

# It's time to shelve gut feel when it comes to marketing decisions

Through 27 years of experience working in hospitality, I saw marketing decisions being made – often at very high level and involving thousands of pounds – that were based on a gut feeling or presumption.

---

I know now, having worked across retail and leisure, that this type of decision making and over generalised presumption about target groups is not just hospitality specific.

Brace yourselves marketers, because you're about to feel old – those elusive 'millennials' start turning 40 this year. And while much marketing has been done in the hope of capturing a slice of this highly sought-after market, the reality is that has always been a near on impossible task. This is largely because all millennials are just people born between 1981 and 1996, all with varied interests, outlooks, family set ups and consumer characteristics.

*Next, there's the futuristic sounding Gen Z baffling boardrooms across the land. Who are this mysterious group?*

Well, I'll tell you – anyone born from 1997. The one thing that is clear about this group is that they do not respond to over-generalised marketing, but to personalisation.

If businesses were shooting in the dark before the past life-altering year of a global pandemic, lockdowns, and a seismic shift to adopt technology, then those unintentionally ineffective broad-brush approaches are set to become even more irrelevant. Frankly, right now, few businesses have money to be throwing at fruitless activities.

So, in an age where knowing your customers in intimate detail will be the key to not losing them to other brands, how *should* we be marketing in the 'new normal'?

### 1. Know who is most valuable to you and in as much detail as possible

The 'pareto principle' states that roughly '80% of outcomes come from 20% of the causes' and from my experience, this theory is true of customers and their spending habits.

A very small group of your customers are responsible for a big chunk of your revenue: do you know who they are? Assuming you don't, dig deep into your data to identify and profile them in as much detail as possible.

Demographic and geographic information (such as age, gender and location) is important, but it's the juicy psychographic insight you really want: the behaviours and the 'whys' of that behaviour. With COVID and its impacts undoubtedly changing the psychographic profile of your most valuable customers, seek out new ways to gather data in the coming months.

*Unsplash © Brooke Cagle*

### 2. Build a digital dialogue to equip you with the tools to drive personalisation

Now we know our targets, we want to find out as much as possible about them. For many brands, this means we are going to need to listen more than we talk.

Imagine going to a party, meeting someone for the first time and blurting out your name, where you live, what your beliefs and passions are, and why you dye your hair or don't eat meat. It would make for quite an uncomfortable few minutes for the recipient of this information. But if we start slowly, and maybe with a question, we might end up sharing and learning an awful lot about our new connection – where we understand that they dye their hair because it makes them feel hugely confident, or don't eat meat because of the texture rather than animal welfare concerns.

### 3. Personalise your messaging

Now we have all this information, this is where we fundamentally shift our approach from one based on age groups, geographical locations or gender, to one based on mindsets. Your hair colour marketing, for example, becomes about targeting based on the confidence a new hair colour instils in the wearer, rather than how young or old they might be.

Evaluating how that messaging might be landing in our data and then refining our approach accordingly will be key to effective personalisation, becoming ever more granular as we go.

### 4. Convert interest into action

It's essential we don't lose our audience at the final hurdle: the point of conversion. Whatever messaging got them to your shop, website or venue must be consistently executed at the point of conversion to a booking or sale.

There is no point attracting an adult who is looking for a place to go for an adult post-work night out to your 'crazy golf' venue if your website is showing imagery with kids running wild.

*Personalisation needs to be present at every stage of the journey.*

And if conversion is as much about inspiring new behaviour as it is about increasing the value of existing, you'll need to look to your data again to know which way to go.

### 5. Everlasting love

Like friendships get deeper the more you connect (or the more useful you remain!), retention comes from it feeling almost too risky to go elsewhere. Make no mistake, the clues will be in your customer data when things are starting to fizzle. Use this information to re-ignite your connection at the earliest opportunity.

While there will always be a place for commonality in such things as age, gender and geography, in the context of today with changed consumer habits and shifting consumer priorities, the smart marketer should be transcending those limiting segments and getting to grips with the data within their

businesses. This will help to identify and understand the behavioural and psychographic traits of their most valuable customers: and these insights should drive acquisition, conversion, and retention strategies, in turn increasing the value of marketing and its contribution to the top and bottom lines. Gut feelings and over-generalised presumption must be left at the door in favour of fact and data.

*Victoria Searl is founder of DataHawks.*

---

Article by VICTORIA SEARL