



GDPR killed the marketing man.

An Opportunity for the business

Introduction

The introduction of GDPR on 25th May 2018 was a long overdue consequence of businesses viewing the customer as a number to be crunched, a postcode to be mailed to, rather than a human being with a unique experience of the world and the brands within it.

GDPR, while little understood, was welcomed by customers because it felt like the amalgamation of years of being hounded by cold calls and direct mail, of tricks by companies to get more information out of us and of stories of our data being sold by the likes of Facebook to companies that exist to exploit that information for business and political gain.

The fact that all this was legal and done with customer ‘consent’ was even more frustrating. The idea that it was a choice between remaining connected with your favourite people and products or keeping your data secure made customers rightfully angry.

This is not to equate receiving spam emails and direct mail with selling your emotional tendencies to Cambridge Analytica, but it highlights that customers have had enough of being treated as a data point without their knowledge or explicit consent.

While GDPR therefore brings in much needed protection for customers, it presents a challenge for the marketing industry which for decades has been reliant on mass mailing/e-mailing customers, being able to reach them because they have information that a customer has provided for other means.

However, challenging circumstances allow creativity to thrive. GDPR has forced the situation and created an opportunity to revolutionise the industry and end rage-inducing marketing tactics for good.

How did we get here?

GDPR has created a huge amount of hype in the marketing and business world. In our world it has put most marketers into a complete tailspin. There are few meetings where GDPR isn’t mentioned in a concerned tone, and the steps we now go through to be able to work on clients’ data are now, in most cases, rightfully significantly more rigorous.

It is almost as if they have suddenly woken up to the fact that some data does not just belong to them to do whatever they like with and in fact should be treated with consideration to the true owner, the customer. In fact, this is exactly what has happened. The marketing industry has previously treated all data as their own asset without appreciating the sometimes vulnerable position that can put customers in.

GDPR is a reaction to the many deep seated flaws that still permeate in marketing today. You do not need to look far back to think of numerous examples of marketing teams taking liberties:

- Junk mail through letterboxes (while less prevalent in a digital age it is still not uncommon)
- Sales calls at all hours of the day (again, the digital age has sadly not made this a thing of the past)
- Spam email
- Opt-in/Opt-out tricks every time you signed up for something or bought a product (GDPR has fortunately had a significant positive impact on this)
- Not to mention the almost daily data breaches reported in the news.

The list goes on and yet it's not surprising. For years all marketeers have heard is to be more customer-centric, to put the customer at the heart of the business. Well, that is what they've done, quite literally, but sadly with no regard to the customer themselves.

As customers we can all recognise the feelings of frustration and outrage that a brand believes it is OK to clutter our hallways with direct mail, affectionately referred to by those in the industry as "shit that folds". Nearly all of us have felt the frustration of painstakingly navigating click boxes trying to ensure we don't get a barrage of unwanted emails only to find somehow they still sneak through.

To top it all off, the customer has been saying "No" for years. Signs saying 'No Junk Mail' on letterboxes feature across the country, while landlines have built in filters to prevent cold-calling, and few people answer the phone to unrecognised numbers anymore.

GDPR has now come along, after years of the customer being ignored and told the marketing industry that "No, really does mean No".

The marketing industry has been obsessed with, even addicted to, customer data (though rarely using it with any great effect, instead choosing to mass market), and now it needs to go cold turkey.

So, what next?

At Beyond Analysis we never use customer data. In fact, we avoid it like the plague. Initially this came from a way to avoid all the costs associated with the additional security required to satisfy any client checks, as well as minimising the time required to spend worrying about keeping this safe and secure.

As a result, we learned how to solve business problems creatively without resorting to invasive direct communication. It also helped that we couldn't stand the idea of being involved in anything that industry insiders referred to as 'shit that folds'.

So instead we went on a journey of looking for ways to build up a rich and detailed picture of our clients' customers that taught us why knowing exactly who customers are just isn't important at all:

- We stopped looking at things through the business lens and started deploying a customer lens. For example, a box of Crunchy Nut to a business might be known for the space it takes up on a shop shelf and its markup, while for a customer it

is a convenient, quick, kid-friendly meal solution and something they have to fit in their cupboard.

- We started looking for other data sources that could help us and went for what some would expect to be some of the most sensitive data in the world, debit and credit card data, which in actuality can be completely anonymous and therefore protective of the customer.
- We focused our analytics efforts on the customer journey or experience so that we could see where a customer comes from, how they interacted with the business, when and where those interactions changed and ultimately what did they end up buying (or not).

What we then learned was that all these great insights were only going to be useful to our clients if our people understood it and used it and actually *did* something with it. So we focused on how to get insights and information out to the front line. Our clients do not make serious money from our work when it remains in the hands of marketing or insight teams, but they have made huge impacts when operations teams are brought in and have the right information at the right time.

What we've been discovering is that what we are doing goes back to the very core of successful business.

We've shifted our focus from Marketing making products look and sound shiny and ramming that message home to our customers at every available opportunity to hit some arbitrary KPIs. We've shifted away from trying to boost demand via targeted marketing or trying to create a sense of need that doesn't exist.

Instead, what we've moved towards is creating better value propositions at the supply end, helping our clients let their product and product experience speak for themselves.

We are encouraging our clients to move away from "annoying" marketing to "constructive" marketing, where:

- Businesses shift from tracking customer behaviour (which has been shown to make customers uncomfortable) to **forecasting** their needs, enabling businesses to better meet these needs (an outcome which has been shown to be valued by customers).
- Making businesses faster/leaner/meaner, by giving them the right tools such as intelligent alerts rather than pages of excel reports, so they can respond to their customers needs in time
- Help design better experiences - pairings of products that are either essential or work well together, better pricing to bring customers in and keep them loyal.

All of which can be done without identifying a single customer and instead looking at the aggregate.

We respect customers' privacy because it matters, because it is their right and most of all because we want them to love our products and buy them because of that.

Conclusion

Clearly we are entering a new era of marketing, forced upon the industry by long overdue regulation. While the transition may not be easy, it does not mean marketing industries need to fall back on mass-media marketing. This is an ideal time to embrace the

alternative approach to marketing, being data driven and highly targeted, helping to shape the whole product chain, not just picking billboards and bus stops.

GDPR may have killed the marketing man, but in reality, it has given those that want it a second chance, a much bigger opportunity. The opportunity to do what the worlds truly great marketeers and brands achieve - letting the product speak for itself.