception? Baseline metrics that answer these questions can be gathered through CRM, web analytics, Net Promoter Scores, customer surveys and other sources.

According to Experian, a data analytics company, the top five channels used by enterprise companies to interact with customers include corporate website (72 percent), sales team (61 percent), call center (53 percent), mobile sites/applications (42 percent) and face-to-face locations (42 percent).

The point is, some channels are more critical than others. You have to employ the 80 / 20 rule.

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Leading CMOs are also looking at the internal and external roles involved in messaging development and delivery across these channels. They are documenting specific positions across the company and partners involved in specific phases of the customer journey. It is important to answer questions like: Which departments are involved in messaging delivery? Which specific roles within each department are responsible for messaging development? Which partners manage channels and touchpoints in each phase of the customer journey? With a clear picture of the roles as they are currently defined, you can then redefine the positions and responsibilities so they enable the company to deliver a connected and consistent customer experience. How can we restructure these departments and roles to better serve our customers? What processes must be implemented to ensure seamless handoffs from one role to the next? How can we bring our partners more into the fold to ensure greater alignment in the experience and messages they are delivering? You have to know where the story is originating from across the enterprise if you hope to deliver a consistent message throughout the customer journey.

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With the channels, positions and partners having the greatest impact on the multichannel experience identified, it’s time to educate and train these individuals on the new processes and your messaging platform. Maybe that’s why Alex Becker, Global VP at Digital River, recently said, “The clearer and stronger you make your own messaging, the more likely your channel partners will be to follow your lead and tell the brand stories you want consumers to hear. Message consistency begins at home.”

Formal education and training programs must be designed and implemented to ensure employees and partners clearly understand the new world order. They must fully understand what they will be held accountable for, the role they play in the customer journey and how to leverage corporate messaging in their areas of responsibility. The goal is to increase accountability and ownership of the new processes these individuals are expected to follow and the story they are expected to tell in specific phases of the customer experience.

The new corporate messaging platform serves as the cornerstone of your multichannel customer experience. It is a constant centering point for every stakeholder involved in developing or delivering messaging across each channel used in the customer journey. These individuals must understand there is a foundational message everyone is expected to connect back to. Personalization strategies and decisions should align with the messaging included in the platform.
No more start-from-scratch or “I think this might work” free-form testing. Every message consumed by customers is now anchored in the platform to ensure the story remains consistent from one channel to the next. As personalized messages, content and experiences are tested and analytics are captured, the insights are then used to further align the messaging platform with customer requirements.

Define Closed Loop Process (Enhance Experience Over Time)

The most critical change CMOs are making is to ensure a closed loop feedback process exists to ensure the new, integrated operating model is working. From the corporate messaging platform, to new roles and responsibilities, cross-channel processes, personalization efforts and more. The goal is to ensure the story delivered and the processes used to connect customer-facing channels are producing positive results. The diagram below shows how the platform, process, people, channels and feedback loop all work together to deliver a compelling and consistent multichannel customer experience.

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Bringing It All Together

Delivering a consistent story throughout the multichannel customer experience is not easy. But it is not insurmountable. It just requires a game plan and the persistence to put these foundational elements into action. It all starts with putting an anchor in place — a comprehensive corporate messaging platform that you can pull through the critical channels utilized throughout the customer journey.

Foundational Elements of a Successful Multichannel Customer Experience

| Process  | Formal (employee and partner) education and training on how to leverage the platform in specific communication channels and areas of the business. Defined and documented multichannel messaging connectivity and continuity processes. |
| People   | Individuals that will be held accountable for maintaining compliance with the messaging platform (corporate story). |
| Date     | Demographic, behavioral, engagement and conversion data that can guide personalization of message / experience over time. Inform future versions of platform (corporate story). |
| Closed Loop Feedback | Process, People and Data feedback loops ensure the platform (corporate story) is enhanced and aligned with real-world (internal and customer) insights and requirements. |
No more start-from-scratch or “I think this might work” free-form testing. Every message consumed by customers must be anchored in the platform to ensure the story remains consistent from one channel to the next.
About OnMessage
Companies that succeed in maintaining complete alignment between their corporate story and strategy — win. They win because their words and actions are consistent; creating a superior experience that increases customer acquisition, retention, loyalty and competitive differentiation. OnMessage specializes in helping executives align and activate their entire organization around a corporate strategy and story that dramatically improves the customer experience. Leveraging our disciplined methodology — executive teams are able to crystallize their go-to-market strategy, formulate a strategically aligned corporate messaging platform and ensure every stakeholder understands how to activate the strategy and story throughout the customer journey. In addition, our cloud-based intelligence console provides leaders with timely and accurate insights. Market, customer, employee, culture, competitor and partner insights they need to optimize their strategy, story and customer experience over time. We are OnMessage, the strategy consulting firm helping executives win in the highly competitive “experience economy” that exists today.

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James O’Gara
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James O’Gara is the president and founder of OnMessage. Under his leadership, OnMessage has developed a proven model for helping companies develop a clear, compelling and consistent message. With almost 25 years’ experience working in business and marketing leadership positions, O’Gara is known and respected for building collaborative relationships with executive teams that result in highly effective go-to-market, messaging / positioning and demand generation strategies.