TRENDS IN PERSONALIZATION

RESEARCH FINDINGS

SITECORE + SoDA

GLOBAL TRENDS STUDY

The Global Trends in Personalization Study is a collaboration between SoDA and Sitecore to assess investment plans, adoption of emerging technology, organizational priorities and key challenges relative to delivering personalized digital consumer experiences. Data was collected in January and February of 2019 from 351 marketing leaders and C-level executives across North American, Europe and APAC. The full report, along with commentary and perspectives, is available online at:

www.sodareporton.com/trends-in-personalization

SUMMARY
FINDINGS

SoDA

1 Digital experience personalization is a major priority for global business leaders and investment plans for expanded capabilities are growing.

✓ 85% of marketing leaders and C-level executives say that digital experience personalization is an important facet of their marketing ecosystem with 35% indicating that they see personalization as a *major competitive advantage for their business*.

✓ 83% increased their investments in personalization for 2019 with 32% pointing to a *significant budget increase* this year.

✓ The importance of personalization capabilities and investment plans varied little across geographic regions, leadership roles and size of digital budget, indicating that *digital experience personalization is a consistent, global priority*.

(2) **Data & Analytics and Technology Platforms are top investment priorities in 2019 with no signs of slowing down through 2021.**

✓ Marketing leaders and C-level executives point to Data & Analytics (41%) and Technology Platforms (36%) as the Top 2 areas where they are currently *investing the most money to fuel their personalization initiatives*.

✓ Looking ahead at the next two years, investments remain focused on Data & Analytics and Technology Platforms with 38% and 33%, respectively, earmarking these areas for the *most significant budget increases*.

(3) **Content is a crucial element of the digital experience ecosystem and global leaders are focused on scaling their content production capabilities.**

✓ Producing and publishing personalized digital content more quickly and more cost-effectively is a near-unanimous priority for global leaders (> 95%) with 55% and 47%, respectively, focused on *speed of delivery* and *efficiency* *as a major priority for their organization*.

✓ Not surprisingly, challenges related to developing a more robust digital content ecosystem mirror the biggest opportunity areas: global leaders point to Speed (44%), Budget (39%) and Automation (39%) as the *top pain points throttling their ability to produce and deliver more personalized digital content*.

(4) **While marketing leaders and C-level executives clearly recognize the importance of digital experience personalization, the majority appear to over-estimate their current capabilities.**

✓ When it comes to digital experience personalization, 67% of global leaders *rate their organizations as "Masters" or "Experts"* with robust and advanced levels of personalization capabilities.

✓ Though rating themselves highly in terms of organizational maturity, *less than 40% utilize even the most basic targeting criteria* for personalization: Purchase History (38%), Browsing History (28%), Referral Source (24%) and Session Click-stream Data (20%).

✓ *Less than 45% are leveraging AI-capabilities for crucial functions* such as automating routine tasks, improving content targeting, becoming more responsive to user actions or scenario planning.

✓ *Less than one-third of leaders rate their personalization capabilities as "Advanced"* in any crucial sales and communication channel (Web, Mobile, Email, Call Center, In-Store Experience, Online Advertising or Cross-Channel Integration).

⑤ **Global leaders have identified many of the crucial priorities necessary for digital experience personalization, but most still lack the strategic plans, data practices, platform capabilities and budgets necessary to accelerate and enhance their capabilities.**

✓ 52% currently *lack an adequate roadmap and strategic investment plan* for the personalization capabilities.

✓ *Lack of budget* (40%), *limited platform capabilities* (37%), *channel complexity* (37%) and *data* (35%) are *significant barriers* standing in the way of enhanced personalization.

✓ Data & Analytics is a top priority but nearly 50% of leaders do not view testing and measurement as a major priority while data *Automation* (44%), *Accuracy* (40%), *Fragmentation* (39%) and *Interpretation* (39%) represent *significant challenges*.

✓ *Organizational practices and priorities for data privacy significantly lag*– just 35% say that data privacy is a major priority for their business and only 32% are actively improving their processes relative to data privacy despite the fact that nearly 80% admit to experiencing some level of data breach at their organizations

RESEARCH
HIGHLIGHTS

SoDA

Investments Growing in 2019

Marketing leaders and C-level executives point to increased investments for personalization in 2019.

Spending on Personalization	2019
Significant budget increase in 2019	32%
Budget increase in 2019	52%
Budget same in 2018 and 2019	15%
Budget decrease in 2019	1%

32%

Significant Budget Increase

32% of marketing leaders and C-level executives in North America, Europe and APAC say that they have significantly increased their budget for digital experience personalization in 2019.

Spending is an even bigger priority for online businesses, those with digital marketing budgets greater than $100MM and those who view personalization as a competitive advantage for their business.

Of Nearly Ubiquitous Importance

85% of global leaders acknowledge the importance of digital experience personalization for their business.

VIEWPOINT ON ROLE OF DIGITAL EXPERIENCE PERSONALIZATION

35% We see personalization as a competitive advantage for our business.

50% We see personalization as an important part of our overall marketing ecosystem.

13% We see personalization as cost of doing business.

3% Personalization is not a critical priority for our business.

a competitive advantage

35%

More than one third of marketing leaders and C-level executives say that digital experience personalization is a *competitive advantage for their business.*
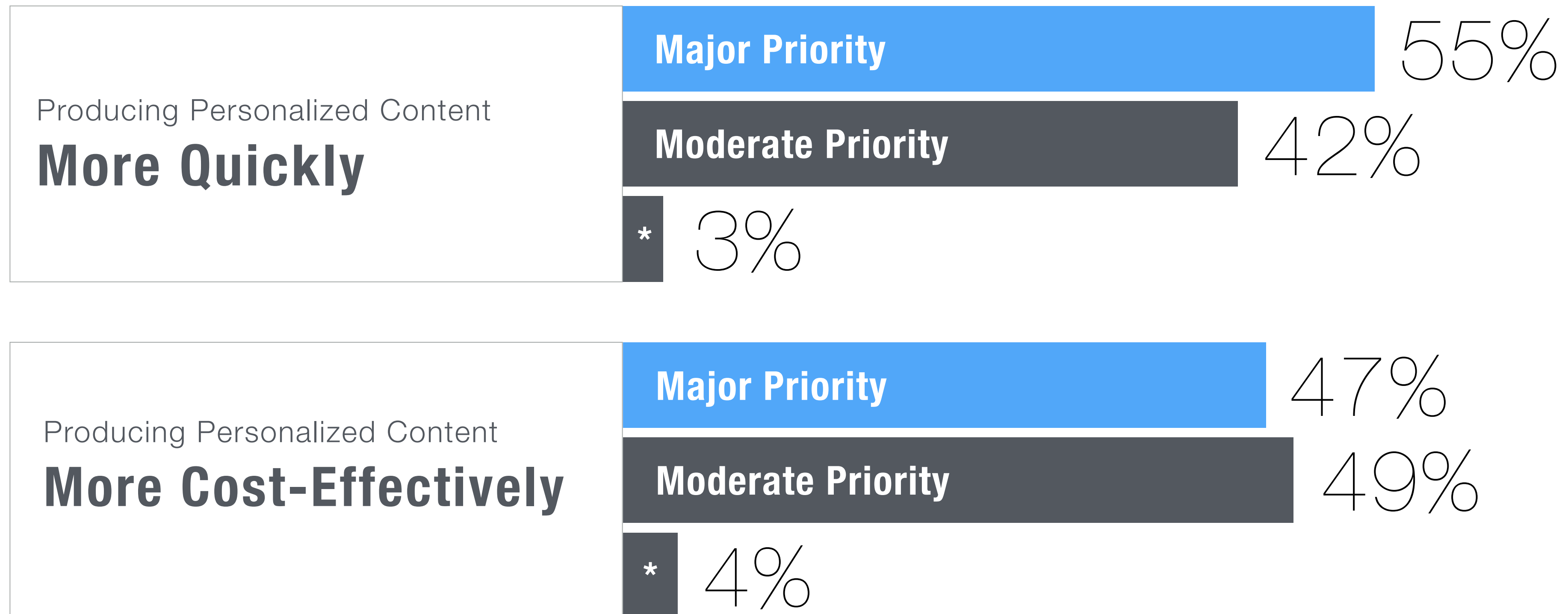
Data & Platforms Top Spending

Data and platforms are the biggest areas of spending for personalization and slated for budget growth through 2021.

2019 :: Top 2 Areas of Investment		2020/21 :: Top 2 Areas of Increase	
Data & Analytics	41%	Data & Analytics	38%
Platforms & Technology	36%	Platforms & Technology	33%
Strategy & Planning	35%	Strategy & Planning	32%
Staff & Headcount	24%	Staff & Headcount	26%
Media & Advertising	22%	Media & Advertising	25%
Content Production	21%	External Partners	23%
External Partners	20%	Content Production	20%
Process & Org Change	2%	Process & Org Change	3%

Content is a Major Priority

Content is crucial for the personalization ecosystem and global leaders cite speed and efficiency as priorities.

Producing Personalized Content
More Quickly

Major Priority 55%

Moderate Priority 42%

* 3%

Producing Personalized Content
More Cost-Effectively

Major Priority 47%

Moderate Priority 49%

* 4%

* Not a priority.

Challenges for Personalization

Leaders point to automation, speed and channel complexity as top challenges hindering greater personalization.

Top Barriers :: Organizational	
Budget	40%
Technology Platform	37%
Channel Integration	37%
Data	35%
Executive Support	34%
Internal Processes	34%
Internal Team / Capabilities	31%
Content	29%
Prioritization	19%
Other	2%

Top Barriers :: Data	
Automation	44%
Accuracy	40%
Fragmentation	39%
Gaps	36%
Access / Timeliness	32%
Budget	23%
Interpretation	9%
Other	1%

Top Barriers :: Content	
Speed	44%
Automation	39%
Multi-Channel Distribution	35%
Internal Staff / Capabilities	33%
Asset Library / Media Types	30%
Agency Partners	26%
Insight	11%
Other	1%

Organizational Maturity

Leaders rate their organizations highly when it comes to assessing their current personalization capabilities.

MASTERS	12%
EXPERTS	54%
NOVICES	21%
BEGINNINERS	12%
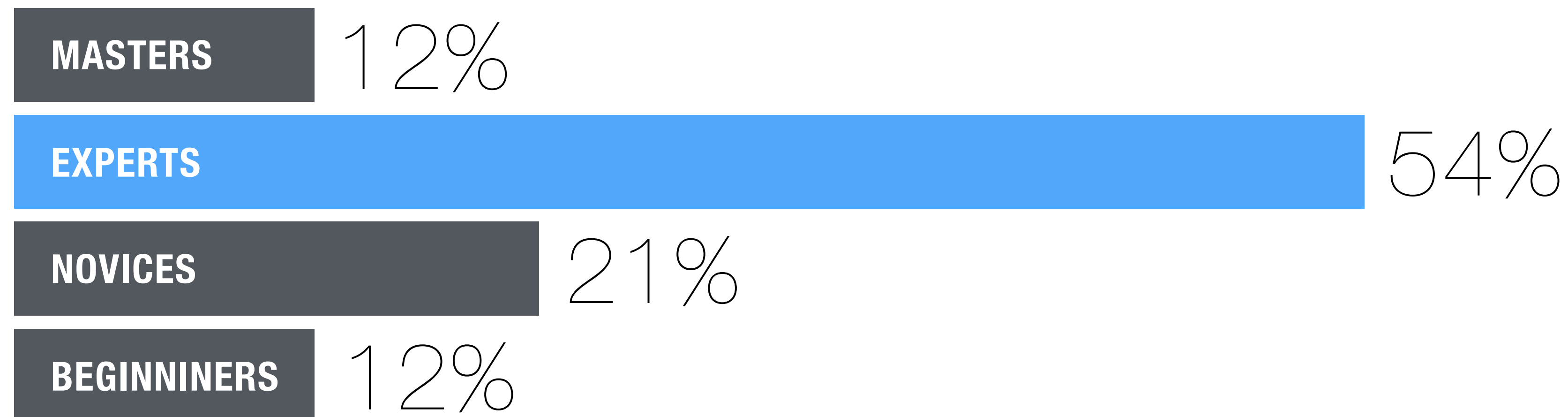
Masters… *We are delivering a comprehensive, dynamic and advanced personalization program continually optimized through ongoing improvements and investments.*

Experts… *We are delivering robust levels of personalization with a clear roadmap and investment plan for more enhanced personalization capabilities.*

Novices… *We are delivering simple levels of personalization but steadily increasing our level of sophistication.*

Beginners… *We have not done much yet and/or are just starting to explore personalization.*

Top Targeting Criteria

Organizations utilize a number of criteria to target and personalize the delivery of digital experiences.

Top Targeting Criteria Used for Delivering Personalized Experiences

|			
Geography / Region	38%	Device Type	25%
Purchase History	38%	Referral Source	24%
Segmentation Model	33%	Predictive Model (manual)	24%
User Profile / Preferences	31%	Gender	23%
Age	30%	Session Click-stream Data	20%
Current Geo-location	28%	Ethnicity	15%
Browsing history	28%	Predictive Model (AI)	9%
Shopping cart history	26%	Other	1%

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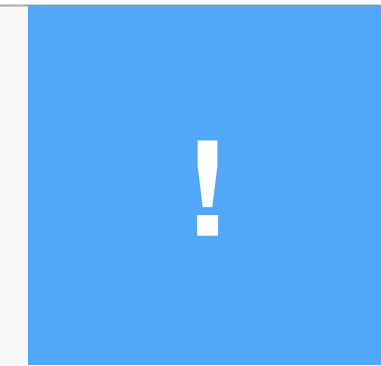
ROOM TO GROW

While marketing leaders and C-level executives rate their organizational capabilitiesfor personalization highly, less than 40% are utilizing even the most basic parameters for targeting, indicating that it's still early days for most businesses when it comes to delivering personalized digital experiences.

Strategic Roadmaps Lacking

More than 90% of leaders say they have a strategic roadmap for personalization but majority are lacking.

More than half of all organizations lack an adequate strategic roadmap and investment plan for the development of enhanced personalization capabilities.

Yes	48%
Yes (but roadmap lacks specificity and necessary funding)	44%
No	6%
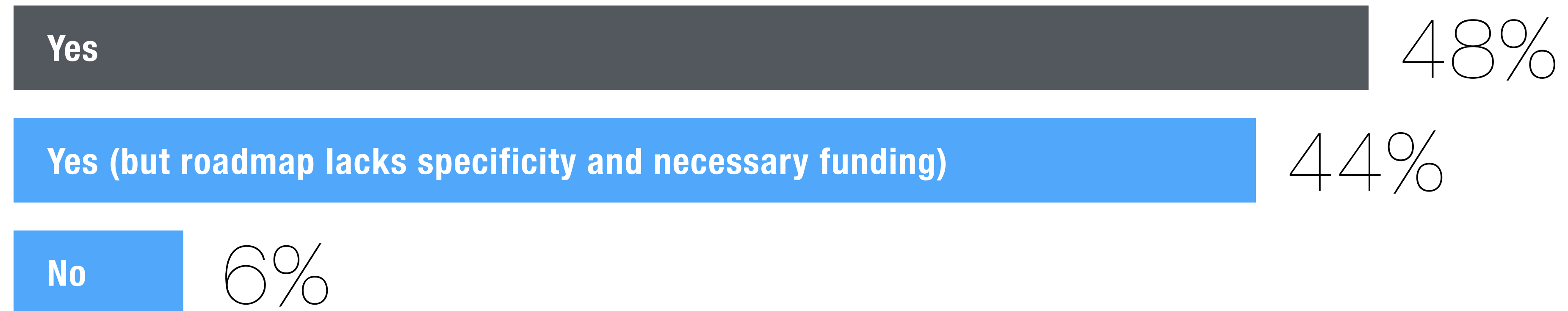
AI Adoption High But Use Limited

81% of global leaders are utilizing AI capabilities for personalization but the applications are very limited.

AI FOR PERSONALIZATION

24% Leveraging AI capabilities that are *native to the software platform(s)* we use.

37% Leveraging AI capabilities *developed, trained, or customized internally*.

20% Leveraging *both native and internally developed* AI-driven capabilities.

11% Not currently leveraging AI capabilities, but *plan to in the next 12-months*.

8% Not currently leveraging AI capabilities and no near-time plans / don't know.

PRIMARY USE CASES

Use Case	
Predictive Analysis / Scenario Planning	55%
Quicker Responsiveness to Customer Actions	51%
Automating Routine Content Tasks	49%
Smarter Content Targeting	46%
Other	11%

A Few Segments Stand Out

Investment plans, priorities and practices varied little across segment data cuts with the exception of three.

Competitive Advantage

35% of respondents (n=122) view personalization as a competitive advantage for their business. This segment is more likely to:

- Have a detailed strategic plan (+18).
- Have significantly increased their budget for personalization 2019 (+21).
- View the production of personalized digital content as a major priority… more quickly (+27) and more cost-effectively (+22).
- View testing and measuring the impact of personalization programs as a major priority (+19).

Compared to the global average.

Digital Budget > $100 MM

28% of respondents (n=99) have annual digital marketing budgets greater than $100MM (USD). This segment is more likely to:

- Rate their organizational capabilities for personalization at a "Master" level (+17).
- Have significantly increased their budget for personalization 2019 (+15).
- Point to "Platforms & Technology" as one of the top two areas slated for big investment increases over the next two years (+14).
- Prioritize data privacy… investing heavily (+13) and improving processes (+14).

Compared to those with budgets < $100 MM.

eCommerce Sales Model

37% of respondents (n=131) operate an eCommerce and online sales as their primary sales model. This segment is more likely to:

- Have a detailed strategic plan (+26).
- Leverage AI-capabilities (+18).
- View the production of personalized digital content as a major priority… more quickly (+24) and more cost-effectively (+16).
- Point to internal staff and capabilities as a key challenge (+13) and adding new staff and headcount as a top investment priority over the next two years. (+14).

Compared to those with hybrid offline/online models.

SURVEY
METHODOLOGY

SoDA

Survey Methodology

The respondent pool consisted of 351 marketing and executive leaders from a global mix of industry segments.
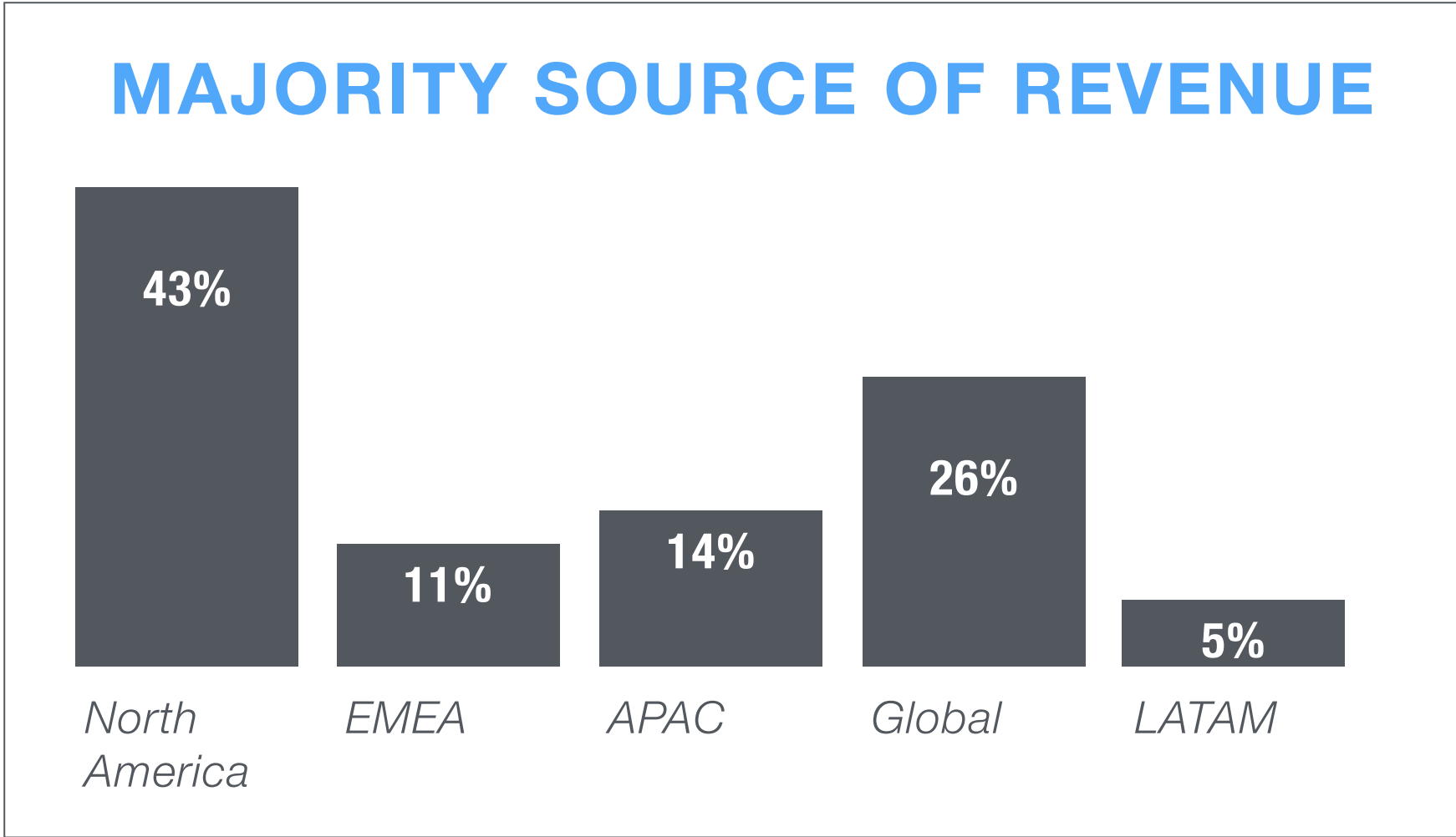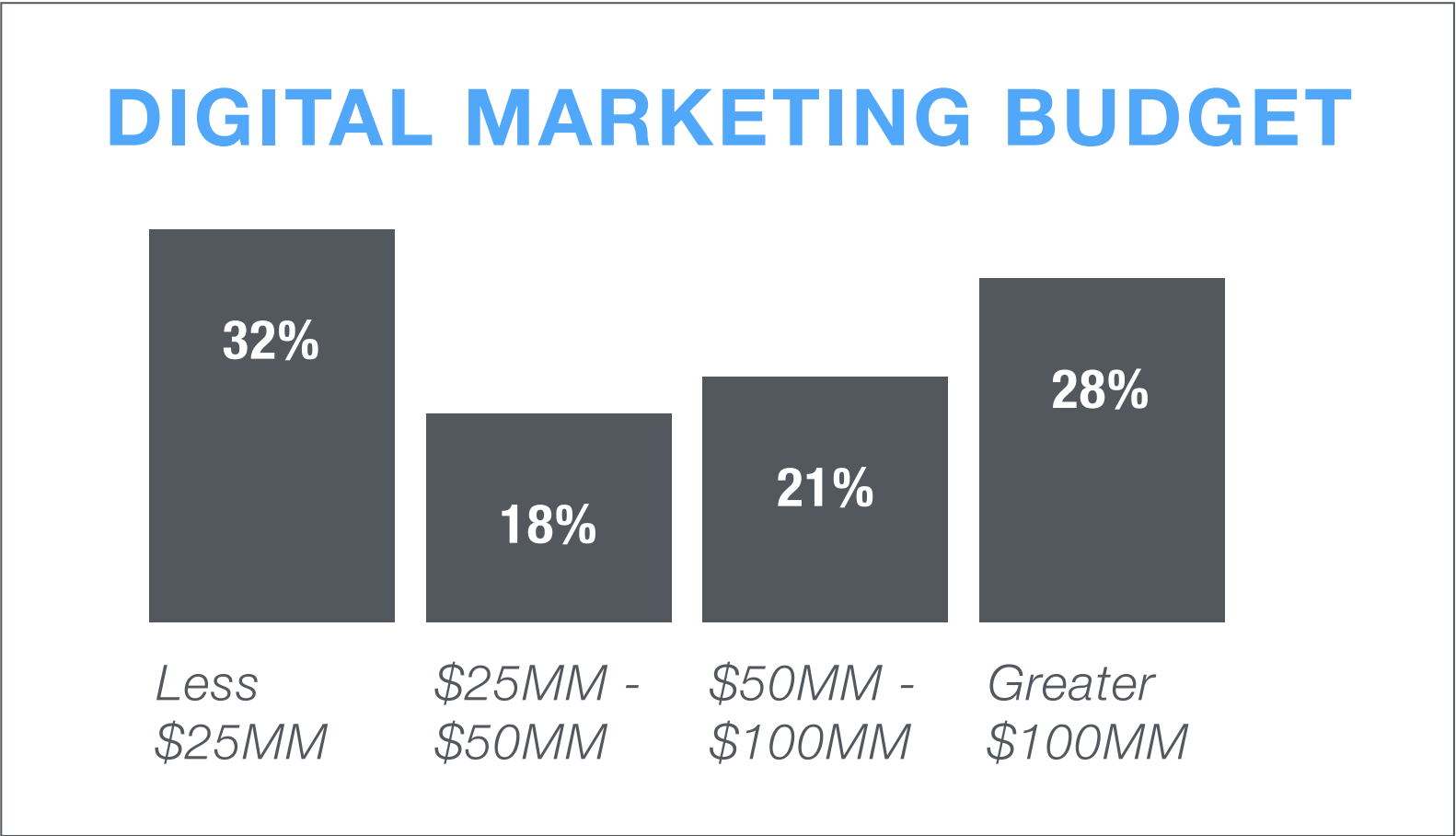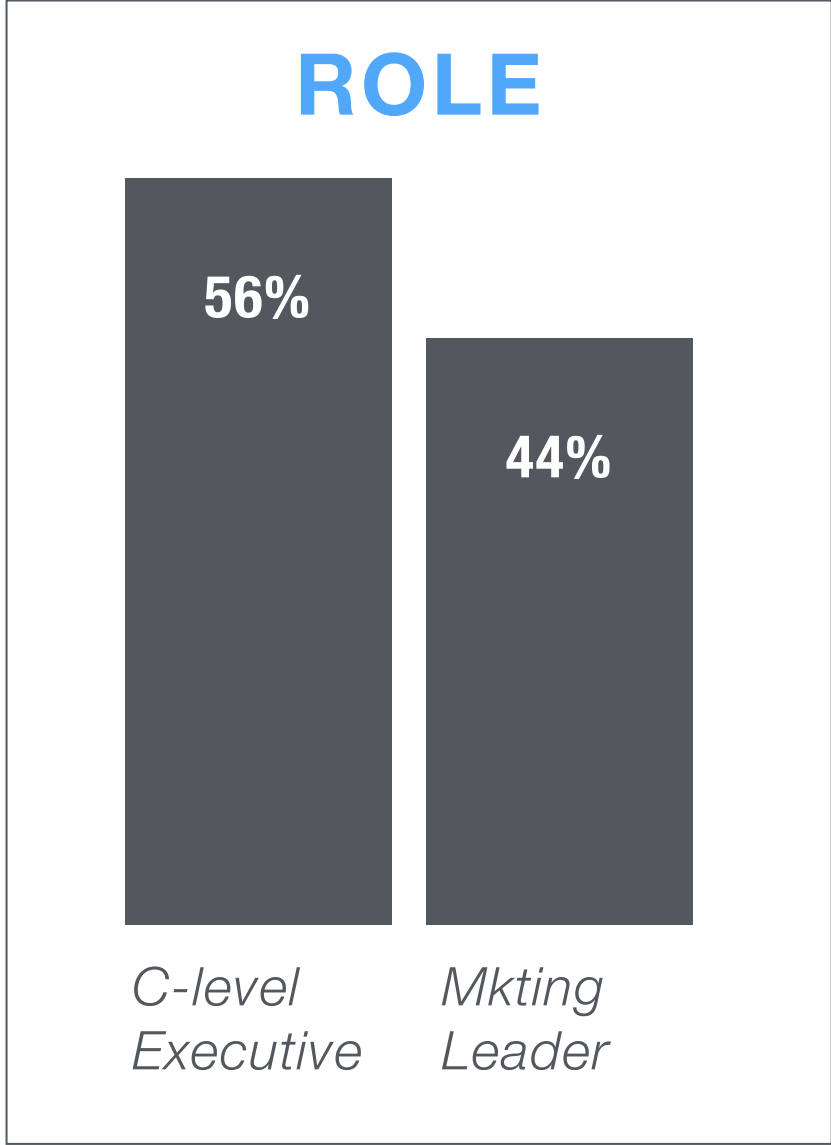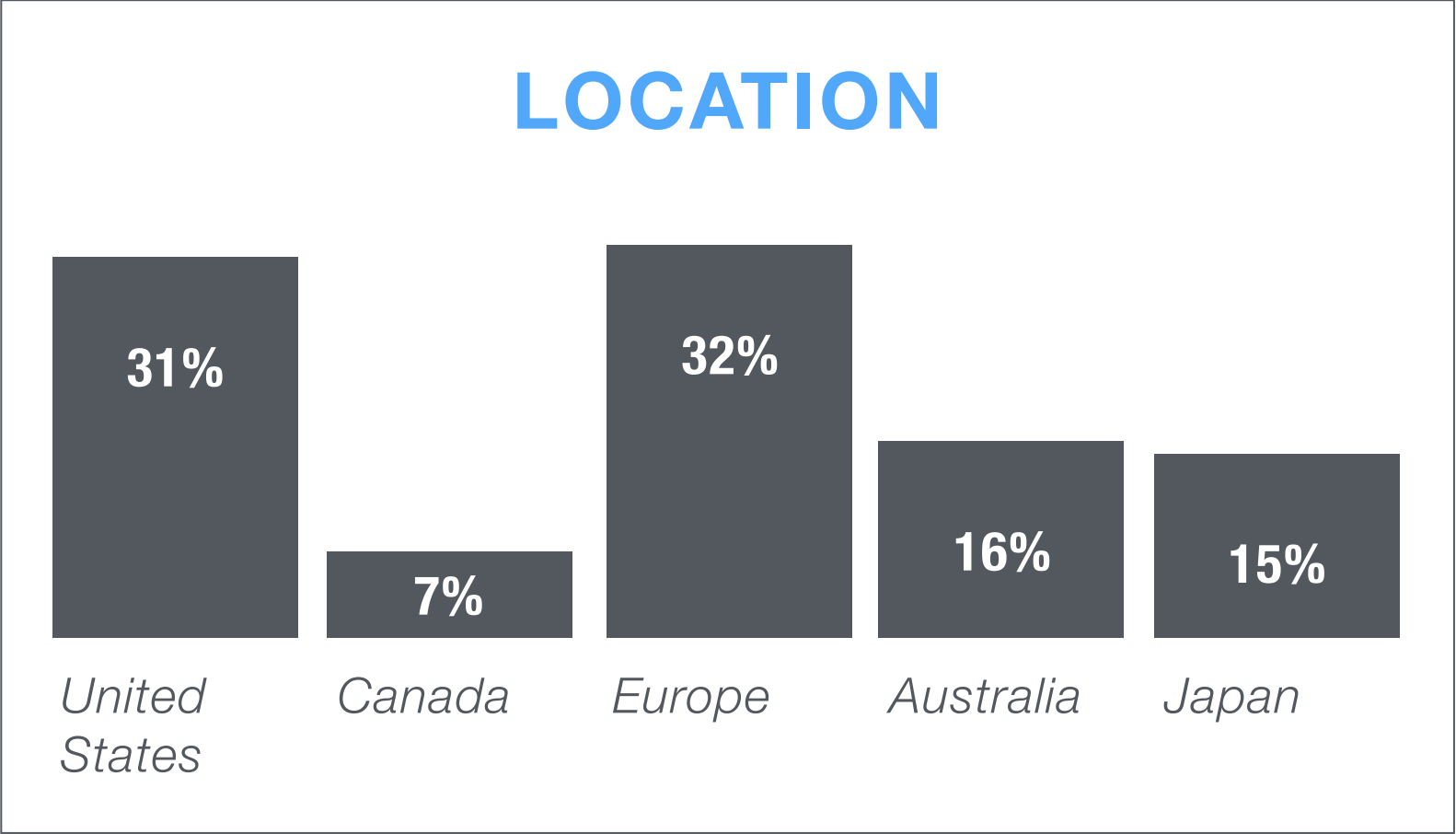
Survey Respondents

(n = 351)

:: Global online survey fielded for 6-weeks in January and February of 2019.

:: Screened for responses from Marketing Leaders (director and above) and C-level Executives.

:: Strong mix across industry segments and geographies.

:: Nearly equal split of respondents with digital marketing budgets less and greater than $50 MM.

:: Healthy representation of eCommerce sales models and hybrid online/offline sales models.

Respondents

Survey Respondents
(n = 351)

LOCATION

United States	Canada	Europe	Australia	Japan
31%	7%	32%	16%	15%

SALES MODEL

Online	Online / Offline	Offline
37%	54%	9%

ROLE

C-level Executive	Mkting Leader
56%	44%

DIGITAL MARKETING BUDGET

Less $25MM	$25MM - $50MM	$50MM - $100MM	Greater $100MM
32%	18%	21%	28%

MAJORITY SOURCE OF REVENUE

North America	EMEA	APAC	Global	LATAM
43%	11%	14%	26%	5%

3 High-Level Takeaways

Here are 3 resources to help you move further along the path to personalization.

There's A Disconnect

Between personalization perception & reality and between marketing leaders & the C-suite

Marketers must get honest:

- With themselves to assess where they are.
- About the need for a clear execution roadmap.
- With the rest of the C-suite on what's needed to move to the next phase, and why that matters.

Get the ebook:
The path to personalization

Content Is Still King

It's the fuel for personalization but organizations struggle to produce it quickly and efficiently

To produce content at the rate required, marketers must:

- Implement strategic processes around content creation.
- Invest in tools that streamline the content process.
- Invest in tools for omnichannel delivery, as well as collect the data.

Read the blog:
Solving the content crisis

Align Your Approach

Personalization is a strategic advantage, and organizations that embrace that are surging ahead

Most marketers can't change their budget or sales model, but they can:

- Get clarity on what personalization can do for their organization.
- Understand the tools available and which ones best serve their unique needs.
- Align their needs with IT's capabilities.

Learn about your options:
Get a demo

ABOUT SODA

SoDA is the leading global network for digital agency leaders, creative innovators and technology disruptors. With more than 100 agencies spanning 6 continents (sorry, nothing in Antarctica … yet), our members help the world's most progressive brands imagine and create the future of digital experiences.

ABOUT SITECORE

Sitecore is the global leader in digital experience management software that combines content management, commerce, and customer insights. The Sitecore Experience Cloud™ empowers marketers to deliver personalized content in real time and at scale across every channel—before, during, and after a sale. More than 5,200 brands—including American Express, Carnival Cruise Lines, Kimberly-Clark, and L'Oréal—have trusted Sitecore to deliver the personalized interactions that delight audiences, build loyalty, and drive revenue.

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SoDA

Trends in Personalization

Welcome to this special edition of *The SoDA Report on Trends in Personalization*, **developed in partnership with Sitecore.**

We are thrilled to feature this report in a series of white papers released under *The SoDA Report* On… moniker designed to conduct deep dives on a targeted issue which impacts the companies and people who are creating the future of marketing and digital experiences.

Delivering personalization to consumers at scale requires a combination of the right data and the right technology. Authors from Perficient Digital, Dept, Microsoft, Deepend and others speak to the rise in demand for these experiences, the successes (and candid challenges) that agencies are facing to remain ahead of the curve, the way in which they're working with clients to deliver timely and innovative results, and the tools required in order to do so.

I'd like to thank the Sitecore team for their support of SoDA and the *SoDA Report* series. To become a subscriber of *The SoDA Report*, please email SoDA and we will ensure you have priority access to the release of upcoming editions.

We hope you enjoy this report and, as always, welcome your feedback, ideas, and contributions for future editions.

Lakai Newman
Managing Editor and Head of Production, *The SoDA Report*

SoDA

Tom Beck, Society of Digital Agencies

Research Findings :: Global Trends in Personalization Study

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About the Author: *Tom Beck is Executive Director of SoDA and works closely with its membership, Board of Directors and corporate partners to create an indispensable global network for digital business leaders, creative visionaries and technology disruptors.*

Brian Flanagan, Perficient Digital

Building a Foundation for AI Personalization

Most companies know that personalization is an effective way to increase relevance and build long-term customer relationships. In fact, 93% of marketers agree that personalization helps to advance customer relationships (Evergage). However, many companies still struggle to deliver personalized experiences.

The problem isn't the ability to deliver targeted information to an individual user, but rather to deliver personalization at scale. It's easy to think about five or 10 variations of an experience, but what about millions? This why many organizations are looking towards artificial intelligence as a way to automate personalization.

The potential for AI is unbound. With machine learning, we can use data to observe, understand and anticipate the needs of customers. However, AI isn't a silver bullet that's going to do all of the work for you. You first have to develop a strategy around personalization and then use technology to enable it.

in partnership with

SITECORE

Understand the Journey from the Customer's Point of View

Creating an effective personalization strategy starts with understanding the customer journey. The goal is to be able to customize every touchpoint to match the individual's needs, preferences, and intent. To achieve this, you have to develop a 360-degree view of the customer and then identify opportunities to improve their experience with relevant content, offers, and calls to action.

You also have to consider that your customers' journeys will likely involve third parties and interactions you don't own. Let's say you're a utilities provider and your customer purchases a Nest thermostat from Home Depot. That product will impact your customer's energy experience, but you won't know they've installed it unless they tell you, right? You want to learn what products they own so you can continue to build their profile and support their journey, but first you have to show them how providing that information can improve their experience.

We helped a utilities client in this situation by implementing feature we call "Milestones." With Milestones, a customer can add information to their account profile (e.g. "On this day, I installed my new Nest thermostat") and then track the impact that product had on their energy usage and monthly bills. So even though the company was not directly involved in the purchase of the thermostat, they are able to create an improved experience by connecting to it. Showing your customer that you can make their lives easier and help them achieve their goals will earn lasting loyalty and encourage them to engage with you even more.

Develop a Content Strategy that Keeps Up

Many organizations struggle with content strategy, but it's crucial to making personalization work effectively. Where there used to be one version of content for everybody, there now may be five or six content versions based on different audiences that need to be managed and expanded as personalization efforts grow.

AI can help carry the load by determining the right content for an individual and then automating delivery from the pool of content you've created. It can even gain insights from factors like customer behavior and use those to further personalize without requiring new written content. For example, Uber can say to a user, "Hey, you took 40 trips this year, traveled 350 miles, and met 25 different drivers." Nobody had to generate that content. Uber would just need to define rules and train the AI to pull the data and plug it into the customer-facing story.

Know Your Systems and Capabilities, and Grow Them

Personalization isn't possible without the right technology - and knowing how to use it. We see a lot of clients that have great tools in place, but don't really know how to use them to drive personalization. It's like owning a Ferrari, but only using to go to the grocery store.

So how do you go from the grocery store to the Autobahn? From crawling down side streets to flying down the highway? Well, you have to start small and then build a foundation for propelling more advanced experiences. Perficient Digital has a model that we use to illustrate the different personalization types, ranging from simple to complex, and the progression from rules-based personalization to cognitive. Over time, your solution should evolve from simple rules-based targeting against

broad segments to cognitive solutions that understand and respond to individual customers' intent.

	Crawl	Walk	Run	Fly	
Journey			Lifestyle	Intents Stages	
Behavioral		Usage Actions	Trends Rankings	Look Alike	Value
Persona	Site History	User Type	Attributes		
Contextual	Device Location	Timing			
	Rules-Based	Automated	Cognitive		

Perficient Digital's Personalization Spectrum

The more effectively you can use strategy and technology to understand customers' intent and personalize experiences to meet their needs, the more they will trust and rely upon you to make their lives easier.

About the Author: *For more than 20 years Brian has worked with clients to design and execute cutting-edge user experiences. As a digital experience strategist, he is responsible for driving digital strategy for enterprise clients and oversight in delivering best practices. In this role, Brian keeps Perficient Digital and its clients on the cutting edge of new design strategies for next-generation technologies to consistently exceed client and peer expectations.*

Paige O'Neill, Sitecore

The Hard Truth: The C-suite is Just Not That Into You

There is a hard truth that we as CMOs need to face … and CMO to CMO I am just going to put it out there. As much as things have changed over the last 10 years, and as much as marketers now have a more strategic seat than ever at the C-Suite table … why does it still often feel like the rest of the C-suite is just not that into you? Like they just don't get what we are trying to do for marketing/lead gen/pipeline/the brand/the customer experience?

Think I'm paranoid? Consider this: In a recent survey conducted by the Harvard Business Review, **80% of CEOs say they either don't trust or are unimpressed with their CMO.** That's quite a data point, and I'm sure we all feel like our own CEOs don't feel that way, but since 80% of CEOs reported feeling this way, most of us are obviously wrong.

And this misalignment couldn't come at a worse time. According to a 2018

eConsultancy Report, 40% of senior executives say the CMO is now primarily responsible for creating the business case for tech investment — their digital transformation and customer experience. And the need to create an engaging digital experience has never been more intense, as more and more industries face the immense pressures of doing business in a post-Amazon world.

So, where's the disconnect?

Sitecore recently partnered with SoDA to survey over 350 CMOs and other senior marketing executives, asking a series of questions to see if we could figure out why marketers are having such a difficult time getting the executive support they need for digital transformation initiatives.

Marketers have been left to untangle and implement a very complicated martech stack to improve the customer experience, but they don't have full control over where the company's budget gets allocated. There's competition from the rest of the C-suite, who also need to fund their initiatives. That can lead to funding gaps.

In addition, the rest of the C-suite often don't fully grasp the complexities involved in creating a cutting-edge customer experience or the technology that's required to get it accomplished. It's also likely that marketing executive need to get better at articulating the need for these investments. Put together, it leaves CMOs in a very tough spot.

The survey results showed one glaring area that's driving the C-suite disconnect – mapping out a clearly articulated business strategy for personalized digital experiences that directly supports the company's business objectives. Only 49% say their company has a clear roadmap for digital experience and is aggressively executing against it. However, approximately 67% of the marketers rated their companies as "experts" or "masters" in delivering personalized digital experiences. That represents a 16-point delta that doesn't add up. How can you be an expert or master, but you're winging it without a clear plan?

More than 85% said that personalization of digital and experiences was a "major competitive advantage" or an "important facet" in driving their business. But the top response, at more than 40%, when asked to identify the biggest barriers that are hindering your ability to deliver more personalized digital content and experiences, was "budget". If personalization is such a high priority, why can't senior marketers get the necessary funding? A Sitecore/Avanade study showed that 73% of companies see a lack of collaboration between Marketing and IT, and 69% see the same between the CMO and CIO. Without your colleagues' buy-in, it becomes an uphill battle.

Many of the other results from the survey show a clear pattern – marketers are overestimating their capabilities. So, it's time for all of us to be honest with ourselves and realize that very few companies are actually delivering the personalized customer experiences they say they are. There is no one-size-fits-all, there is no silver bullet. The path to digital experience success requires testing and learning. And the majority of our marketing peers are in the exact same boat, trying to figure out how to close that C-suite disconnect.

I've been on the front lines of either marketing or implementing digital experience technology for over a decade, and here are a few things I've learned along the way about how to secure alignment among the C-suite, gain trust, secure the needed budget, and be one step closer to delivering on the promise of an advanced digital experience that creates lifelong customers:

Be honest and realistic. Personalization takes some time and investment. It goes to the old adage of underpromise and overdeliver. You'll gain the trust of the CEO so they don't have to be primary decision-maker for CX investment, which is the case in 32% of companies surveyed in the eConsultancy report. It will increase the chances of securing the necessary investment to build out your martech stack.

Develop a clear, documented strategic approach that ties into core business objectives. We all know that creating enough quality content fast enough is a major hurdle. But doing nothing is not an option. Start by focusing on a specific sector, then create enough vertical content to get the results you want before moving on to another. Automate certain tasks, improve efficiency and productivity, then scale up to meet your multi-channel content needs.

Know what success looks like – for your business. The most important thing is to get started, even if it's small. Simple personalization can lead to strong conversions. But know that there is no perfect solution that fits for everyone. Every company is different – their objectives, their products, their location, etc. What works for one company, may not work for another, so don't get bogged down by paralysis by analysis. Get going, learn where you're succeeding, then test, refine, and keep moving forward.

Know what's important to other C-suite members. It won't matter how good you are if you don't develop an alliance strategy with the executive team that focuses on driving efficiencies through your people and processes. If you can measure it, you can manage it – and secure further investment for it. Speak their language to get executive buy-in. Having this conversation now will save wasted time and money, leading to a business plan that everyone can confidently agree on.

The good news is that overcoming the C-suite disconnect isn't insurmountable. By simply level-setting on expectations, being honest with yourself and the rest of the executive team, and setting a clear strategy with tangible objectives, you'll be one step closer to becoming the toast of the C-suite.

About the Author: As the new CMO of Sitecore, an integrated CMS, and e-commerce solution, Paige is an expert at handling new roles in marketing departments, having been through the process on multiple occasions. Dubbing herself as the chief marketing "synthesizer," Paige has a knack for synthesizing all the information that is thrown her way and gaining a quick understanding of the company's goals and priorities.

Mellissa Flowerdew-Clarke, Dept

Rise of the Machines: Personalization for the Tech Generation

Personalization is nothing new; the days of being impressed by Amazon recommending a book based on the last one you read has long gone. As consumers increasingly expect their customer experience to be relevant specifically to them, and with pure-play digital giants rising to the challenge rapidly, pressure for businesses to evolve their personalization strategies is mounting.

In a 2019 Econsultancy report, 53% of marketers said that "data-driven marketing that focuses on the individual" was the most exciting opportunity in 2019, in comparison to just 7% of organizations saying personalization was top priority in the 2018 report. Strangely, back in 2017, 73% of Forbes 500 executives said they 'must' deliver personalization to be successful. So, is it a priority or not? I suspect that it is, but we're just using different terms for the same thing. Whether we're talking

segmentation, automation, data-driven, dynamic content or AI, we're all driving towards the same thing: delivering relevant, personalized experiences to improve CX and, ultimately, conversion.

The plethora of mixed terminology is perhaps indicative of the way we often approach developing our CX strategies. If we're being truthful, we sometimes think we know how to tackle the challenge, without really understanding the wishes of our customers. In a recent Dept survey, we asked consumers whether they liked personalization or not. Over 30% of respondents said that they didn't but, interestingly, the brands they selected as their favorite retailers were the ones doing personalization the best. So, does this mean that we need to advance our strategies, technology and execution to deliver personalization in a way that consumers don't even realize they're being personalized to (think Netflix)? Or do we need to make it an active choice for consumers (think Thread)?

One thing's for certain, the appetite for personalization is there. But we've been talking about it for years, so how come we're not all achieving the holy grail of personalization by now? Common challenges preventing the application of personalization strategies have, historically, included a lack of resource and expertise to deliver the amount of content and data analysis needed, lack of process, and legacy technology that wasn't up to the challenge. Yes, some of these challenges still exist however, the skills, tools and techniques are now widely accessible; if you have the ambition and buy-in to invest, the technology is available to enable success (think Microsoft Azure and Sitecore, for example).

Demystifying the Boardroom Bingo
There's no point in comparing your business to Netflix or Amazon or Facebook. Because, well, they're the white rhinos of the digital landscape. But there are, absolutely, achievable goals that we can all aim for. This starts by demystifying some of the buzzwords and that are likely being muttered at board rooms across the nation.

Artificial Intelligence; the term itself conjures up Philip K Dick-esque robots and Black Mirror perils. It's far more digestible to think of it simply as Machine Learning (MI). Machine Learning has the ability to automate analysis, and detect patterns of data at a rate that would be impossible for humans to achieve. It can take data segmentation beyond simple keyword clusters, and opens up the opportunity to glean information from new data sources, such as audio, image and video.

Team the opportunity of MI data pattern analysis with, say, audio sentiment analysis and natural language processing, and you've got the intel you need for powerful personalization. For example, if you're a telecoms company, you could use MI for audio sentiment analysis across your call center (i.e. find all the 'angry' calls), and layer this with user search and location data. By doing so, you could automate a process to serve relevant content, specific to that user's exact complaint, next time they land on site. Or they could receive an automated message detailing their issue and how you're going to solve it. You could address the individual concern of that one customer in record time, without them having to repeat calls or explain the issue again. How's that for a great customer experience? It could demonstrably improve your customer retention rate and lifetime value. Happy (or, at least, appeased) customer. Happy CEO.

Hyper-targeted experiences are made possible with dynamic content, which is the crux of the big boys' personalization success. It can take you beyond trigger-based 'they bought a screwdriver last time so show them pictures of screws on the homepage', to a whole new level of real-time relevance. Netflix serves dynamic content based exclusively on previous viewing and preference analysis, built on extensive tagging. Very overlays usual data points such as purchase history and demographics, with real-time weather analysis, to push personalized product content on-site. Even Channel 4 is getting in on the action with the launch of Dynamic TV, which harnesses user data to deliver personalized video ads on mobile, desktop and Smart TVs. And what powers this dynamic content? Machine Learning.

Omnichannel is (still) a challenge
Understandably, personalization becomes trickier if you have an offline presence. Traditional bricks & mortar retailers will be all too familiar with the omnichannel challenge. Online retailers know that consumers will interact with their brands across multiple channels, but when you throw physical stores into the mix, it makes delivering the right message, to the right user, at the right time a little trickier.

How can organizations personalize their site to promote after sales activity, if they don't even know that a user has purchased in store? The in-store POS system would need to be able to identify the customer's profile and map previous online research behavior, combining the records to create a fully informed personal profile. It sounds simple enough and, in theory, it is. If you can collect a unique ID at the point of sale (e.g. an email address), you can map it to their online profile. But there are multiple tech systems that need to be integrated with each other to deliver this information from the POS system to the CRM to the DXP or CMS, in order to trigger the right personalized content.

The upshot is that it's totally doable, but entirely dependent on investing in the right technology stack, having the correct skills to be able to connect the data and, crucially, getting your hands on that unique identifier.

I think we'd all be in agreement if we said that we want to implement this level of personalization to improve our customers' experience with our brand. But what if said customers don't want to explicitly share their information? Implicitly, we share our data all the time, but with scandals such as Facebook/Cambridge Analytica coming to light, consumers are wary. Sure, GDPR has been implemented to help protect consumers from unscrupulous use of their data but, let's face it, none of us are still entirely sure what the real implications of GDPR are. Does this mean that we now need to ask users' permission to use their data online when they've purchased in store? Should stores guide consumers through the online experience in-store, therefore keeping all transactions in the digital realm where digital rules apply?

We've come a long way over the past five years, but there's still a way to go before personalization becomes seamless for both businesses and customers alike. Needless to say, consumer demand will lead us in the direction we should take; just make sure you have machine learning in your back pocket to help with their rapidly increasing demands.

About the Author: *Mellissa has spent the past fifteen years helping businesses to realize the potential of effective, multi-channel marketing strategies. Her background in retail analysis and expertise in written communication has helped both B2C and B2B brands understand their target customers and how to best to communicate with them, whether it be selling chocolate, cars, software, services or anything in-between. As Marketing Director UK & US at Dept, she is responsible for driving the agency's marketing strategy in these regions, connecting and converting new clients and employees to help fuel the agency's international growth.*

Doug Gould, Microsoft

The Building Blocks of Personalization

Here's an analogy I've used recently around the challenge for brands to build amazing digital customer experiences. You've just got a beautiful new Lego set that your kid (or hey, even you) are very excited about building.

Let's say that it's the Lego Millennium Falcon from Star Wars. Clocking in at a cool 7,500 separate pieces. A daunting task but when completed will be a masterpiece. Something that will stop people in their tracks.

But building this has a few rules and quid pro quos. You're doing it as a team of 3. Person A is the only one looking at the first half of the instructions. Person B is the only one looking at the second half of the instructions. Last, Person C is the only one that can look at what the finished product is supposed to look like and get other

people excited about it. Now, beyond the organizational complexity in our Lego project let's bring a few other curveballs into the mix. Not all the Lego pieces fit together. The instructions for the first half and the second half are inconsistent. Let's also say that the frequency that the Person A and Person B can talk is every 4 weeks or so.

Oh, one other thing. You've got everyone depending on you to have this Millennium Falcon done in 6 months.

This has been the state of digital customers experiences over the last few years. Disparate systems, siloed teams, and a lack of an overall strategy has had a big impact on delivering digital experience promises made by brands and agencies. A constant theme in the past SoDA Reports have been the difficulty that a client has in being agile enough to take advantage of an agency's creativity. There's inconsistent data, solutions that don't talk to one another, and processes that are slow. One of the issues here is the complexity going on behind the scenes, ultimately, ends up getting exposed to a customer with a poor digital experience. And the research shows that ultimately customers will just walk away from a brand with a poor customer experience.

At Microsoft, we often are involved under the hood of marketing organizations down at the deepest levels of their technology roadmap. The modern marketer has to coordinate their internal IT Person A's, Digital Agency Person B's, and Marketing Person C's to deliver amazing digital experiences. The digital experiences that brands need are heavily reliant on not just these teams working together but also the building blocks fitting consistently along the imagined digital customer journey.

These building blocks first consist of things like CRM platforms, cloud technologies, and enterprise 3rd-party integrations all feeding from complex databases. Starting with a business problem, we work hard to drill down into these building blocks to make sure that they align closely with the outcomes the marketers need. We partner with agencies and clients to support the agility with processes like DevOps and technologies like serverless platform services. We're helping Person A with the first part of their plans and processes. But that isn't far enough.

Our partnerships with leading marketing technologies like Sitecore round out the picture. Digital agencies and marketers have trusted Sitecore's technology for years in helping achieve their digital experience goals. Today, the partnership between Microsoft and Sitecore unleashes the next level of marketer Lego blocks such as personalization, automation, and recommendations on-top of the existing blocks we provide from Microsoft. Separately, we have powerful technologies that help both IT and marketers but it's only together when a fuller strategic picture can be made.

In 2019, the stakes for brands to execute on these digital experiences has never been higher and great investment from clients will only push Person A, Person B, and Person C to align more closely and faster than ever. And this is just today. Looking further out, technology Microsoft is developing like machine learning, conversational AI, and design-heavy experiences like augmented reality are increasingly relevant to IT and marketers.

The SoDA Report this year showed that clients are looking seriously at voice, conversational AI, and AR. So even if you've finished the Lego Millennium Falcon, your client wants the Death Star, Sandcrawler, and X-Wing to go with it… maybe even in the same 6 months.

About the Author: *Doug has spent his career at the intersection of agencies and technology; using emerging tech to create impactful consumer experiences. Based in NY - his passion for emerging technology has brought him to Microsoft, where he builds partnerships and programs with top global digital agencies around experience innovation using Conversational AI, Mobile, Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality and Internet of Things.*

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Vijayanta Gupta, Sitecore

Personalization Excellence Needs A Mindset Change

Here's a sweeping statement for you to consider: every brand today wants to be recognized for hyper-personalized customer experiences. Whether you agree or not, you can't argue that delivering engaging content that drives a human connection at every touchpoint, has become the modern-day technology-powered marketing holy grail.

But, here's the thing – while nearly 70% of organizations (link to study stats) consider themselves experts in personalization, the fact is that 44% state they haven't invested at levels they need, 32% say they don't have the executive team buy-in needed, 36% mention that they don't have the process and organizational structure needed, and 40% highlight that their technology platforms do not have the capabilities they need. What's the implication of this?

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We're overconfident and underprepared
With statistics like the ones highlighted above, it's clear that many of us are underestimating the importance of key success factors for personalization. We're overconfident, yet we're underprepared. My opinion is that lack of budget, executive support, technology platform, and organizational structure for personalization, is a symptom of something deeper – a lack of being customer-centric. Why? Because personalization is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to implementing a customer-centric strategy.

Irrespective of the corporate rhetoric, your strategy, simply put, is the sum total of decisions that are taken by your employees, partners and vendors every day. Your culture is the fabric that binds the strategy together and makes its execution possible. A customer-centric strategy won't be successful without having personalization at its core. And, personalization won't be successful without a culture and mindset shift that is needed to execute the strategy.

The secret of getting a mindset change is to get started …with data you have
Even if you don't think you have the right tools or support, you do need to get started on your personalization journey. Even if it's limited in scope or narrowly defined, you'll quickly be able to gather data to fuel further embedding of the culture of personalization in your organization. And in doing so, you will be able to refine your tactics and see more quick wins – giving you the metrics you need to convince your C-suite to invest.

Start small and scale fast. Choose to act on the aspects of your data that you know are correct. Devise a campaign with the purpose of capturing consumer data. Offer discounts or special deals to customers who answer short surveys. Start an informative newsletter that consumers can access in exchange for their personal information. Every day spent in waiting for the perfect scenario to deliver personalization to appear is a day gifted to the competitors to exploit.

"Marketing is changing faster than ever, and digitization is leading people to expect even better experiences. It's about using personalization to address the challenges and opportunities of an evolving digital world by consistently delivering relevant, timely content and experiences to your customers on their preferred channels."
Stella Goulet, CMO Avanade

Failure doesn't mean failure …it means learning
It is possible that you won't get everything right at the beginning. Personalization isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. What works well for one organization might not work at all for another. But getting started and testing your strategy can still help you prove value. Bear in mind that your customers' attention is fleeting, so you cannot afford to be afflicted by analysis paralysis while your competitors might be testing and learning by delivering digital experiences that are more superior than yours.

Even if your initial efforts are below expectations, you'll still be learning. That's because the data you gather from activities that don't work is often more, if not equally, useful than the data you gather from your highest-performing personalization strategies.

The buy-in you need the most for a mindset change …is yours
As leaders, each one of us owes it to our customers to represent their voice within our organizations. The mindset change where organizations realize that personalization is the core of customer-centricity starts with each one of us. As leaders, irrespective of our role and level in our organizations, we should continuously highlight that personalization is not just about what we do to our website or mobile app. It's an organizational mindset that is critical for making the brand more customer-centric than the competitors.

About the Author: Vijayanta Gupta is the Global Vice President of Strategy & Industries for Sitecore. His team is responsible for Sitecore's industry-specific growth strategy. In addition, his team is also responsible for providing strategic guidance to empower clients and partners for deriving maximum business value from their investments in Sitecore-powered digital transformation. Vijayanta advises senior executives across industries on their digital strategy, is a sought-after keynote speaker regarding digital transformation, and his perspectives on customer experience transformation are regularly published. He also serves on the advisory board of sports-tech and AI-focussed start-ups in India and UK.
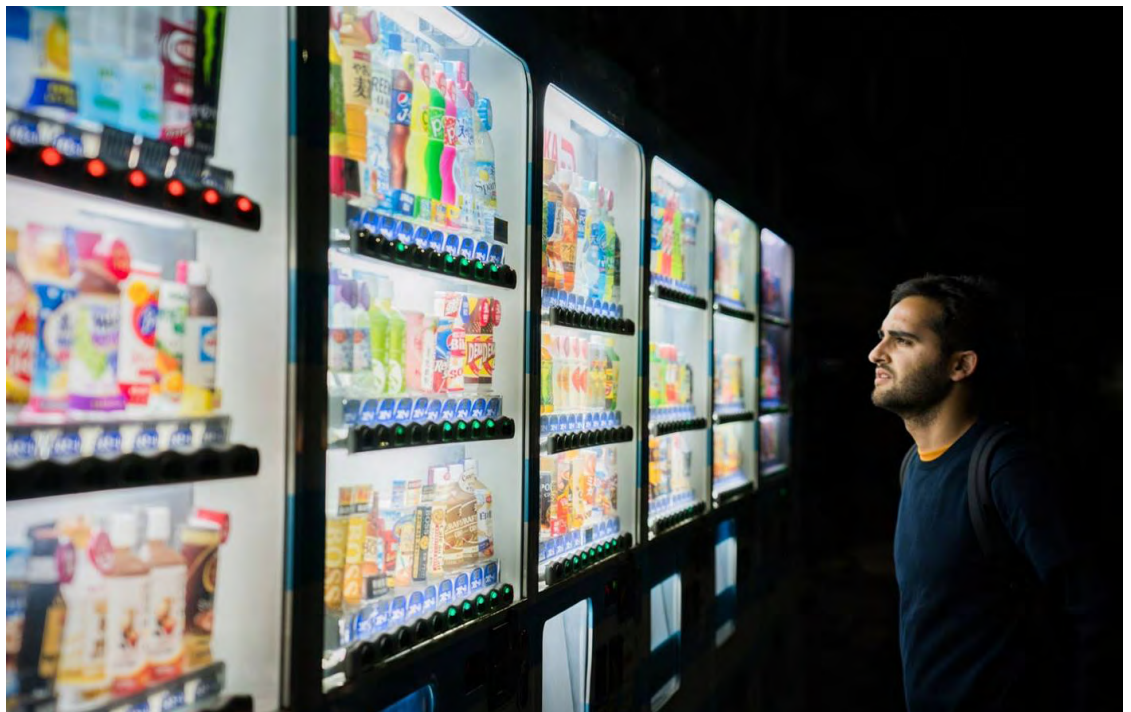
Matt Griffin, Deepend

Building the Best Personalized Experience for Your Consumers

There's no denying the rise in demand for personalized experiences. However, along with this increased demand come many challenges facing marketers in their efforts to keep up with ever-evolving trends and remain truly impactful.

Through a combination of the use of innovative AI-driven technologies and a continued focus on developing and implementing exceptional CX strategies, marketers can successfully pave the path to building the perfectly personalized consumer experience.

There are numerous exciting developments at the forefront of personalization. Technologies incorporating dynamic optimization make the process of identifying winning variations far more efficient. We're seeing personalization engines that are

able to compile vast sets of data to deliver highly tailored experiences to website visitors, providing us with unparalleled possibilities for engagement and conversions.

The continued trend focusing on mobile users presents us with opportunities to leverage location-based services on a wider scale to pinpoint consumers and their various stages in the process in a more precise and effective manner. Delivering multi-channel personalized experiences in real time is becoming increasingly essential to our success.

However, there are still several challenges agencies are facing today when it comes to building an outstanding consumer experience. For one, many of the underlying technologies being developed to further propel advancements in personalization are still in their infancy.

Many of us also still find ourselves struggling to deliver real-time personalization at scale. We have more access to data now than ever before; however, being able to effectively organize and extrapolate this information into actionable insights, especially when multiple devices come into play, remains a challenge for most.

Furthermore, the industry faces several challenges posed by data harvesting for the purposes of providing personalized experiences and ensuring adequate security measures are taken to protect an individual's valuable information.

But enough about technology. While advancements in fields such as AI serve to provide us with a world of opportunity in the arena of personalization, the implementation of this technology alone in the absence of the right CX strategy is insufficient.

So, what exactly defines a good CX strategy, and how can we as marketers better prepare ourselves to meet the demands of our modern consumers?

By focusing on solid customer research using qualitative methods to get to the emotive center of the problems that face us so that we can find the right solutions to the right problems through personalization. Qualitative data should, of course, always be supported with a certain level of quantitative data. However, too much of this can muddle the process, resulting in the loss of valuable insights.

A good CX strategy involves a company-wide commitment and needs ideation through co-design workshops and rigorous processes around the problem to ensure that the creative processes drive true innovation.

Then and only then can we begin to focus on persona development in order to connect with the desires of our real customers. Segmentation that merely looks at demographic data does not give us the level of insight that we need to be truly impactful.

A focus on choosing the right platform technology to solve the dilemmas we face is also crucial. Choosing a platform for the sake of choosing a platform won't cut it. We need to find solutions that can streamline operations and create seamless individualized experiences across multiple channels, enabling us to radically

transform how we interact with our customers and prospects.

Embracing appropriate CMS options and identity resolution is essential in our efforts to stay current and effective. Effectively mapping these personas into our platforms of choice and relentlessly optimizing and refining our processes for maximum effectiveness over time is also vital to success.

Furthermore, we need to improve our measures for ensuring the security of the personal data that we harvest for personalization. Growing concerns over the exploitation of valuable consumer information have prompted the implementation of new policies such as the GDPR to grant individuals greater protections. If we want to provide our audiences with the best experiences possible, we must start by taking steps to ensure their well-being and reduce the risks of data being compromised.

Conclusion
Delivering exceptional consumer experiences through personalization continues to lie at the forefront of our minds. While there are still several challenges that face marketers in this arena, the prospects that the rapidly evolving technological climate presents us with are exciting.

As developments continue to progress, we as marketers must do our best to focus on preparing ourselves by developing and implementing effective CX strategies to best meet the needs of our customers. Once we've done this, we'll be able to create positive change by designing the perfectly personalized consumer experience.

About the Author: With over 20 years' experience in the design and interactive media industries, Matt was an active participant in the formative years of the digital communications industry, gaining valuable experience with Deepend in London, before setting up Deepend in Australia in 2000. Under his management, the Group has grown to include the brands; Deepend, Nomad, History Will Be Kind and How To Impact and Kobalt Systems. The businesses cover a breadth of consultancy, with a diverse and talented team of innovators, consultants, designers, technologists and communications experts.
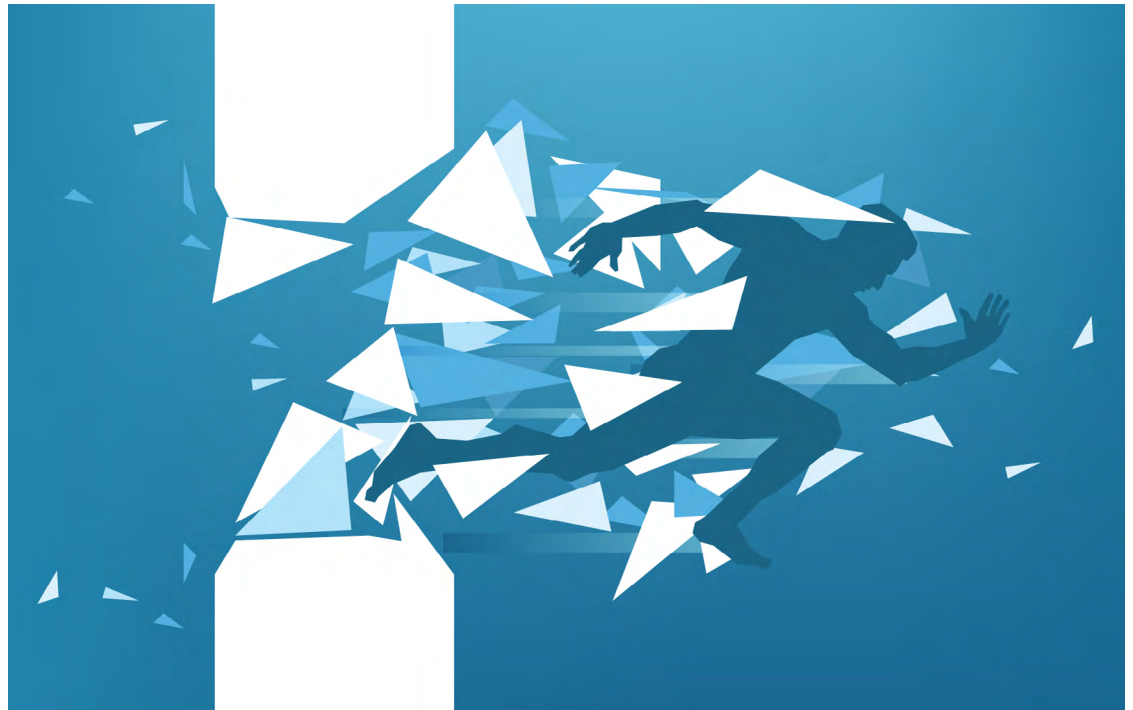
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Mike Shaw, Sitecore

Don't Succumb to Personalization Paralysis

As you're no doubt aware, marketing isn't a discipline that stands still. As people and their priorities change, so does the way we advertise products and services. 20 years ago, marketing was all about driving visitors to your static websites through email segmentation.

The emergence of digital marketing led to the reinvention of segmentation and completely changed the way we use technology for marketing – forever. In a blink of an eye, segmentation has become completely normal and digital marketing is now simply called 'marketing'. It just happens.

Today, a big challenge facing marketing is personalization. This ideal takes the marketing concepts of the last 20 years and goes significantly deeper, building experiences that transcend segments and speak to individuals. For personalization to

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progress and become just 'marketing', the industry needs to recognize that everyone is different, and dislikes being categorized in general terms. This consumer demand is why 84% of the industry believes personalization will become an important component of their overall marketing strategy and provide a competitive advantage.

While this endeavor is daunting, I believe that intent matters more than anything else. Changing from static marketing to segmented marketing took time, just as adapting to personalization isn't something you need to force. If you come at personalization from a positive angle — something you want to do instead of something you have to do — the results are obvious.

Today's mad ideas are tomorrow's case studies
In the 1950s-60s, marketing was all about the billboard. Marketers had the opportunity to grab the attention of their target audience in one location, which was a particular challenge for any business targeting multiple industry segments.

Then, radio and TV advertising started to become a possibility. Suddenly, marketers had the ability to provide more information or cater to specific sectors through different adverts for different channels. They could craft unique messages to different segments based on who they knew watched or listened at a specific time. As technology has progressed, the sheer diversity of marketing channels that are available has exploded.

Personalization is increasing the possibilities in the same way TV advertising once did, now with greater ability to identify individual desires and cater to them. Today, the increase in personal data makes it possible to personalize marketing messages for the individual. You're probably already doing this at a base level, with device and location information and other default data being considered. But this is just the start of what is possible. Those brave enough to put trust in their data, take the plunge, and push the boundaries of what's possible will get a head start in the process.

The world keeps moving
Because technology is always advancing and new possibilities are presenting themselves, the idea that personalization is a simple checkbox activity is misleading. Personalization in marketing and experiences is a sliding scale, becoming more and more potent as the amount of data, as well as the technology to decipher it, becomes more abundant.

The simple truth is that personalization is a mindset that can never be perfect because it's always changing. We market to people, and people are always changing their interests, so our marketing must change to allow for more personalized messages. Personalization is full of opportunities – it's time to jump in.

"Customer needs are changing at a very rapid pace, and the opportunities for personalization are significant. With a clear view of the customer, you can transform your marketing and deliver even better experiences."
Corinne Sklar, CMO, IBMiX

Intent matters
There are numerous advantages of personalization, but no one said it was easy.

Roughly 34% of respondents described themselves as 'novices or beginners' in personalization, which is no surprise when faced with barriers including executive support (34%), budget (41%) and access (35%). Having a successful personalized marketing strategy in place can be a game-changer. If you're not yet personalizing – it's ok – you just need to start somewhere. Look at the data you have and try to provide the very best experience based on that.

This is where the case studies of tomorrow will come from. Creating a vision of what you would like to do, if only you had the technology and the data to do it, is nice for future planning. But today's marketing requires getting the most out of what we have at our fingertips.

Personalization really doesn't need to be scary, or some alien concept that you should be doing, right this instant. Don't panic, start steady, and get comfortable. You'll be much better for it.

About the Author: Mike leads the charge for championing excellent customer experiences in order to impact business results for Sitecore customers. Before joining Sitecore, Mike worked extensively with Sitecore implementing best practice personalization and contextual marketing techniques for a wide range of industries and companies.

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Team & Partners

SoDA

SoDA serves as a network and voice for entrepreneurs and innovators around the globe who are creating the future of marketing and digital experiences.

Lakai Newman, Communications Manager

A graduate of Emory University, Lakai Newman came to SoDA from a NY-based digital agency where he focused on creating compelling content for a number of blue-chip brands. He serves as SoDA's primary steward and contact for communications, social media, and marketing efforts. Lakai also serves as Associate Editor and Head of Production for *The SoDA Report*, SoDA's biannual trend publication that features primary research, thought leadership, and case studies from top digital agencies, production companies, and client-side digital marketing executives from around the world. He considers himself a natural "creative" that is passionate about global travel, cooking, pop-culture, and all things digital.

Jessica Ongko, Designer

Since joining SoDA's Operations team in 2014, Jessica Ongko has been deeply involved with strengthening SoDA's brand and visual identity while collaborating with agencies around the world to design and create publications, event signage, and both digital and physical assets related to the work of SoDA. A graduate of the Graphic Design program from advertising portfolio school, The Creative Circus, you'll often find Jessica trotting the globe and working out of airports during long layovers.

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Sitecore is the global leader in experience management software that combines content management, commerce, and customer insights. The Sitecore Experience Cloud™ empowers marketers to deliver personalized content in real time and at scale across every channel—before, during, and after a sale. More than 5,200 brands––including American Express, Carnival Cruise Lines, Dow Chemical, and L'Oréal––have trusted Sitecore to deliver the personalized interactions that delight audiences, build loyalty, and drive revenue. www.sitecore.com

Paige O'Neill, CMO

As Chief Marketing Officer of Sitecore, Paige leads Sitecore's global marketing organization including marketing strategy, product marketing, communications, demand generation, partner marketing, field marketing, and branding. With over 20 years of experience in senior marketing roles, Paige is a data-driven CMO with a track record of accelerating growth and has a passion for developing thought leadership programs that build strong awareness and differentiate companies from the competition.

Paige was recently named by B2B Magazine as one of the top 20 female tech marketers making an impact in the industry. She was also featured in 2018 as a top influencer by the Bluewolf Women Innovators Network.

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