

USING AI TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Integrating new technologies into business systems, processes and operations can be confusing and complex. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a good case in point; while it offers immense potential, harnessing its power can be a challenge. Mark Petroff, President and Chief Executive Officer of OneMagnify, explains how the auto industry can benefit from AI, as well as how implementing the technology can improve marketing efforts and maximize customers' car-buying experiences.

Q: Marketers in the automotive industry want to create optimal customer experiences. Which digital-maturity challenges are getting in their way?

Mark Petroff: Today's auto-buying environment is highly competitive and digital-first and customers expect top-notch experiences. Yet there are numerous digital-maturity challenges that hinder automakers' ability to create optimal customer experiences.

First of all, I often see that inconsistent data integration and fragmented systems across departments remain a big hurdle to forming a single, unified view of a customer. This fragmentation often leads to siloed data, where customer information is dispersed across different platforms. In turn, this hampers the ability to deliver personalized experiences and insights across the full customer journey.

Another challenge is cost and complexity. Whether you choose monolith, modular or native platforms – or some combination of them – it requires a significant initial investment in marketing technologies and infrastructure, as well as intricacies in implementing and managing marketing technology platforms.

Finally, data privacy and security loom large. Companies must not only stay compliant with privacy regulations, but also protect customer data and address ethical concerns tied to marketing practices driven by artificial intelligence (AI).

Q: How should marketers think about the role of customer research and how it links to creating customer experiences?

Petroff: Customer research is vital when it comes to designing anything related to the customer journey. When done effectively, customer research results in a deep understanding of target audiences and their behaviors, preferences and pain points. These are all pieces of information that automotive marketers need to connect with future customers.

Customer research should focus on truly listening to your customers. One way to do this is through a voice-of-customer (VoC) analysis. This can involve scraping websites and social media to learn what customers are saying online and gathering first-party data on how existing customers interact with your brand, products and services. Then, you can layer on AI techniques to analyze the data for sentiment and themes, pull out important quotes and interpret what it all means to your organization.

The research should also go deeper, digging into how customers and prospects feel at each stage in the customer journey through surveys, focus groups and interviews.

Overall, when customer research is done well, it helps your team obtain a deep understanding of core audiences, which allows you to develop strategies to reach them at the right time, in the right place and with the right message to influence decision-making.

Q: How can auto manufacturers maximize the use of chat bots in enhancing the customer experience?

Petroff: They can be incredibly helpful, but a poorly trained chat bot can become a pain point for customers. Underlying data quality is incredibly important. The more precise the answers need to be for customers, the more rigor companies should apply to governing the automated responses provided to them.

A great example of this is the [Dealer Co-Pilot program](#) that we're developing for FordDirect. The Co-Pilot is an internally facing AI platform inside the dealership that helps the dealer directly interact with the customer. It's also a convenient, single point of access that eliminates time, expense, and hassle. It empowers dealers to make smarter decisions by providing quick answers to customers or to help them in their role at the dealership.



Mark Petroff

Q: How does AI help marketers improve the customer experience?

Petroff: AI has transformed how we communicate with our customers and is reshaping how we engage with and market to them. One of the most significant changes has occurred in advanced customer segmentation, where AI-driven tools provide deeper insights into customer needs and preferences. By analyzing vast amounts of data, these tools tailor marketing messages and offers to specific groups with precision, ensuring higher relevance and resonance with each segment.

This level of customization is further enhanced by AI-driven personalization engines such as custom generative pre-trained transformers (custom GPTs), which can be trained on each persona. These engines enable marketers to efficiently generate persona-specific content while maintaining high relevance and resonance with target audiences. They also allow for the dynamic adaptation of personas as more data is gathered, ensuring that marketing strategies remain aligned with evolving customer behaviors.

In addition, AI helps address the challenge of information overload by enabling progressive disclosure throughout a customer's journey. This allows organizations to offer timely interactions across multiple touchpoints, sending customers the right information at the right stage of their decision-making process.

Finally, generative AI can help organizations better understand customer feedback, particularly through analyzing call center data. By efficiently identifying patterns and trends in large, unstructured customer-feedback datasets, you gain valuable insights into customer satisfaction and areas for improvement.

Q: How can auto-marketing teams ensure they have the data and processes in place to leverage AI at scale?

Petroff: To leverage AI at scale, auto-marketing teams need to establish robust data infrastructure and processes.

The first step is to focus on data quality and integration. Start by consolidating data from various sources – customer relationship management systems, dealership interactions, social media, website analytics and more – into a unified, centralized data platform.

Once your data is centralized, it's important to ensure compliance with data privacy regulations, protect customer data and address any ethical concerns to ensure transparency.

Having the correct and qualified talent in place also plays a huge part in leveraging AI at scale. We should make sure our marketing teams are upskilled in AI, data science and analytics – or hire outside experts.

After those steps, you must build a solid foundation for data science. Implement business-intelligence tools, such as dashboards and reporting, to establish a clear baseline of your current performance. This helps you see where you can improve. Then you can enhance your insights with data science techniques and make informed decisions based on the outcomes and interpretations of predictive models.

And finally, investing in data science isn't just about financial resources. It often requires a significant investment of time and effort to socialize the concept within your organization. Take that extra step to ensure all stakeholders understand and embrace the value AI brings.

By forecasting customer behavior and market trends, AI empowers you to anticipate and proactively address customer needs.

ABOUT THE PANELIST

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Petroff is the leading force behind OneMagnify's growth as a tech-driven innovator of integrated marketing services. Prior to joining OneMagnify, he was a partner in Deloitte's Financial Advisory Services practice and served in the United States Navy.

