

Customer Insight

Strategic intelligence across the technology adoption life cycle

Summary

As individuals become more socially empowered and technologically savvy, businesses need to become as agile as their customers. This article explores how businesses can integrate the customer experience throughout the product life cycle—from research, to product development, customer adoption experiences, business analytics, marketing, sales, and more.



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According to [Andreas Weigend](#), former Chief Scientist at Amazon.com, individuals generated more data in 2009 than was created in all of human history through 2008.¹ As our culture becomes increasingly connected through social technology, individuals are not only creating more information than ever before, they're also actively sharing that information. Individuals can instantaneously text, tweet, and post their opinions and purchasing decisions to a global audience, creating a marketplace of intelligent consumers who trust the experiences of their social network more than they do marketing messages.

If the “information revolution” is evolving into the “intelligence revolution,” what does that mean for marketing—especially high-tech marketing?

Information is siloed, intelligence is shared

As individuals become more socially empowered and technologically savvy, businesses must be as agile with information sharing as their customers are. For example, businesses that suffer from the “silo effect” (lack of communication between departments that results in a fragmented customer experience) may find it more and more difficult to retain customers and remain competitive in the marketplace. On the other hand, businesses that cultivate an “insightful” organizational structure—one that values visibility into the customer experience and business analytics, plus puts the people, processes, and technologies in place to strategically share that information across business units—can build intelligent relationships with customers that ultimately drive revenue and increase profits.

This “customer intelligence” model is at the forefront of innovation in business. Customer intelligence differs from business intelligence in that it is customer-centric and interdisciplinary—making use of statistics, as well as marketing, technology, communications, and public relations. Gaining cross-departmental insight into every aspect of the technology adoption life cycle—from research, to product development, customer adoption experiences, business analytics, marketing, and sales—gives businesses a tremendous advantage in the marketplace. Sharing information across traditionally “siloed” groups helps businesses make better strategic decisions that ultimately create maximum value both for the customer and for the organization.

A recent report by [Forrester Research](#) identifies three stages of customer intelligence maturity—from functional intelligence, to marketing intelligence, to strategic intelligence—and predicts that the next generation of chief marketing officers will emerge from the strategic customer intelligence discipline.² “Today, customer intelligence executives enable organizations to successfully manage relationships with highly empowered customers who have a dwindling tolerance for marketing,” says Dave Frankland, an Analyst at Forrester Research. “Tomorrow, they will create Customer Intelligence command centers to drive corporate strategy and create competitive advantage.”

¹ Weigend, Andreas. “The Social Data Revolution(s),” May 20, 2009. In: Now, New, Next Blog. Harvard Business Review. Available from: <http://blogs.hbr.org/now-new-next/2009/05/the-social-data-revolution.html>.

² Frankland, Dave. “The Intelligent Approach to Customer Intelligence,” October 16, 2009. Forrester. Available from: http://www.forrester.com/rb/Research/intelligent_approach_to_customer_intelligence/q/id/55051/t/2.

Customer intelligence across the technology adoption life cycle

In the 1990s, the visionary marketing strategist [Geoffrey Moore](#) wrote that the key to successful high-tech marketing is to embrace and leverage this fact: Members of the high-tech market segment consistently reference each other when making buying decisions. “The more self-referencing the market and the more tightly bounded its communication channels, the greater the opportunity for [ongoing chain-reaction effects—what is usually called word of mouth],” Moore explained.³ The challenge becomes: how to intelligently market to the five primary psychological and demographic personalities that make up the high-tech market segment—innovators, early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and the laggards—throughout the various stages of the technology adoption life cycle?

In his seminal work *Crossing the Chasm*, Moore revised the original technology adoption life cycle model⁴ (which describes the adoption or acceptance of a new product or innovation) and proposed that—for discontinuous or disruptive innovations—a significant gap exists between the first adopter group (innovators and early adopters) and the early majority. In other words, these two groups think about technology adoption in very different ways and therefore need to be approached with marketing strategies that specifically target what Moore called the “visionary” (innovator and early adopter) and “pragmatic” (early majority) mindsets. For example, visionaries are eager to engage in technology adoption programs, while pragmatists want to see evidence of a technology’s efficacy before adopting it. This is especially true during times of economic uncertainty when the gap between early adopters and the early majority widens due to budgetary concerns.

Here’s where strategic customer intelligence really comes into play: Businesses that manage customer relationships, cultivate customer engagement, gather customer information throughout the technology adoption life cycle—and most importantly share that information across teams—possess the insight and agility needed to drive effective, targeted marketing and sales efforts.

How the rubber hits the road

So, how does a company—or a motivated individual within a larger organization—evolve from being functionally intelligent to strategically intelligent? Even if you aren’t the customer intelligence evangelist at your organization, you can still make incremental changes that could ultimately launch an intelligence revolution.

Become a customer advocate

Rather than “sell” to customers, strategically intelligent companies (and individuals) focus on relationships. Reach out to advertising-skeptical consumers through social technologies to tangibly demonstrate bottom-line value. For example, create or become involved in online communities.

³ Moore, Geoffrey A. *Crossing the Chasm*. Adobe Acrobat E-Book Reader edition v.1. October 2001, p. 22.

⁴ Bohlen, Joe M.; Beal, George M. “The Diffusion Process,” Special Report No. 18. Agriculture Extension Service, Iowa State College. March 1957, 1: 56–77. Available from: <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/extension/presentations/publications/comm/Diffusion%20Process.pdf>.

Focus on customer value

Never ask for a single piece of customer information without knowing ahead of time how it will help add value for the customer—and for the business. Start by mapping out how you (or your group) plan to interact with customers (for example, through a [technology adoption program](#) or [customer advisory board](#)). Then determine what information you want to gather, how you plan to use that information to add value, and what processes you need to put in place to share that information with other groups.

Build an intelligence engine

Without a system to capture, store, analyze, and share customer data, customer intelligence does not exist. Use [technology](#), implement processes, or suggest policies to centralize functions and ensure that everyone in the company (or on your team) can turn that data into informative insights that drive business decisions. Remember, no matter what system you employ, it will only be as good as the information going into it. Don't let yourself drown in the data—team up with a [business intelligence expert](#) to help you make sense of your data, and more importantly, to share it.

Engage a strategic intelligence partner

Unsure how to start an intelligence revolution at your company or in your department? Seek the services of an [intelligence partner](#)—a company that specializes in offerings that span the technology adoption life cycle. From product planning (professional services, research) to product development (technology adoption programs, product validation) to product marketing (customer reference programs), a strategic intelligence partner can help you launch an intelligence revolution. A full-service agency can support all stages in the life cycle, as well as supply the people-power to help you successfully cross the chasm from ideas to results.

To find out more about how Projectline can help you tap into and incorporate intelligence from your customers, email extraordinary@projectlineinc.com, or drop us a line [on our website](#).