Towards personalization of content marketing through data-driven customer experience

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Abstract

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Effective content marketing is based on background research and data that provide insight into the interests of the target audience and the type of content that attracts them. A personalized marketing message can engage a customer, which in turn enhances the customer experience. The objective of this thesis project is to review the content marketing methods and concepts relevant to personalization. The outcome of this product-based thesis is a guide providing practical instructions for personalizing marketing messages and measuring campaign results. The guide is aimed for marketing professionals and organizations keen to raise their brand awareness and maintain business competitiveness in today's markets as well as in the future.

The thesis empirical output, the guide, is based on the theory underlying this report. Three key components of personalization are presented in the thesis: content, experience, and data. The thesis theory and the guide are linked around these three main components.

In order to deliver personalized marketing messages, it is relevant to know to whom the messages are addressed. The target audience can be identified through market segmentation and creating fictional buyer personas presented in this work. A customer journey model can help organizations understand their customers' experiences before and after conversion, and to discover the kind of content that is best to offer at any stage of the journey. In addition to the customer journey model, methods for goal setting and the elements that make up interactive content are part of the theory presented in this work.

The thesis presents content personalization methods delivered through email marketing and blogging, as well as conveying a tailored customer experience through websites. The work is primarily intended for companies and marketers operating in the EU as it presents the legislation (GDPR legislation) applicable in the EU territory. In addition, the work introduces metrics suitable for measuring marketing campaigns and indicators to assess customer success. Methods to test content campaigns and staying up to date on content status are also taken into account in this thesis project. The future roles of humans and machines in content marketing are assessed at the end of the thesis.

The personalization guide is a generally informative product executed without a third commissioning party. The guide is a visual demonstration of the methods presented in the theory parts of this report comprised of practical tips and instructions. The thesis project began in January and ended in May 2021.

Keywords
personalization, customer experience, data-driven, segmentation, marketing metrics

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1 Introduction

The digital environment is increasingly favoring the personalization of technology by offering people the opportunity to personalize their own devices in use. A similar trend has been capturing marketing content creation, and the share of personalized digital content has been growing rapidly in recent years. In fact, the turning point where consumers rather demand than reject personalized marketing messages to support their purchasing decisions is ongoing. (Chaffey 2019, 5–6; Wilson 2019, 1.) The one-size-fits-all approach can be seen as a bygone trend which rarely, if ever, works in digital marketing (Nair & Gupta 2021, 2).

This product-based thesis has been created as part of business administration studies at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (UAS) with specialization on digital marketing and international business. The output of the project is a guide for personalizing content marketing targeted for professionals working in the marketing sector and for small and medium-sized business leaders interested in marketing methods. This introductory chapter aims to clarify the main areas of the thesis project, which are the subject background, project objective and delimitations, thesis structure and theory framework, and the key concepts used in this work.

1.1 Personalization of content marketing as the subject

The subject of this thesis, personalization in content marketing through data-driven customer experience, was chosen due to its current topicality in the digital world and my personal interest in delving into the related advanced methods of technical content marketing. The digital environment today enables various solutions for marketers to bring their messages in front of an audience (Chaffey 2019, 5). At the same time, it can also create strategic and technical challenges for some businesses (Dodson 2016, 1). Organizations will need to adopt new skills and develop competitive digital approaches as customers today are online. In the digital age where technology and smart devices are constantly becoming more personal devices, the trend of personalization can also be seen as predominant in marketing. (Charlesworth 2018, 32.)

In addition to studying the definition of personalization, the thesis unravels the methods for measuring performance and results of content marketing campaigns. The concepts and methods presented also take into account the aspect of personalized customer experience. Due to an increased focus on individualized and concentrated marketing techniques that are likely to be requirements instead of optional models for marketers in the future (Wood 2017, 81), the output of this work is expected to add value and/or instructional guidance to people working in the marketing field. The personalization guide, which is the empirical output of this thesis project, is a generally informative product executed without a third commissioning party.

With segmented and targeted messages, marketers can deliver relevant content to the right individual or group at the right time (Gunelius 2011, chapter 6). Methods for reaching a specific target audience or certain type of people vary depending on the target market, electronic means of communication, and the characteristics of each campaign (Chaffey 2019, 371). Methods for segmenting customer audiences and the techniques for targeting content to the segmented groups are further reviewed in this thesis.

1.2 Thesis objectives and delimitations

The purpose of this thesis is to create an inspiring and instructional guide for marketing professionals on advanced content marketing techniques, where the main focus is around personalized customer experience and the methods to measure the results of personalized marketing campaigns. The main objective of the project is to examine the methods and concepts relevant to personalization in the light of content marketing. Three questions have been created to support the thesis purpose and main objective, to which answers are sought through the project and around which this work is built (see table 1). The primary question seeks an answer to how content marketing can be enhanced through personalization. Two supplementing (secondary) questions find the answers to how customer experience is part of content personalization, and the methods to track and measure marketing performance. The report and guide are determined around the three questions that focus not only on personalizing content but also on data-driven customer experience.

Table 1. Primary and secondary questions for the project

Primary question
How content marketing can be enhanced through personalization?
Secondary question
How customer experience is relevant to personalization and part of personalized content marketing?
What are the methods to track and measure personalized content marketing performance and results?

The second objective for the project is to guide entrepreneurs and company leaders in planning and launching elements of personalization to be part of their own marketing strategies. Therefore, the guide is created in a format that can benefit organizations keen to raise their brand awareness and maintain business competitiveness in today’s markets as well as in the future. The guide offers practical tips for intensifying personalization in content marketing and instructions for utilizing the presented techniques and methods.

This thesis focuses on content personalization methods delivered through email marketing and blogging, as well as conveying a tailored customer experience through websites. Since personalization through social media is alone a vast subject, it has been excluded from this work to ensure consistency in the aforementioned channels. In addition, more thorough introductions and presentations of basic digital marketing and content marketing practices are also excluded from the thesis subject, targeting audiences already familiar with these concepts. This ensures the primary focus of the work remains merely on content personalization and data-driven customer experience. When referring to a customer in this work, the reference is made to both consumers and business customers unless otherwise stated.

The work is primarily targeted for organizations operating in the regions of the European Union (EU), as it presents the General Data Protection Regulation active in the European Economic Area (EEA). The thesis project does not take a position on the situation of any individual company but instead presents the theory and the empirical part on a general informative level. Through this project, I will become acquainted with and explore the wide-ranging forms and possibilities of personalization, which are reviewed in the light of current and future trends from a marketer’s perspective operating digitally in the EU and EEA.

Due to the thesis being part of bachelor's studies, its objective is also that I, as a student, can learn about the thesis subject as much as possible and practice the academic reporting style. The intention is that delving into the subject will allow me to understand better digital marketing methods than before the project began. As the work is my first long academic report, the project also aims to practice the extensive use of sources as well as the academic style of producing text.

1.3 Thesis structure and theory framework

The work consists of a thesis theory report and the empirical part, the guide (see figure 1). The theory basis comprises of two parts. The first theory part introduces personalized content marketing by reviewing audience segmentation and targeting methods, the ways to deliver relevant content, and the challenges organizations may encounter with personalization. The second theory part introduces the methods for measuring the results of campaigns and discusses the future trends in data-driven marketing at the end of the chapter. After the theory parts, a description of the empirical implementation presenting stages from the planning stage to the execution of the final product is reviewed. The final chapter of the report discusses the findings and outcome of the project, reflection on learning, and presents suggestions for further development and research on the subject. The empirical output, the guide, entitled “*How to boost content marketing through personalization*,” is attached to the appendices of this thesis report (appendix 1).

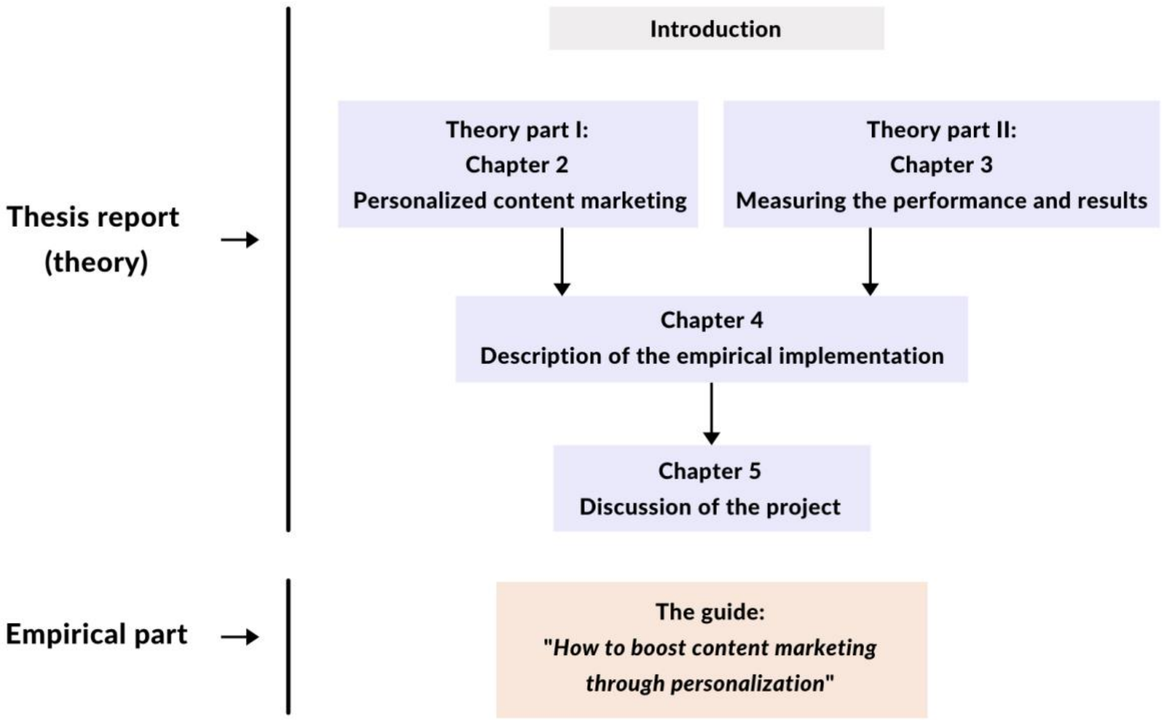

Figure 1. Structure of the thesis

The framework of the theory part is based on sources of professional literature from the marketing field, including academic research articles and papers, professional blog publications, instructional guides from institutions, and other published institutional research and studies related to the thesis subject. The theory basis, in turn, serves as a frame of reference for the empirical part, of which structure is based on chapters 2 and 3 of this report. Although the content presented in the guide is based on the thesis report, other sources have also been used for creating the product, all of which are listed in the bibliography of the guide.

1.4 Key concepts

There are four concepts used in this thesis that can be recognized as key concepts. These include *personalization, customer segmentation, customer targeting,* and *customer* *journey*. The meanings and short definitions of these four key concepts are explained below:

- **Personalization** refers to the act of tailored experience or message to a specific individual or group based on information gathered from them (Charlesworth 2018, 32).
- **Customer segmentation** refers to the method of dividing customers and potential customers (prospects) into distinct sections, or segments, on the basis of common factors or characteristics (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 38).
- **Customer targeting** is the action of reaching out with a specific content or message to a specific individual, or group, often a previously defined customer segment (Wood 2017, 79).
- **Customer journey**, also known as the buyer journey, describes a path of experiences every customer, or buyer, encounters when becoming a customer (Champion 2018, chapter 1). Customer Journey in this thesis involves five stages: awareness, consideration, conversion, retention, and advocacy stages.

2 Personalized content marketing

The aim of this theory chapter is to examine personalization in content marketing, describing the constructing elements. The main elements of personalization presented in this chapter are *creating a personalized customer experience* and *delivering relevant content*. The review of creating a personalized customer experience covers customer segmentation, creating fictional buyer personas, customer targeting, and customer journey stages. The review of delivering relevant content, in turn, covers so-called SMART goal setting and delivering interactive (smart) content through email marketing, blogging, and website experience. The chapter concludes by reviewing challenges organizations may face with personalization and also presenting the legislation involved in collecting people's personal information in the EU. Before delving into the aforementioned elements, the chapter begins with a review of personalized content as a concept and the advantages of organizations using it.

2.1 The concept of content personalization

As the world keeps digitalizing exponentially, the possibilities and ways to implement personalized content also keep increasing (Chaffey 2019, 5–6). When referring to personalization in this work, reference is made to the type of personalization that takes place through content marketing or otherwise digitally online. As facile and fast access to smart devices can make people more demanding in terms of digital content, marketers today are required to collect and process the human data devices such as mobile phones produce to be able to create result-based content and provide personalized experiences (Wilson 2019, 1). Such personalized marketing can occur via email or blogging, or otherwise by optimizing online presence, which is later discussed more thoroughly in this work.

The concept of personalization is determined around three main components, *content*, *experience*, and *data,* of which the combination is illustrated in figure 2. According to Charlesworth (2018, 32), personalized **content** comprehends a bespoken marketing message for each customer – an individual or organization – who have some level of interest in the message they receive. In turn, a multinational computer software company, Adobe Inc. (2021), defines personalization as providing the best possible **experience** to a specific segmented audience in real-time based on previous customer or personal data from the target audience. As both of these definitions point out, delivering a tailored message for a specific target audience is the foundation of personalization. However, delivering a personalized message seems to be shifting towards providing a comprehensive customer experience when a person needs it the most. Charlesworth

(2018, 32) notes that content can be personalized based on **data** originating from the customer when a company is aware of, for instance, the person's interests, previous purchasing history, or other information related to the customer's purchasing behavior or activities.

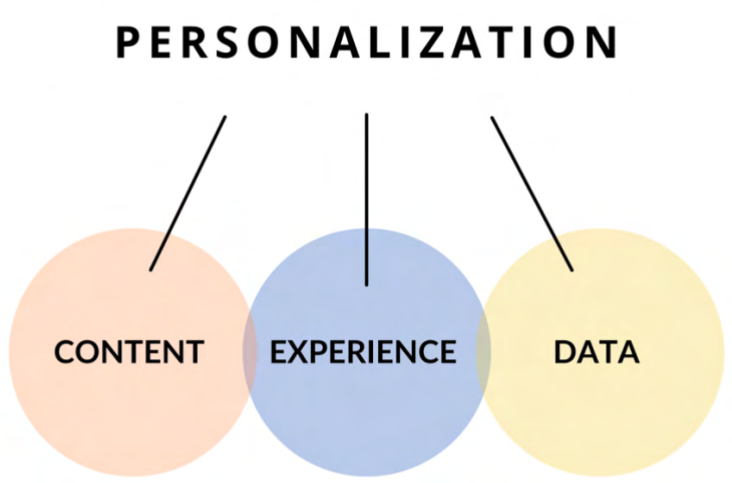

Figure 2. The main components of personalization (adapted from Charlesworth 2018, 32; Adobe Inc. 2021)

The results of a study performed by Forbes Insights Team (10 Mar 2020) indicate that personalization goes hand in hand with customer experience but requires data to function properly. The survey study discloses that around 70 percent of consumers are likely to purchase based on experience alone, and nearly 80 percent of consumers consider customer experience equally important as the quality of products or services. The researchers from the team noticed that creating digital interactions with customers is feasible with the right data, and the data in turn makes it possible for marketers to understand customer preferences and behaviors (Forbes Insights Team 10 Mar 2020).

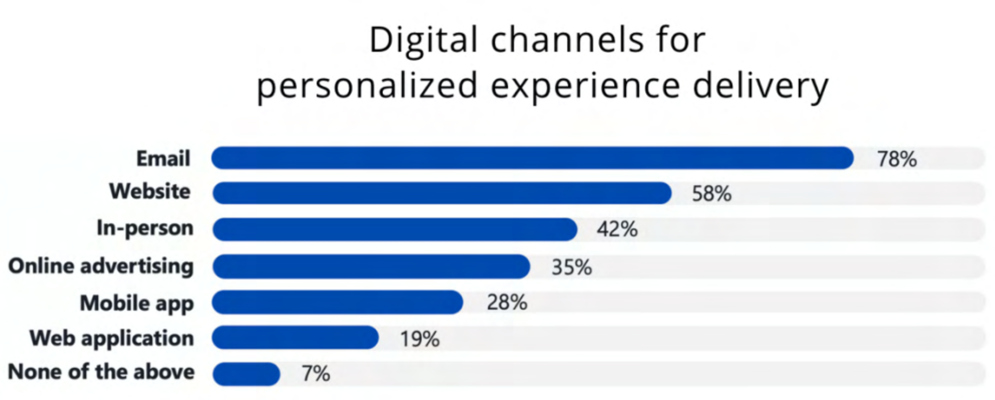

Figure 3. The most commonly used digital channels for personalization in 2019 (adapted from Researchscape International & Evergage, Inc. 2019, 6)

Another study conducted by Researchscape International and Evergage, Inc (2019, 6) discloses the most commonly used digital channels for delivering personalized messages in 2019 (see figure 3). According to the study, email was the number one channel, followed by websites for personalized experience delivery. The study claims that four out of ten marketers use in-person, such as in-store experiences, to deliver personalization. Personalization through online advertising and mobile or web application were less frequent among marketers but still used channels for experience delivery.

2.2 Advantages of personalization for organizations

Three key advantages can be recognized and linked to personalization. These include successful customer relationships, improved customer conversion numbers, and increased sales numbers. These three advantages are better reviewed in this section in the above-mentioned order.

Building a successful customer relationship requires a company to provide the right product or content to the right person by finding out the person’s needs and preferences. After purchasing something that is needed or consuming content that interests the viewer, it can be more comfortable for the person to continue interacting with the product or content provider. Creating interactions between the customer and the business can further evolve into a successful and beneficial relationship for both parties. (HubSpot Academy 2021.) Ariker, Heller, Diaz and Perrey (2015) point out that a successful relationship can make it easier for the customer to remember who provided a solution for their problem and thus provide improved engagement with the brand. An ideal relationship is a kind that turns customers into loyal ones who promote the brand to their own network generating new customers by their own initiative (Ariker *et al*. 2015). Angelini (2018, 1) describes a customer relationship as an intangible resource with a high value for a company that can maintain the company’s market position in a critical economic situation.

Growth in customer conversion numbers can be seen as a result of interactions between the customers and business. A conversion in digital marketing can mean sales in a digital environment (online sales), registration for services, or frequent use of a software or application (Hanlon 2019, 235). Customers make purchases more often when reacting to a personalized message than for messages that are not personalized, which concludes improved customer conversion (Lavinsky 18 Mar 2014).

Sales numbers can be increased by 10 percent or more as an after-effect from personalized marketing actions and deliver a return on investment (ROI) five to eight times higher on average (Ariker *et al*. 2015). The above-presented numbers indicate that a targeted audience reacts to personalized messages they receive with a higher probability than an audience who receives impersonalized messages instead. A similar type of observations has been made by the E-Tailing Group (s.a.), according to which personalization is seen as part of customer-centric marketing, where the priority is given to customers' interests and needs before advertising products or services. Figure 4 demonstrates how consumers exposed to engaging customer-centric marketing activities commonly purchase up to 300 percent more often than consumers not being exposed to engaging customer-centric marketing practices used by retailers. (E-Tailing Group s.a.)

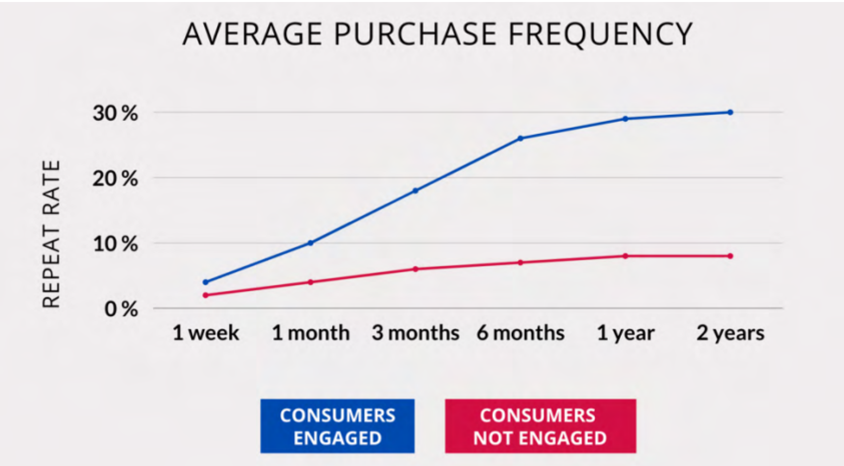

Figure 4. An average purchase frequency between engaged consumers and not engaged consumers (adapted from E-Tailing Group s.a)

2.3 Personalizing the customer experience

In order to provide a personalized customer experience, it is essential to find out whom the customized message is designed for, what type of content is relevant for the audience, and at what stage of the customer relationship it is best to reach the target audience. This section clarifies the differences between customer segmentation and targeting. In addition, the section also presents the method for creating fictional buyer personas and the five stages of the customer journey.

2.3.1 Segmentation of the customer base

Customer segmentation is a method used in marketing to divide customers or potential customers into distinct market groups to which a company prefers to sell its products or services, or believe their brand is competent for the segment's use of purpose. Market segments are customer groups divided based on similar behavior, needs, demographic information, or other characteristics valued by the executive organization. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 38.) Five different approaches to segment audiences into groups based on categorized information are presented in this section, which comprises *geographic, demographic, psychographic, behavioral*, and *benefit* categorizations (see table 2). These segmentation approaches can assist organizations to understand their target audience needs and preferences.

Table 2. The five segmentation approaches (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 38–43)

Category	**Types of information**
Geographic	Location (countries, states, cities), climate (seasons), population (type and density), market size, cultural preferences (food & clothing habits, traditions), languages used, and country-specific laws and regulations.
Demographic	Age, gender, ethnicity, income, level of education, occupation, family structure, marital status, and religion.
Psychographic	Interests, values, personalities, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, activities, lifestyles, and social status.
Behavioral	Purchase decisions, shopping behavior, purchase frequency, brand loyalty, buying stage, and feel of the product.
Benefit	Benefits, preferences, differentiation, unique products, and customer loyalty.

The first recognized segmentation approach divides audiences based on their **geographic** information, meaning the categorization is based on customer location data. Examples of features counted as geographic categorization are country, climate, market size, and cultural preferences, or any other cultural or area-specific feature. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 38–39.) Customer location is often the first point from which segmentation of a new market or unknown target group begins (Chaffey 2019, 162). GPS and satellite technologies provided online enables real-time spatial data sharing, which marketers can make use of when defining strategies (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 38–39). Dividing customers based on where and what kind of environment they live in can support the marketer’s decision-making process of whether it is worthwhile to advertise, for example, winter jackets rather than sunglasses online for a certain target audience.

The second segmentation approach is to divide audiences based on their **demographic** factors. These factors comprise personal and socioeconomic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, occupation, educational attainment, family structure, and religion (Hanlon 2019, 84). Like geographic data, using demographic factors to segment target groups is also commonly used since they generally require collecting less data and are consequently easier to obtain than, for example, information related to people's opinions and behaviors (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 40). Access to demographic data enables classifying a specific content for a certain categorized people but may not offer competitive advantages for organizations as the same information can also be available to others operating in the market.

The third approach, **psychographic** segmentation, refers to dividing markets by customers' cognitive attributes and preferences such as interests, values, personalities, beliefs, opinions, and lifestyle choices (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 41). Psychographic segmentation, also known as attitudinal segmentation, provides a versatile picture of the segmented group as such information is the primary factor influencing people's decision-making in their everyday lives (Chaffey 2019, 372). Examples of psychographic choices are brand preferences, orientation on a career path, selecting a college course, or buying a home (Frue 11 Sep 2019). Such collected information can be accomplished through conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys, and other analytical data through, for example, search engines or social media (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 41).

Behavioral segmentation is the fourth approach that divides the target market based on similar behavioral patterns and actions (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 43). It considers the customers' purchase decisions, shopping behaviors, purchase frequency, brand loyalty, and how they feel about a certain product or service (Frue 1 Oct 2019). Because buying behavior and habits can vary between different people, these factors can also be difficult to measure. Thus, it is common to conduct customer surveys and execute qualitative studies to determine a specific behavior or use previously collected customer data to support understanding of the possible behavioral patterns. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 43).

The fifth approach, **benefit** segmentation, is a form of behavioral segmentation that divides the target audience based on specific benefits and needs the purchasing customers search for (Minhas & Jacobs 1996, 3). People who look for electric cars over the traditional car models are a describing example of benefit classification. When a company identifies such individuals interested or possibly interested in electric cars, the business can start targeting their marketing actions to similar types of customers by segmenting them into a separate market group. Marketing through benefit segmentation can increase the number of loyal customers who are likely to continue to purchase from the same company or brand again in the future. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 42.)

2.3.2 Buyer personas to support segmentation

Creating buyer personas can make the customer segmentation process and the analysis of segmented groups more comprehensive. Buyer personas, also known as customer personas or consumer personas, are fictional representations of ideal customers with common interests and traits of customers who most likely will engage with the business (Lehnert, Goupil, & Brand 2020, 4). Buyer personas are a tool used in segmentation research for a long time, however, recent years have further proved the applied technique to be particularly effective for improving online and website development in organizations (Chaffey 2019, 66).

The buyer personas are simple in concept but can provide further insights of how a certain target group behaves and thinks (Chaffey 2019, 65). The persona profiles can comprise from detailed descriptions of the ideal customers' values, their goals and motivations, the things that influence their decision-making process, and the types of challenges or problems they might be looking for a solution to (Wilson 2019, 54–55). The buyer personas can be derived from data gathered via qualitative research, such as observations made through user's or customer's behavioral patterns from interviews and surveys performed at the segmentation stage. The qualitative findings can be supported by quantitative research or other supplemental data provided by industry leaders. (Cooper, Reimann, Cronin, & Noessel 2014, 81.)

Figure 5. Example template of a fictional buyer persona of a business representative (adapted from Chaffey 2019, 65–66; Cooper *et al*. 2014, 81)

An example template of a fictional buyer persona is presented in figure 5. The example persona is a description of a business representative as a business-to-business customer. The model consists of the target person's demographic information, goals and challenges in professional life, and key social media platforms one possibly uses. Although the information stated the example is fictional, groundwork and accuracy for discovering the data from real individuals can offer advantages when learning to know the real target audience. Therefore, any additional information may be added or changed depending on what a company recognizes as useful and relevant for each purpose.

2.3.3 Customer targeting approaches

A decision of *who* to target with *what* type of content can be undertaken once the segments are selected. While segmentation is a method for dividing customers and prospects into specific groups, targeting, on the other hand, is the action that is taken towards the defined group or individual. (Wood 2017, 79.) Thus, targeting is built on top of segmentation, which ultimately personalization and tailored individualized experience can be based on.

Due to most markets being managed by several heterogeneous demand segments, an integral part of the personalization strategy is that organizations can identify and decide which segments to target (Lancaster & Reynolds 2013, 5.3). This section examines four distinct methods for targeting customer segments, which are presented as coverage approaches. The methods comprise *undifferentiated marketing*, *differentiated marketing*, *concentrated marketing*, and *individualized marketing* (see figure 6).

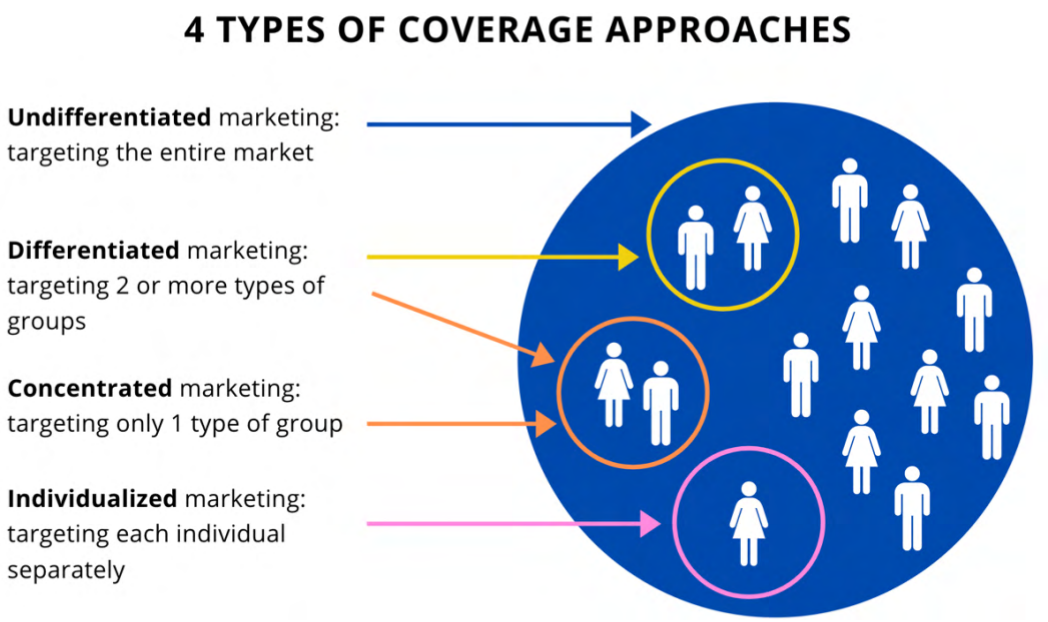

Figure 6. The four types of coverage approaches (adapted from Wood 2017, 79–81)

An **undifferentiated marketing** approach is identified as mass-marketing that targets the complete market coverage without any segmentation or customization in delivered marketing messages (Lancaster & Reynolds 2013, 5.3). This targeting approach treats the entire market homogenously, assuming all customers will respond to the same marketing output the same way. The undifferentiated marketing approach can be a less expensive strategy to build due to the mass-produced and blasted content but is unlikely to bring impactful results. (Wood 2017, 79–80.)

Differentiated marketing, commonly known as segmented marketing, concentrates on multiple customer groups, or segments, customizing a different marketing message for each segmented group (Lancaster & Reynolds 2013, 5.3). Offerings and messages through segmented marketing are more personalized and consistent than through undifferentiated mass-marketing, which is why the segmented method is considered to be more effective (Wood 2017, 80). Differentiated marketing is known as the most used marketing strategy out of the four coverage approaches (Langford 7 Jun 2019).

The third method for targeting is to use **concentrated marketing**. This coverage approach targets merely one or well-defined segmented customer group creating specialized and exclusive content tailored only for the group needs (Wood 2017, 81). Concentrated targeting is often used by smaller businesses and has been recognized as a compelling way to gain customers and customer relationships. It is often used when entering niche markets where the core of a product or service needs to be specialized for narrowly targeted audiences. (Lancaster & Reynolds 2013, 5.3).

Wood (2017, 81) recognizes the fourth coverage approach as **individualized marketing** which seeks to build a relationship with the specific customer. Lancaster & Reynolds (2013, 5.3) identifies the same coverage approach as a *selective targeting strategy* creating a fully customized experience to meet the demand of each customer. Langford (7 Jun 2019) has a third name for the approach calling it *micro marketing* that uses contextual information to appeal one specific target group or individual on a niche market. All of the above-mentioned descriptions indicate dedication and time from marketers for targeting only single individuals, hence it can be challenging to impact a larger market which in turn may have its effect on decreasing business volume. However, individualized marketing through today's advanced technology can provide effectiveness in impacting more people at once.

2.3.4 Understanding the customer's journey

Customer journey is one of the key concepts in marketing, demonstrating the process customers go through before, during, and after a purchase decision (Becker, Halinen & Jaakkola 2020, 767). The concept defines a series of touchpoints and describes experiences each customer encounters when communicating with a brand and becoming a customer. (Champion 2018, chapter 1). Content relevant to its recipient can be produced by identifying where the target audience is in their customer journey. Champion

(2018, chapter 1) introduces three different stages of the customer journey: the *awareness stage, consideration stage,* and *conversion stage*, shown in figure 7. In addition, a survey analytics corporation, QuestionPro (s.a.), adds two additional stages to the journey process, which involve the *retention stage* and *advocacy stage* taking place after a person has converted into a customer.

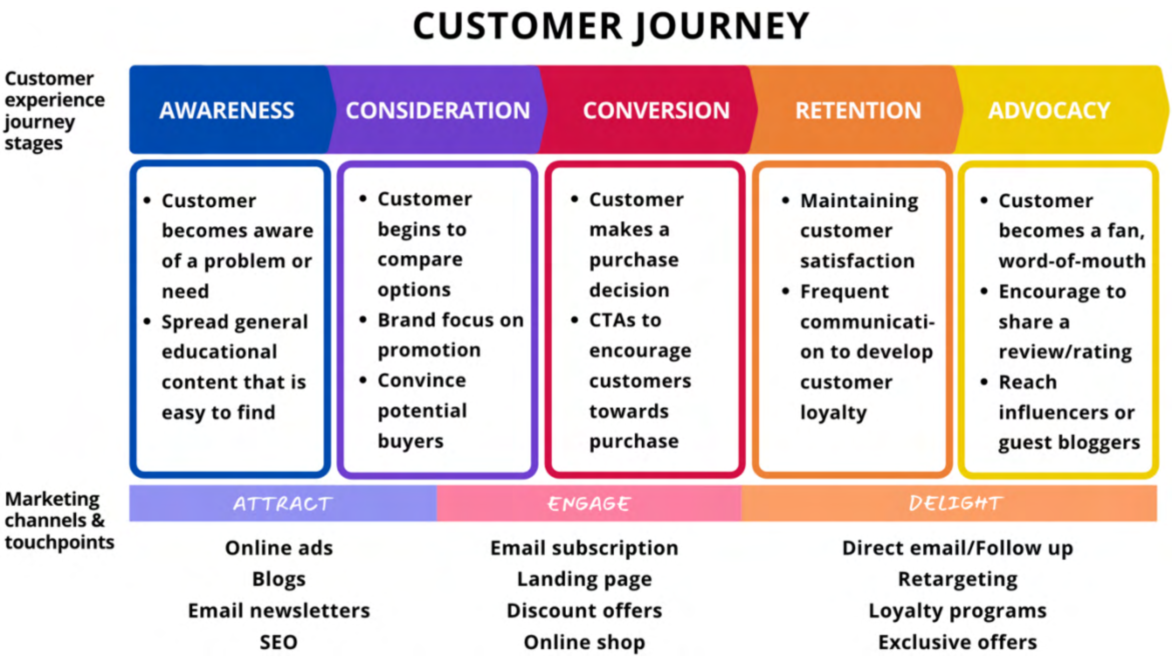

Figure 7. The customer journey stages and marketing touchpoints (adapted from Champion 2018, chapter 1; QuestionPro s.a.; Sellers 6 Aug 2020)

Customers begin their journey experiences initially becoming aware of a problem or need they may have, recognized as the **awareness stage**, a pre-purchase stage (Følstad & Kvale 2018, 198). Identifying a problem, a person starts to learn more of the issue and perform research to find a possible solution (Champion 2018, chapter 1). At this early stage, it is relevant for marketers to create effortlessly discoverable content the target audience can consume. The content does not yet need to provide a solution to the problem but rather educate the recipient. (Sellers 6 Aug 2020.)

The **consideration stage** is considered as the second pre-purchase stage where the problem or need has been fully recognized (Følstad & Kvale 2018, 198). The customer begins to search for more informative and product-specific information to compare discovered options for solving the problem or need (Champion 2018, chapter 1). An objective for marketers to reach customers at this stage of the journey is to convince potential buyers to consider the brand as a possible option without sending an image of enforced sales (Sellers 6 Aug 2020).

When the customer is ready to make a purchase, they will enter the third stage of the journey, the **conversion stage**. At this stage of the journey, the action for choosing the most appropriate solution is ready to be taken place. (Champion 2018, chapter 1.) Attaching a clear call-to-action (CTA, indicating the next desired step or action) inside a content can drive customers towards a decision to purchase (Sellers 6 Aug 2020).

The fourth and fifth stages of the customer journey, the **retention** and **advocate stages**, are considered post-conversion stages, being very similar to one another where the primary focus is to intensify customer loyalty and engagement (Følstad & Kvale 2018, 198; QuestionPro s.a.). The retention and advocate stages may be the most lucrative parts of the customer relationship. Around 80 percent of the revenue is, for the most part, generated by 20 percent of the customers, which indicates the importance of retaining existing customers. (Funnel Optimization s.a.) Reinforcing the existing customer relationship is a key factor in the retention stage, which often starts before an individual decides to purchase. Once a loyal and happy customer reaches the advocacy stage, they have turned into a fan of the brand who continue to use the products or services and independently promotes them on behalf of the company. (QuestionPro s.a.) Reaching the advocacy stage is the ultimate end goal for organizations to pursue since a word-of-mouth marketing is generally known to be discovering new customers. However, to reach this goal, a positive customer experience and customer nurturing throughout every stage of their journey is relevant.

2.4 Delivering relevant digital content

This section focusses on reviewing ways to deliver relevant content to target audiences. The section takes into account a goal setting process and the digital channels used for delivering interactive (smart) marketing messages. The channels presented consist of email marketing, online blogging, and website experience.

2.4.1 Formulating SMART marketing goals

Planning a project or campaign starts with understanding the objectives and defining of what is set to be accomplished (Kerzner 2009, chapter 11.5). Formulating goals provide a sense of direction as the work progresses and ensures the desired outcome through implementation (Wood 2017, 92–93). The concept of SMART goals has its origins in a theory of Management by Objectives (MBO), first presented in the 1980s. It is a commonly accepted criterion for object setting in project planning and marketing. The SMART acronym derives from the initials of words *specific, measurable, achievable, relevant*, and *timely*. (MindTools s.a.) Table 3 lists some of the relevant and guiding questions one might use when setting SMART goals for content creation through these five components.

Table 3. The five components for SMART goal setting supplemented with guiding questions (adapted from Locke & Latham 2012, 23; MindTools s.a.; Ryan 22 Apr 2019; Warner 17 Jun 2019)

SMART goals	
Specific	What needs to be accomplished? What is the audience looking for? Why is this goal important? (What? Why? Who? Where? Which? How?)
Measurable	How the achieved goal can be measured? Can qualitative or quantitative measuring methods be applied? What metrics are used?
Achievable	Is the goal realistic to achieve? Are there limitations affecting any part of the process? Is the workload manageable?
Relevant	What is the benefit of reaching the goal? Can the end goal solve a problem?
Timely	When should the goal be accomplished?

When **specifying** goals, five question words can be used for goal definition: *What? Why? Who? Where?* and *Which*? Detecting *what* needs to be accomplished and what the audience is looking for assists in discovering relevant topics for content creation. (MindTools s.a.) Defining *why* something is done helps avoid creating unnecessary content that does not relate to the recipients. Identifying *who* the target audience is, and knowing who to exclude from the audience, produces content strictly for those in need. Once settled on what type of content will be produced for whom and why, *where* the content is published and promoted can be selected to reach the right target audience. (Ryan 22 Apr 2019.) In addition, it is useful to acknowledge *which* resources and limitation factors affect achieving the goals. (MindTools s.a.) These aforementioned five question words can help clarify what is expected of content and how it serves its recipients. Thereby, a question of *how* something is done might be relevant to add as a sixth question for specifying goals.

To know whether the goals have been reached or not, it is relevant to track the progress of achieving the objectives. By documenting and **measuring** the results, it is possible to know if the taken actions have been efficient in achieving goals (Locke & Latham 2012, 24). Choosing the right metrics to measure collected data aligned with the business goals can support understanding the purpose behind a strategy (Hanlon 2019, 312). A more specific analysis of the prospective metrics for measuring personalized content is covered in chapter 3 of this thesis.

When setting goals, the objectives must be **achievable** and realistic (MindTools s.a.). Objectives set too far from reality become unrealistic and are seldom accomplished (Warner 17 Jun 2019). Setting achievable goals is particularly important in growing companies where the goals must be challenging enough to drive results but still achievable to reinforce motivation for future endeavors (Wood 2017, 102).

Goals that inspire their implementer are likely to be **relevant** not only for the business but also to bring added value to the recipient (MindTools s.a.). Determining whether a goal is relevant or not can be challenging at its creation stage, however, a desire to educate and solve the target audience’s problems are often indicators of relevant content for both parties (Warner 17 Jun 2019). Evaluating whether the objectives align with the values and needs of the company mission is among the key factors to consider when defining SMART goals (Santaniello 5 Oct 2017).

In addition to defining the goals, the **timeline** for achieving the goals and resources available are also matters to take into account at the planning stage (Santaniello 5 Oct 2017). Scheduling can have a psychological impact on achieving goals making them more likely to accomplish. Once the overall schedule of goals has been recognized, it is as important to set smaller milestones along the process to ensure the end goal is fulfilled. (Warner 17 Jun 2019.) Setting subgoals enables measuring the success achieved during an ongoing project, encouraging adjustments if something is not functioning as desired.

According to Kezner (2019, chapter 11.5), one can ensure the desired results are achieved in concrete terms by setting goals according to the above-described SMART technique, and assessing and measuring whether the goals have been viable. However, Bendikson, Broadwith, Zhu and Meyer (2020, 714) highlight, that having a goal and pursuing the goal in practice are not the same, and SMART goals may not motivate action at all events. Therefore, it is important to appoint the people responsible for achieving the goals and to monitor the progress along the project (Bendikson *et al*. 2020, 727).

2.4.2 Creating smart interactive content for personalization

Brenner (4 Oct 2019) recognizes smart content as content optimized and tailored to the characteristics of its user, changing as per target audience segment. Liarokapi (22 Oct 2020) states another, yet similar, definition acknowledging smart content as content that evokes and maintains user’s attention on the brand and feels personalized to each website visitor. Both of the definitions support the idea of creating content that resonates with its audience and changes according to the viewer, which eventually can create a personalized experience. Although *smart content* and *SMART goal setting* do not directly refer to the same acronym, they are still interlinked as the goals set guide and support the smart content creation.

In addition to smart content, *dynamic content* and *interactive content* are also terms used of the concept (Brenner 4 Oct 2019). This type of artificial intelligence (AI) powered content engages with its viewers using merely content relevant to each recipient (Nair & Gupta 2021, 2). Dynamic content can attract and guide the user more effectively through the customer journey and digital channels than unoptimized static content (Liarokapi 22 Oct 2020). Static content is the opposite of dynamic content, which remains unchanged and displays the same content to all its viewers (Brenner 4 Oct 2019). Creating personalized content often requires more time and resources than creating generic content, however, publishing it can be over five times more lucrative than creating content that does not interest the target audience (Ryan 22 Apr 2019).

A structure of the concept of smart content consists of five main features. These incorporate *targeted, optimized, relevant, integrated*, and *profitable* content (see figure 8). The concept is based on targeted content being effortlessly visible and discoverable for the viewer, requiring automated online optimization. (Brenner 4 Oct 2019.) Based on previous online searches, smart content can be optimized offering improved content recommendations for customers and content viewers (Nair & Gupta 2021, 2). Integrating the smart (dynamic) content across digital channels the target audience uses, creates a base for customer conversion (BrightEdge 2021). Therefore, the use of smart content is likely to improve business metrics and, by extension, enhance business profitability (Brenner 4 Oct 2019). However, this type of intelligent content may not be suitable for every company if the business has no need for such structured content. Businesses benefiting most from automated smart content are, for instance, companies with large portfolios and product lines that use several languages to operate with customers and various types of audience segments (Content Marketing Institute s.a.).

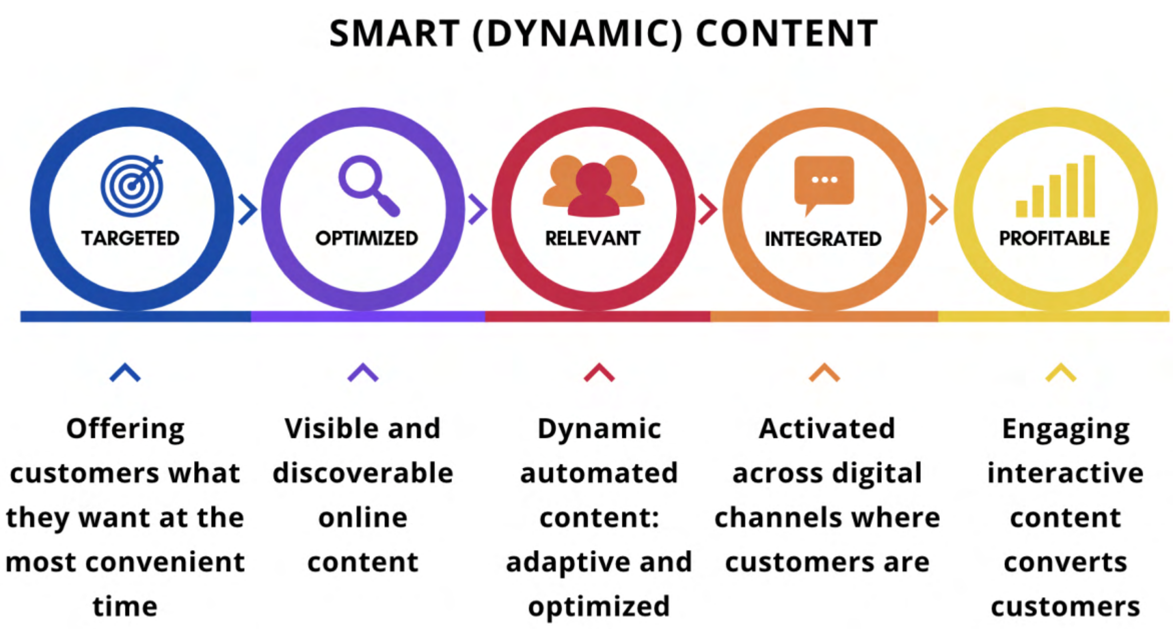

Figure 8. Structure of smart (dynamic) content (adapted from Brenner 4 Oct 2019; BrightEdge 2021)

2.4.3 The power of email campaigns

The word *email* is an abbreviation of the term *electronic mail,* which refers to exchanging digital messages on a computer or a smart device that can send and receive messages when connected to the internet (Tech Terms 31 Oct 2014). It is considered one of the most important and cost-effective tools for organizations to communicate with their customers and business partners (Hanna, Smith & Swain 2015, vi). According to research performed by Direct Marketing Association (2015, 4), email outperformed other digitally used channels for an average of 3 800 percent return on investment, meaning 1 UK pound spent roughly brought a return of 38 UK pounds. Today, nearly six years after the research, email can still be recognized as one of the most powerful and cost-effective channels for digital message delivery in marketing. Its powerfulness lies in the email being a universally accepted digital instrument offering the message sender and the recipient to communicate via the internet connection with a high digital storage capacity to preserve previous messages and message chains (Hanna *et al*. 2015, 34).

According to GlobalStats Statcounter (2021), more than 55 percent of the global internet traffic is created on mobile devices, i.e. smartphones. Based on this count, it can be concluded that people use smartphones to browse the internet more frequently than desktop computers. In addition, data gathered by an email marketing automation software provider, Upland Adestra (2019), contend that 62 percent of all the sent email campaigns are opened on mobile devices. Another global technology company, Campaign Monitor (2020), reports a 20 percent annual increase in the number of new smartphone subscribers, further proving the ongoing global shift away from desktops towards mobile.

These numbers indicate a necessity for marketers to consider including mobile responsive content when creating email marketing campaigns.

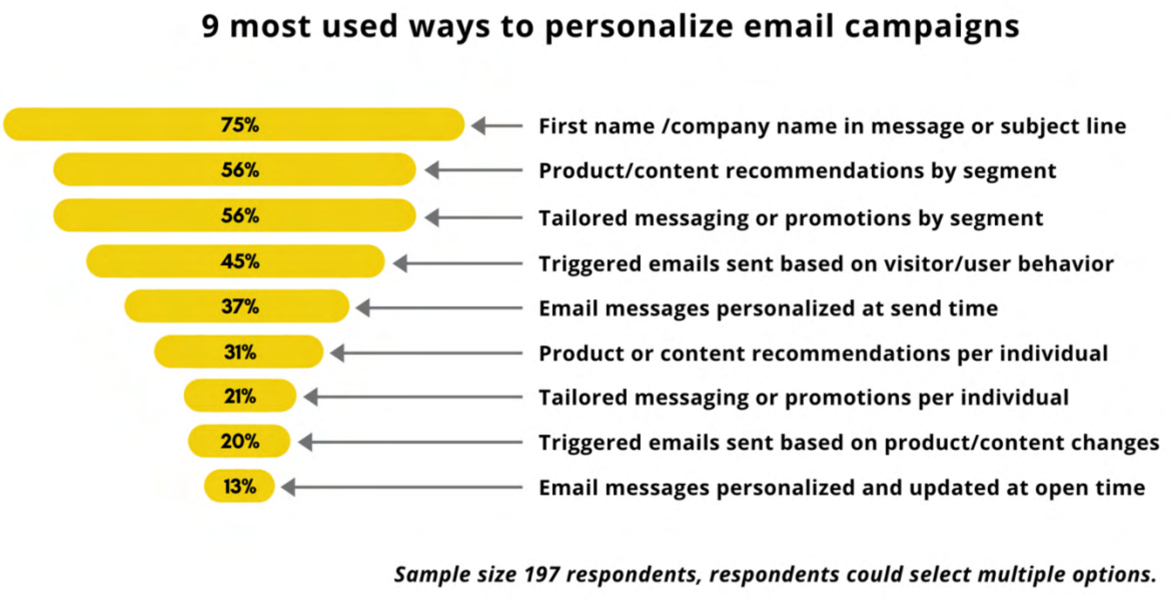

Figure 9. How marketers personalized email campaigns in 2019 (adapted from Researchscape International & Evergage, Inc. 2019, 25)

Researchscape International and Evergage, Inc. (2019, 25) report the nine most widely used methods to personalize email campaigns among marketers in 2019 (see figure 9). According to the study, the most popular way was to involve a recipient's first name and/or a company name in the message greeting or the email subject line. The second popular ways were to recommend a product or content based on the audience segment and/or to personalize email through tailored messaging or promotions. Triggered emails sent automatically based on visitor or user behavior was the fourth, and email message personalized at the send time was the fifth most popular way to personalize email campaigns. Other used but less popular methods for personalizing emails were to add product/content recommendations, or tailored messages and promotions to the email. In addition, triggered (automated) emails for changes made to a product or content, and messages personalized and updated at the email open time were also used but less popular ways to personalize messages among marketers in 2019.

Even though including a contact or company name in the email greeting or message subject line is amongst the most used way to personalize an email, Gunelius (2018, 59) points out that adding dynamic content to the message that changes depending on each viewer is paramount. Further, Gunelius (2018, 59) claims that such adaptive smart content makes it possible to deliver offers to the right people at the most convenient times when an algorithm can recognize people's interests based on previous behavior on a company website or based on purchase history. On the other hand, Ryan (2017, 165) emphasizes the importance of visually attractive email templates consistent with the brand image prioritizing content quality at the same time.

To increase conversion through email marketing, adding a visible text with a graphic call-to-action, or a visible discount or an offer at the top of the email message, have been found powerful ways to encourage the recipient to respond to the message sent (Ryan 2017, 165). Providing contextual offers through smart CTAs enables lead progress towards further stages in target audience customer journeys (HubSpot Academy 2021). However, Charlesworth (2018, 240) discloses that none of the desired actions through CTAs can be completed effectively if they lack an objective. Therefore, setting a goal for an email and creating a call-to-action that drives towards that one specific goal is essential for an email campaign to succeed on high performance. Ryan (2017, 163) highlights, that an effective email campaign considers its target audience, the reasons to send a message, and what is expected from the email to achieve.

2.4.4 Delivering content through online blogging

Collins Dictionary (2021) defines a blog as a website where an administrator, i.e. an author of the blog, regularly records their experiences, thoughts, or opinions about a subject. According to Marketing Terms (2021a), the word *blog* has its roots in word *web logs* or *weblogs* that initially started as a diary-style news site of what was happening in the blog administrator’s life or online in a particular area. Blogging has gained momentum during the past decade, and it has become an established part of strategic content marketing as not only individuals, but also companies are particularly active in sharing content through their own online blogs.

The popularity of blogging is indicated by the figures recorded by companies operating in the related tech field. WordPress (s.a.), a content management software primarily maintaining and creating blogs and websites, affirms that around 40 percent of all web content is built using the WordPress software. In addition, Lupold Bair (2019, chapter 1) remarks that a new blog is created on WordPress software every six seconds. Tumblr (2021), another blogging platform, affirms having over 522 million blogs created in their platform where the average number of daily new blog posts is over 10 million, which confirms the American networking website for being the most popular blogging platform in the world (Tumblr 2021). These above-presented numbers support the vast popularity of blogging today.

The reason for the popularity of blogging is that it can create several advantages for its administrators. The advantages of blogging recognized in this section are customer development and higher organic website traffic. An organization can develop its customer acquisition by publishing content on a blog that attracts prospective customers or customer groups, and crafting educational and helpful blog content that will benefit the targeted audience (Cangiano 2019, chapter 11.5; PR Agency Manifesto 2019, 7–8). In addition, blogging can drive more organic web traffic to the blog site by generating high search-engine rankings when publishing content online (Lupold Bair 2019, chapter 1.1). Web traffic generated from other than paid marketing acts is considered organic traffic (Omniconvert 7 Jan 2020). Building a blog text using subject-related keywords enables search engines to find the blog more facile and optimize its visibility in search results, organically attracting more web users to visit the blog (Cangiano 2019, 8.3). This way, blogging allows organizations to increase their online visibility. A study performed by ConvertKit (2017, 33) shows organic search through search engines being the number one source of online visitors for professional bloggers.

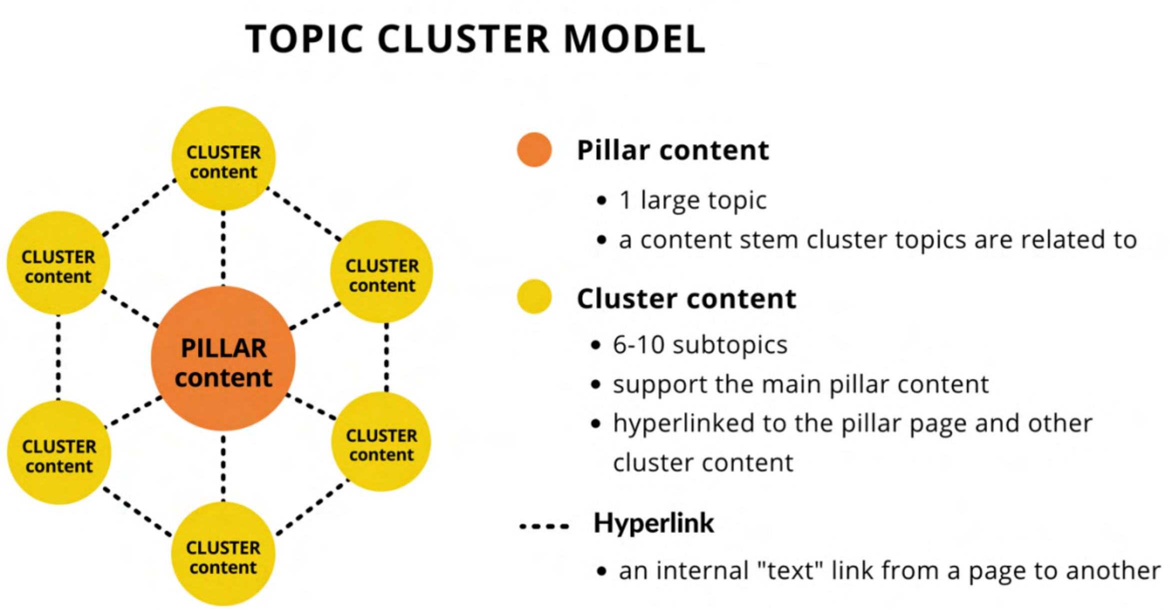

Figure 10. A topic cluster model with six cluster contents linked to a pillar content (adapted from Dopson 11 Jan 2021)

A *topic cluster model* for blogging has been recognized as a technique to gain more web traffic to a blog site. The model internally links one central topic (referred to as *pillar content*) to other subtopics (referred to as *cluster contents*), which in turn are internally hyperlinked to other subtopics (Dopson 11 Jan 2021). An example of the topic cluster model is illustrated in figure 10, where six cluster contents are built and internally linked to support one pillar content. By linking the blog publications to each other, blog articles can maintain a longer lifespan than articles with limited promoting due to the lack of links. The use of the model has been evident to bring results as an American software developing company, HubSpot Inc., discloses their year-to-year web traffic being increased by 25 percent due to the use of the topic cluster model (Perricone s.a.).

2.4.5 Personalized website experience

A consistent and delightful experience tailored to each person converts people into customers more often than an experience that irritates individuals with its inconsistency and negligence (Villani 2018, 1–2). According to Salminen (9 Jan 2018), personalized websites can elevate the visitor user experience (UX) to a higher level when visitors encounter different content in the same views, and thus each has a different user experience. However, Ash, Ginty and Page (2012, 5) point out that many websites are designed and built to prioritize conversion rate optimization leaving little attention to the website visitor experience. Ignoring the UX of a website is often the result of an administrator's narrow knowledge of their audience characteristics and interests, which affect how people end up at the site and particularly what makes them leave the site (Ash *et al*. 2012, 5).

The more relevant and individual the website experience is, the more likely the visitor is to make a purchase decision and become a customer (Salminen 9 Jan 2018). Turning website visitors into customers most often require an engaging landing page, i.e., a page where the visitor initially ends up when clicking on a link in an online ad, blog, email, or through a search engine, for example (Forbes Agency Council 14 Aug 2020). Ash *et al*. (2012, 4) define the job of a landing page to guide its visitor towards an important action the website owner desires their visitor to take, which can convert visitors into leads and leads into customers. Gofman, Moskowitz and Mets (2009, 287) claim that keeping the prospective customers on the site is the key objective of a landing page, which can be achieved through engaging content. Engaging content on a website is created, for example, through smart interactive content and clear stated call-to-actions, methods previously presented in this chapter.

Smart content on a website enables displaying information based on visitors' previous website behavior and points of interest, thereby enabling to identify the visitor (Brenner 4 Oct 2019). On the other hand, identifying the visitor requires web automation and data analysis (Pappas 2018, 1681). Based on the data tracked from an individual's behavior online, the visitor is presented with smart content that matches their preferences and needs (Liarokapi 22 Oct 2020). Personalization makes the website dynamic, which allows a landing page to provide each web visitor individual content, such as ads, images, and text. The types of data to track and methods to measure web-based content are discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3.

2.5 Personalization challenges and the EU legislation

This section discusses some of the internationally recognized challenges organizations commonly confront with personalization and reviews how a European Union (EU) privacy regulation (General Data Protection Regulation) affects businesses handling personal human data. Despite the advantages of content and web personalization, the process for generating results through it may be found complex by organizations. Therefore, personalization can be left to the basics in the absence of the necessary skillset or electronic environment. (Researchscape International & Evergage, Inc. 2019, 37.)

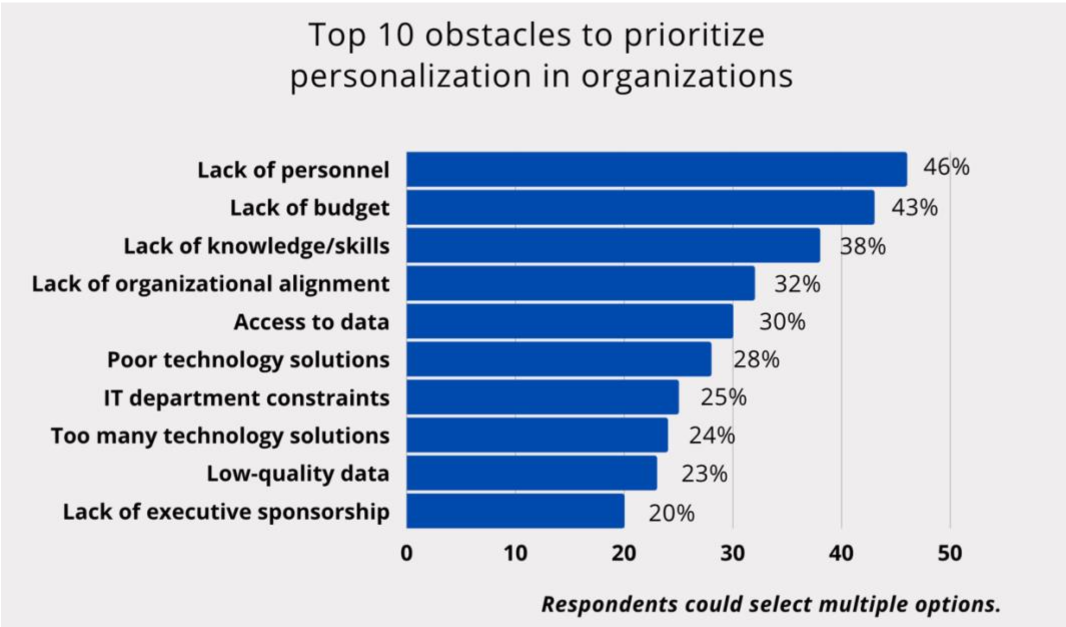

Figure 11. The 10 most common obstacles for marketers to prioritize personalization in organizations (adapted from Researchscape International & Evergage, Inc. 2019, 37)

The 2019 Trends in Personalization study report conducted by Researchscape International and Evergage, Inc. discloses the top 10 obstacles experienced among marketers in prioritizing personalization (see figure 11). The greatest obstacles were insufficient personnel and budget deficiencies. In addition, the study reports the challenges associated with technology, and data collection and utilization would appear to be one of the most common challenges encountered by marketers. In spite of the challenges, marketers and business leaders seem to be aware of the positive effects of personalization. According to the aforementioned survey, as many as 98 percent of the respondents believe personalization helps foster customer relationships, and as many as

85 percent of the respondents stated their customers expect to receive a personalized experience (Researchscape International & Evergage, Inc. 2019, 2).

In addition, content and web personalization are associated with privacy concerns which may be of particular concern to consumers (Pappas 2018, 1680). Pappas (2018, 1680) describes a personalization–privacy paradox may occur among consumers when they receive customized recommendations or personalized content, where they are expected to make a decision between choosing personalization benefits and privacy risks. Even though consumers may have such concerns, still they are often willing to share their information if personally benefiting from it through, for instance, an offer, discount, or any other thing the individual feels will bring them value (Aguirre, Roggeveen, Grewal & Wetzels 2016, 38).

In addition to the online privacy concerns, legislation has also a major impact on marketing when operating within the precincts of the European Union or in the European Economic Area. Since the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was introduced in 2018 by the EU, it has imposed requirements and restrictions on how businesses can internationally handle personal human data of EU citizens (European Union s.a.). The EU legislation declares the organizations and company representatives who process any personal data of EU citizens or work in organizations in the EU countries are required to follow the rules and regulations stated in the GDPR.

The legislation has caused numerous changes in how organizations obtain, retain, and process data, specifically for people working in marketing and sales departments (European Union s.a.). The penalties and consequences can be significant for organizations who do not comply with the legislation, being as high as 20 million euros or 4 percent of the organization’s turnover if significantly impacting the rights and freedoms of a large number of natural people (Dibble 2019, chapter 1). Since all personal data processed and stored must comply with the GDPR if having a presence in the EU or in the EEA, the legislation also affects companies globally outside the EU region on a large scale.

Recognizing what is considered personal data and what is not, can be challenging. The GDPR defines *personal data* as “any information which are related to an identified or identifiable natural person, for example, the telephone, credit card or personnel number of a person, account number, number plate, appearance, customer number or address” (GDPR Info EU s.a.). In addition, Dibble (2019, chapter 3) incorporate to the definition also factors relative to location data and a person’s physical, physiological, mental, genetic, economic, cultural, or social identities of a natural person. Thus, it can be concluded that if an individual cannot be identified from the data or the data is not related to the person, the data is considered nonpersonal.

Since GDPR requires organizations to be transparent in their data collection process, there are two documents for companies to ensure public availability to their customers and audiences: The Privacy Policy document and the Privacy Notice document. Even though the two documents are similar in kind, the regulation requires organizations to ensure they are both available for any natural person, if an EU citizen. The documents comprise information on how the data is processed, which are often displayed on corporate websites. (GDPR EU 2021.) The main differences between these two documents are explained below:

- **Privacy Policy:** A statement stating general data policies used by the organization. It is a document disclosing the rules and ways how an organization handles personal information under its control. Intended for the organization's use for guidance but is required to be available for the people whose data is being processed.
- **Privacy Notice:** A document addressed to the organization's customers or any individual to inform how their personal information is being used and protected by the organization. Its objective is to help individuals make informed decisions by being aware of the data collected and used. This document is to explain all of the parts related to the organization's privacy policy or policies. (GDPR EU 2021.)

3 Measuring the performance and results

This chapter aims to provide information on instruments for measuring personalized content performance and marketing outcomes. The elements presented in this chapter are *weak, acceptable and strong metrics, customer success performance indicators, email performance metrics,* and *an A/B testing method.* In addition, practices for staying up to date on content status are presented. The chapter ends by reflecting on the future trends identifying the data-driven and human-centered approaches which are likely to correlate with content marketing in the near future. Where the first theory part of this thesis discusses how content marketing can be enhanced through personalization with the emphasis on tailored customer experience, this second theory part focusses on finding answers to the secondary question of the thesis, "*What are the key methods to track and measure personalized content marketing performance?"*

3.1 Methods to measure marketing campaigns

The measurement methods presented in this section are defined as either metrics or indicators selected to be suitable for reviewing personalized content marketing results. A *metric* is defined as "*a system or standard of measurement*" by the Oxford Lexico Dictionary (2021a), which can thus be interpreted as an instrument to measure something. Metrics such as sales units, sales revenue, or net profit margin are counted as basic business metrics, which can be identified as hard numbers calculated from raw data that are not estimates but factual information (Charlesworth 2018, 303). In content marketing, basic metrics can comprise, for instance, demographics, content views, page visitors, and the number of subscriptions and downloads. In addition, marketing metrics are often referred to as *indicators* expressing how successfully or weakly specific acts perform (Charlesworth 2018, 303). The most important indicators are commonly referred to as *key performance indicators* (KPIs), which are often financially focused numbers using the most relevant metrics to indicate a specific performance (Hanlon 2019, 313).

3.1.1 Weak, acceptable and strong metrics

Today, in the era of high technology, it is possible to collect various types of data and measure extensively nearly anything from which information exists. What is relevant to measure for each project or campaign to maximize marketing efficiencies is up to each project management's discretion. Digital marketing metrics can be divided into weak, acceptable, and strong categories (Hanlon 2019, 314–316). Each metric category follows the customer journey framework consisting of suitable measurements for awareness, consideration, and conversion stages. Examples of such metrics are shown in figure 12.

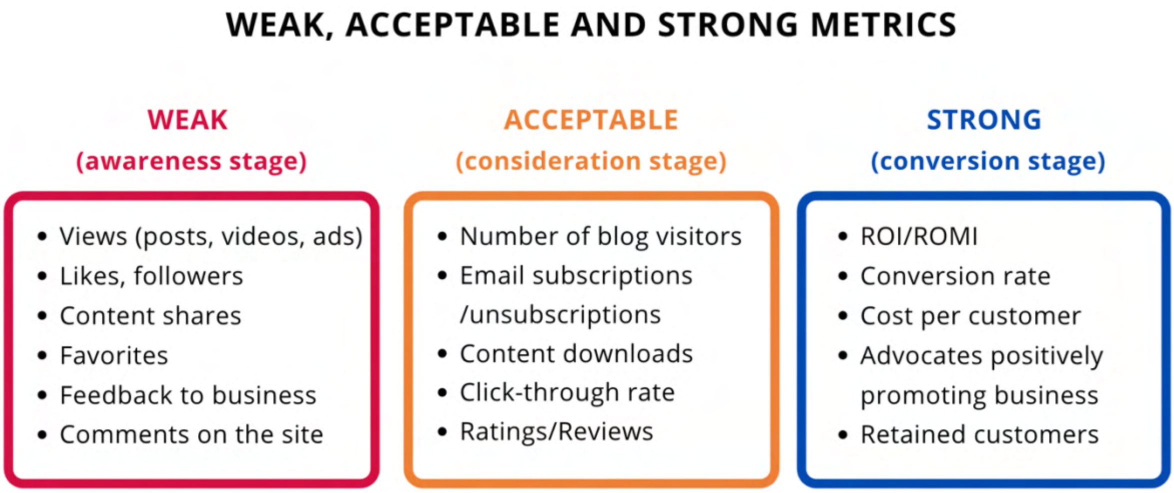

Figure 12. Examples of weak, acceptable, and strong metrics (adapted from Hanlon 2019, 314–316)

The weak metrics assimilate to early-stage customers and are considered as less meaningful data that is unlikely to contribute to a project outcome. Examples of weak metrics are content views, shares, and comments on a site. Acceptable metrics, on the other hand, relate to customers searching for information during the consideration stage of their customer journeys. Acceptable metrics are considered a guiding help for marketers but do not provide a view of a single campaign or content success. (Hanlon 2019, 314–315.)

The stronger the metrics are, the more conversion action such as customer engagement and sales they generate. The strong metrics are considered to be convenient for measuring productivity and success that apply to users and customers at the conversion stage of the customer journey. (Hanlon 2019, 316.) Examples of strong metrics are *return on investment* (ROI) or *return on marketing investment* (ROMI), measuring the profitability of a specific (marketing) investment, and a *conversion rate*, indicating a percentage of users or customers who take the desired action such as site visits or purchases through a specific call-to-action (Bendle, Farris, Pfeifer & Reibstein 2020, chapter 11.5; Grandhi, Patwa & Saleem 2020, 3). As seen in figure 12, metrics that are considered as strong metrics contain a greater number of indicators of estimations or calculations from metrics than metrics of hard numbers generated from raw data.

3.1.2 Customer success performance indicators

Measuring customer success provides insight into how business operations and achievements align with customer’s needs and priorities (Villani 2018, 146). Therefore, it can be concluded that in order to reach high performance in customer success, selected indicators are to align with the set business objectives that are customer driven. This section introduces six performance indicators for measuring customer success to support customer-driven business objectives. These include *customer churn rate, customer renewal rate*, *net promoter score* (NPS), *customer satisfaction score* (CSAT), *qualitative customer feedback,* and *customer lifetime value* (CLV) (see table 4). The indicators are used to assess customer satisfaction or customer brand commitment, for instance. Detailed formulas for calculating the indicators shown in table 4 are presented in the thesis outcome, the guide.

Table 4. Customer success indicators for measuring customer satisfaction and brand commitment (adapted from Bendle *et al*. 2020, chapter 2.9 & 5.1; Fontanella 8 Oct 2020; Hanlon 2019, 318)

CUSTOMER SUCCESS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

indicator	explanation
Customer Churn Rate	Expresses the rate at which customers unsubscribe or stop doing business. New customers should be excluded from the churn rate.
Customer Renewal Rate	Measures the percentage of customers who renew their subscriptions. A high renewal rate means success in maintaining customers, low rate depicts customers low success when engaging with a brand or using a product.
Net Promoter Score (NPS)	Measures customer satisfaction through how likely they are to recommend a brand to someone else. Measured by a survey or single question. On a scale of 0 to 10 points (promoters 9 – 10, passives 7 – 8, detractors 0 – 6).
Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT)	Similar to NPS, asking customers to rate their experience with a brand. Measured by a survey using 5-point Likert scale questions.
Qualitative Customer Feedback	Expresses what do customers value and like about the brand and what do they dislike. Qualitative feedback with open questionnaire responses. Sent out as a customer survey or feedback form or interview in-person.
Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)	Indicates the total revenue a single customer is expected to generate over the customer relationship. The longer a customer continues to purchase from a business, the greater their lifetime value becomes.

Customer churn rate, also known as customer retention rate, indicates the number of customers who discontinue doing business with a brand at a given period of time, which are used to track email or blog unsubscribes, for example (Bendle *et al*. 2020, chapter 5.1). Reducing customer churn can be seen as equally important as customer acquiring, as customer retention is often less costly than acquiring new ones (Fontanella 8 Oct

2020). A renewal rate is similar to the churn rate, but it expresses the percentage of customers who keep using a product or signing up to use a service (Bendle *et al*. 2020, chapter 5.1). A high renewal rate indicates the success in maintaining customers, when in turn, a low renewal rate indicates unsuccessful engagement with customers (Fontanella 8 Oct 2020). The renewal rate can be a useful indicator particularly for technology-based companies whose turnover consists of providing software and applications for their clients.

The company or brand's success in creating satisfied and loyal customers is measured with a net promoter score (Bendle *et al*. 2020, chapter 2.9). The NPS can be determined by conducting a survey question requesting respondents to rate their likeliness to recommend a brand to someone else on a scale of 0 to 10 points. Respondents whose responses lie between 9 and 10 are counted as promoters of the brand. (Qualtrics 2021.) Similar to the NPS are customer satisfaction score (CSAT), intended to measure the experience an individual has had with the brand, and qualitative customer feedback, expressing what customers value and dislike about the brand. These can be measured using a survey question with a 5-point Likert scale (CSAT) and an open survey question or request for open feedback (qualitative customer feedback). (Fontanella 8 Oct 2020)

Marketing actions where an emphasis is on the ongoing customer relationship rather than on a one-time sale are measured with a customer lifetime value. The CLV figure is customer-specific where a high number, or value, indicates a loyal customer demonstrating present revenue of future profits the single customer is expected to generate for the business. (Hanlon 2019, 318.) As loyal customers can generally be expected to bring continuous business to a company, CLV is also relevant for measuring the company's success in growing the number of loyal customers.

3.1.3 Tracking the email campaign performance

One of the advantages of email marketing is its effective and accurate measurability in addition to targeted and personalized messages (Hanna *et al*. 2015, 41). This section presents four metrics to track and measure email performance: *open rate, click-through rate* (CTR), *conversion rate,* and *bounce rate* (see table 5). Instead of indicators, the four measuring methods are presented as metrics since they result from actual events or numbers instead of consisting of estimates or interpretative figures.

Table 5. The four examples of key metrics for measuring email performance (adapted from Gunelius 2018, 185–189).

EMAIL PERFORMANCE METRICS	
Open Rate • A number of emails opened from emails delivered. • Used for tracking open trends rather than the performance of individual messages.	**Conversion Rate** • Percentage of recipients who complete the desired action stated in an email. • Used to track if a message succeeds to convert recipients or not.
Click-through Rate (CTR) • A number of clicks on links contained in a message delivered. • Offers direct insight into how many recipients engage with the content.	**Bounce Rate** • Percentage of unsuccessfully delivered emails to recipients' inboxes. • Used to optimize and improve email delivery.

An open rate, as its name suggests, represents the percentage of opened messages out of total emails delivered (Hanna *et al.* 2015, 43–44). It is a common metric to track emails but does not provide an accurate picture of the delivery or performance of the content itself inside the message. However, it can assess general trends in opening messages identifying the types of messages recipients open the most. (Gunelius 2018, 185)

A click-through rate is a metric that is used to measure the percentage of email recipients who clicked on a link, or an ad contained in a delivered message out of total emails delivered (Marketing Terms 2021b). A high CTR indicates a high number of clicks that can be a sign of relevant content for the respondents, whereas a low CTR can be a signal of irrelevant content due to the low number of clicks (Bendle *et al*. 2020, chapter 11.3). An unsuccessful targeting or failed recognition of the target audience’s needs, or interests are often reasons for a low CTR. The CTR metric is used to monitor, for example, the performance of emails that consist of a call-to-action. (Gunelius 2018, 186.)

A conversion rate was previously recognized as a strong metric in this chapter. It is listed as an important metric in content marketing suitable for measuring the success of personalized content (Gunelius 2018, 187–188). A conversion rate in email marketing corresponds to the percentage of respondents who take the desired action through a CTA on the message (Hanna *et al.* 2015, 45). This can be, for instance, turning a person into a blog follower, enticing them to subscribe to a newsletter, or encouraging them to perform an actual purchase through the desired action (Bendle *et al*. 2020, chapter 11.5).

A bounce rate, also known as a delivery rate (Hanna *et al.* 2015, 43), represents a percentage of unsuccessfully delivered messages, denoting the number of messages that did not properly reach an inbox due to an existing error (Gordon 17 Mar 2021). These errors can be distinguished into a *soft bounce* and a *hard bounce.* The soft bounce occurs when a person’s email address is temporarily out of commission due to a recipient’s auto-response or full email box, for example. The hard bounce, in turn, occurs when the recipient’s email address is misspelled, or it is otherwise permanently disabled. (Gunelius 2018, 189.) Hence, a marketer can use a bounce rate to screen and delete invalid email addresses from their contact list.

3.1.4 Running experiments through A/B testing

Active testing supports the process of finding out the most appropriate and compelling methods in marketing. A/B testing, or split testing, is a method for running experiments to compare alternative versions of the same content or element to see which produces the most optimal results aligned with objectives (McFarland 2013, chapter 3). In other words, one can understand A/B testing to be a practical research methodology where at least two versions are compared with each other to find out which one produces a better outcome. A/B testing is considered as a facile and fast way to test the functionality of distinct elements in business, as well as in outside of business (Siroker & Koomen 2013, 8). Organizations have adopted A/B testing as a much-used method to support everyday work, particularly in digital marketing (Gallo 2017).

Siroker and Koomen (2013, 8) describe how any person can conduct A/B testing in any organization to test almost any process or activity for finding better solutions. However, Gallo (2017) highlights that automation brings support for the testers when resolving case studies' performance efficacy, often run by applicable software programs and platforms. The testing method is suited for an online environment associated with online settings for websites, mobile applications, emails, and online ads (Gallo 2017). The higher the testing capacity is, the more an organization can learn, not merely from its customers or their preferences but also regarding their own internal processes and the most profitable activities (McFarland 2013, chapter 2).

3.2 Staying up to date on content status

This section presents two methods for staying up to date on content and campaign status: a content calendar and content auditing. While it is essential for a marketing team to stay up to date on the details of published content, it is also relevant to keep track of the upcoming tasks and required actions. In order to keep content organized, a digital calendar (a content calendar) where everyone in the team has access can provide consistency. In addition, to ensure the content remains relevant and technically functional during its lifecycle, organizing content inventories (content audits) is a way to monitor content performance.

The purpose of any calendar is to keep track of the present time and to remind about upcoming events or tasks. Calendars help people prioritize what needs to be done in a certain timeframe to maximize productivity in their daily lives and working lives, and not miss set timelines. (Sloan 8 Dec 2017). A content calendar can be defined as a digitally shareable resource for a marketing team to plan and schedule their content marketing activities, often divided by months (Hanlon 2019, 111). In other words, a content calendar is a written schedule of where and when the content is planned to be published. Using a shareable content calendar can help produce content in a consistent manner and brainstorm content ideas among the team. According to Hanlon (2019, 111), content can be planned on a daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis, depending on the industry field. However, Jefferson and Tanton (2015, 258) recall the challenges one may encounter to improve content marketing with a planning and calendaring system unless its use becomes a daily routine. The fundamental purpose of the content calendar is to regularize actions and keep the team up to date (Sloan 8 Dec 2017).

A content audit is another method, or process, to track and review all the existing content. A proper definition for term *audit* is a systematic review of something, which can also adapt to the definition of content audit (Oxford Dictionary (2021b). The aim of content auditing is to compile the existing content into one joint list where it is reviewed and further organized by categorization of distinct content types (Hanlon 2019, 116). Listing merely 5 to 10 features of the existing contents can help retain the auditing process forthright and manageable (Wilson 2019, 123). Casey (2015, chapter 1) states, that an organization can internally conduct a content audit by a responsible person or a team, or outsource the process to an external content strategist or a consultant. However, as Wilson (2019, 123) notes, an internal audit is often sufficient for organizations instead of complex or costly solutions such as outsourcing, unless particularly needed. To ensure audits become part of a marketing project, they can be added to the content calendar to remind of an upcoming auditing process.

3.3 Future trends in data-driven marketing

This final section of the thesis theory part reviews the future trends in marketing identifying data-driven and human-centered approaches which are likely to correlate with content marketing and personalization in the near future. While the operational tasks are decreasing and automation has taken its place in today's businesses, teams are required to gain extensive expertise in data-driven marketing in the future (Wilson 2019, 149). In the near future, Boudet, Gregg, Rathje, Stein and Vollhardt (2019) predict personalization to become the prime driver of success in marketing. In addition, technology and data analytics are expected to bring extensive opportunities for marketers to create more personal and human-centered experiences for customers at different stages of purchasing (Boudet *et al*. 18 Jun 2019).

Table 6. The predicted future roles of humans and machines in marketing (adapted from Wilson 2019, 151–157)

The future role of humans and machines		
roles and tasks	**machine**	**human**
Provide descriptive and predictive statistics	X	
Real-time reporting from constant data refresh	X	
Seamless content workflow through AI (e.g. content ideation, writing, targeting etc.)	X	
Increased volume by automation	X	
Interactive/smart content replacing traditional text and images	X	
Increased engagement through data-led CTAs	X	
Leading the storytelling and emotional awareness in people		X
Defining the tone of voice in content text and brand visibility		X
Leading differentiated contextual content through empathy and situational awareness		X
Differentiating authorship in writing with a personal style		X
Creating opinionated content with a human aspect		X
Production of visual and interactive content (e.g. videos, images, creative content)		X

Wilson (2019, 151–157) enumerates the future roles and tasks for humans and machines shown in table 6. It is expected that the human work will become increasingly focused on producing creative and storytelling content, as well as creating emotional content that attracts and arouse human feelings, while the machines will perform repeatable work on behalf of the people (Wilson 2019, 152). While human qualitative thinking and interpretative skills will be increasingly emphasized, computer algorithms and data processing will be strongly linked to people's decision making, thereby guiding activities of humanity in both business and private lives. Setting a tone of voice in writing and creating a personal style and visibility for brands and businesses are among the key tasks for marketers in the future. (Wilson 2019, 151–157.) It is likely that machine learning programs will provide marketers more accurate and predictive analytics and statistics with real-time reporting and data visualizations (Wilson 2019, 151).

As the technology evolves, artificial intelligence has predicted to be more of a decision-maker in the future rather than being a support to major business decisions. AI will be used as part of human decision-making more often as speed and computational capacity increases (Stone, Aravopoulou, Ekinci, Evans, Hobbs, Labib, Laughlin, Machtynger & Machtynger 2020). In addition, the development of AI is moving towards the presence of better understanding and explanatory AI to support human society's accelerating decision-making. However, the delegation of decision-making to AI in the future will be determined by how detailed the requirements of the decisions are and how easy the starting points for the interpretation of things and causes will be for the AI. (Shrestha, Ben-Menahem & von Krogh 2019.)

4 Description of the empirical implementation

This chapter opens up the implementation of the empirical part of the thesis presenting different stages and details of the completion process. The following sections review how the subject and guide content was planned and scheduled describing how the output of the project was completed in its final form. The chapter also presents the guide structure and the key tools used for designing and crafting the digital layout.

4.1 Planning of the subject and guide content

Inspiration for delimiting the subject of the thesis was sought through previously published bachelor's theses in marketing and international business, as well as other published articles and writings of the topic. When researching papers and writings, the choice of the subject initially adventured more on the international business side until I became interested in the topic of marketing personalization. However, even before defining the topic in more detail, I knew I desired to do the thesis as a product-based project as it seemed the most natural way of working, particularly due to an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic over the project timeline. Due to the global pandemic, working at Haaga-Helia institution facilities would be limited, which confirmed the decision to perform the work remotely and independently without a commissioning client. Executing the work independently would also ensure the subject of the thesis remains interesting to me from start to finish.

The general meaning and purpose of a guide is to provide information and advise or instruct its reader to help complete a specific task or add knowledge on a specific topic (University of Bath 2021). Before thorough planning of the thesis product, it became clear that the guide would need to be a detailed and instructive digital presentation of the subject. The planned vision was that most of the guide would contain visual elements to illustrate the models and methods presented in the thesis product.

The planning of the work began with selecting a subject that adapted to its final form as the project progressed. In the planning phase, the subject was initially limited to the personalization of content marketing, which was further defined to focus on customer experience. As I was also interested in marketing metrics and the methods of processing collected data for business and marketing purposes, a data-driven perspective was also added to the subject of the work. Once the thesis subject had been recognized as a compatible one to meet my personal interests as a student and applicable for the study programme standards, the concrete planning phase of the thesis began in January 2021. Preliminary objectives were set during the preparation of the thesis plan, which comprised of crafting a guide that is helpful and informative for professionals working in marketing. In addition, professional content producers and entrepreneurs interested in advanced marketing methods were also included in the target audience. The aim was to direct the guide especially to smaller growth-oriented companies operating in Finland or Europe.

In addition to the content plan consisting of determined subjects and subtopics, the plan also took into account the kind of knowledge the target audience should have to understand the models and instructions presented in the guide. Even though the final delineation was filed in more detail as the project progressed, it was initially defined that the reader should understand at least the basics of marketing and content marketing before reading the guide to get the most out of it.

A general form of writing a guide is to address the reader directly instead of writing in third person (University of Bath 2021). Thus, the output of this work was also planned and written in a language that makes the role of the reader clear as a person who is looking for instructions. The aim was to create a guide of visual modeling and illustrative instructions as the main focus, in addition to shorter text sections in the guide. The text chapters should be kept easy to read and concise by writing clear sentences and structuring them into shorter sections so the reader would not have to spend too much time on reading the text.

4.2 Content structure and layout of the guide

While planning the content structure and layout of the guide, it became clear that the most consistent way to implement the product would be for the product to be based on the theory parts of the thesis report. However, the design of the content initially started by structuring the layout of the guide listing the larger subject areas. After outlining the content body for the guide, a more detailed outline of the theoretical part for the report began. The initially planned framework and the executed framework for the guide are shown in figure 13.

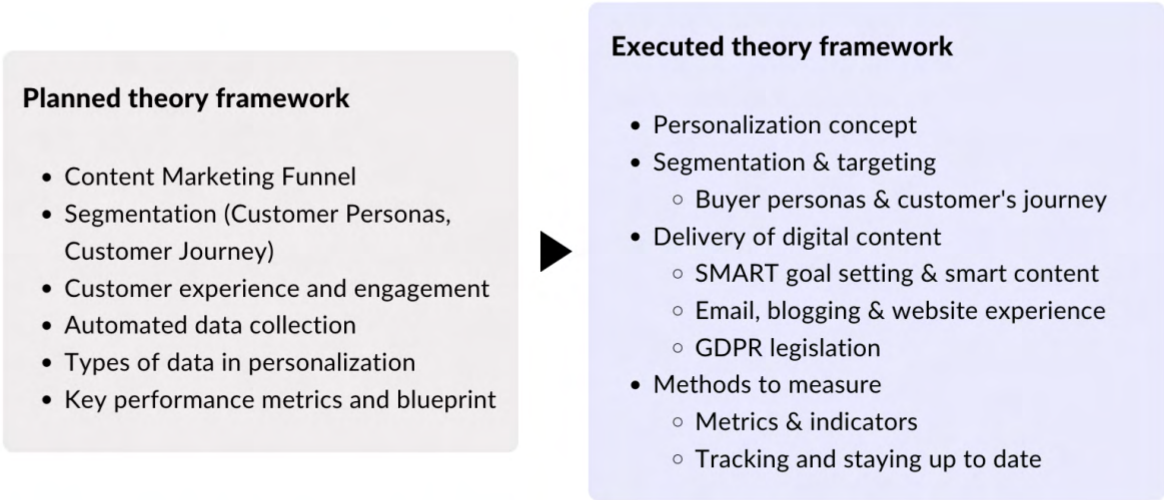

Figure 13. The planned and executed theory framework of the thesis

The completed guide is 43 pages long and compiled into a digital report template. The work has been created entirely by using Canva, a web-based program for graphic design and content production. The final product consists of text based on the theory parts of the thesis report, as well as figures, diagrams, and pictures to demonstrate the presented models. Figures and diagrams have been created and customized for the thesis using templates in Canva and Microsoft PowerPoint, attached to the finished opus as their own elements.

The guide contains practical guidelines and recommendations for content personalization and detailed instructions with calculations on applying the methods for measuring marketing results. As mentioned, the content structure of the guide (see figure 14) is similar to the theory parts of the final thesis report. The guide begins with an introduction part to the guide, after which the first chapter introduces the concept of personalized content and the advantages for businesses using it. In addition, the chapter also presents the three principal components of personalization (content, experience & data). The second chapter reviews the methods of how to personalize an experience for customers and target audiences through segmentation and by using fictional buyer personas. The four methods for targeting an audience and how to take into account the customer journey when personalizing content, are also presented in the second chapter. The third chapter of the guide focuses on presenting how to deliver relevant content first reviewing SMART goal setting followed by identifying the five features of dynamic smart content. The chapter explores how email messages can be personalized and introduces the technical model for personalizing a blog and a website experience.

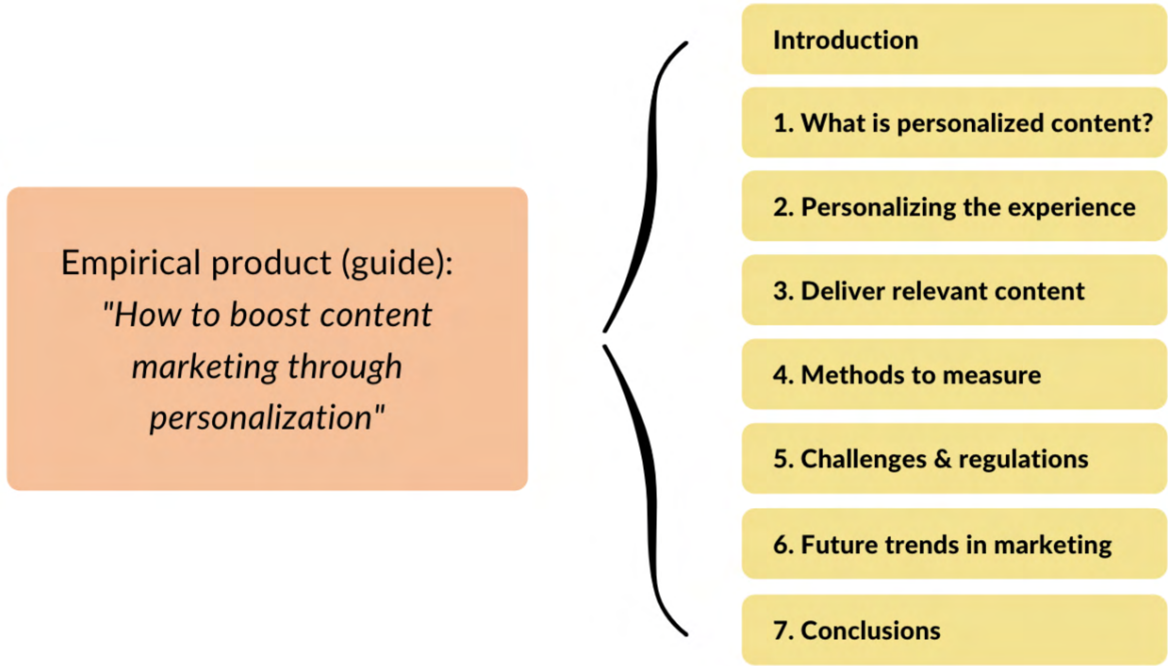

Figure 14. The final content structure of the guide

The fourth chapter scrutinizes the methods to measure and calculate marketing results, presenting the key metrics for content and email marketing, as well as indicators for customer success performance. The fourth chapter ends with presenting instructions on creating a content calendar for staying up to date on content status and running an audit for content inventory. The challenges of personalizing marketing content are addressed in chapter five of the guide, as well as presenting the GDPR legislation with a checklist to support the guide readers better understand the legislation. The final chapters of the guide identify future trends in marketing (chapter 6), followed by conclusions with a brief discussion regarding personalization in marketing and the content of the guide (chapter 7). The guide is attached in the appendices to this report (appendix 1), in addition to which it has also been exported as a PDF file for possible future publications and distributions to interested audiences.

4.3 Implementation schedule

A weekly schedule for the entire thesis project was established at the planning stage. The implementation of the product’s theory framework and the guide itself were executed within the initial timeframe (see table 7). The thesis project was planned to be completed in 15 weeks which 10 of them were scheduled for creating the theory framework and the product. The schedule included each required stage to complete the report and the guide by structuring project assignments for every week from January to May 2021. Such detailed plan for timing the required tasks supported me staying motivated as well as ensured the progression of the writing process.

The preparation of a detailed plan of the work's various aspects supported the construction of the first and second theory parts and gave direction to initiate the work. Although the theory parts were further refined as the work progressed, the main points of the thesis report remained the same as those stated in the initial plan. Upon completion of the theory parts for the guide were completed in March 2021, followed by a completion of the guide in April 2021. Completion of the guide and the entire thesis project required a full-time commitment of working in order to stay on schedule. Although the project schedule was intensive and relatively short concerning the workload, each section of the thesis was completed according to the planned schedule. Thus, the comprehensive planning of the work succeeded in creating a supportive and guiding foundation for the project, which contributed to its completion.

Table 7. The planned project schedule for implementation

Project Schedule	
Week 4, January	Introduction
Week 5, February	2nd chapter
Week 6, February	2nd chapter
Week 7, February	2nd chapter
Week 8, February	2nd chapter
Week 9, March	3rd chapter
Week 10, March	3rd chapter
Week 11, March	A week to revise and rewrite the text written so far
Week 12, March	GUIDE; 1/3
Week 13, March, April	GUIDE; 2/3
Week 14, April	GUIDE; 3/3
Week 15, April	4th chapter
Week 16, April	5th chapter
Week 17, April	Check abstract, references and appendices
Week 18, May	Return final work

10 weeks;
Theory framework
&
empirical product

5 Discussion

This final chapter discusses the success of the project and the things that influenced the outcome of the thesis. The chapter reviews the factors that affected the quality of the work, the challenges encountered along the way, and presents further study suggestions. At the end of the chapter, also academic and personal learning outcomes are discussed.

5.1 Evaluation of the project

To evaluate how well the project succeeded in terms of the objectives and delimitations set at the beginning of the work, the thesis fulfills its original purpose of creating a guide to enhance content marketing with data-driven personalization techniques. To delimit the subject of the thesis, the basics of marketing and content marketing practices were excluded when setting a plan for the project. The work aimed to focus on the advanced techniques of content marketing, which I believe carries through the entire thesis by focusing on the target audience already familiar with the basic marketing concepts. In addition, the objective was to get acquainted with personalization, which was achieved by deepening to the aspect of data-driven customer experience. Thus, the subtopics that are beneficial and crucial to complement the primary subject support the justified success of the project.

Planning the project, creating the theory basis, and designing and implementing the content of the guide have taken a lot of effort and many working hours. Because the product was set to be a comprehensive and thorough creation of the subject, its content had to be customized separately from the theory base even though the information would be based on the theory parts of the work. Thus, the theoretical part also had to be as extensive as the information presented in the product itself. Overall, creating the thesis was a rewarding process despite the demanding workload. The reward for the work was brought about by delving into and learning from the chosen thesis subject, as well as practicing the academic writing style, which is discussed separately in its own section in the reflection of learning.

5.1.1 Factors affecting quality of the project

This section discusses how reasonings of the thesis subject affected the quality of the project and assesses the reliability of the thesis content. In addition, the success of project management is also taken into account when reviewing the factors affecting the quality. Assessing the content reliability, the level of sources used is taken into account. In turn, discussion of the subject reasoning addresses three arguments for choosing the thesis subject, all of which contributed positively to the quality of work:

1) personal interest in the subject
2) the importance of the subject for my future professional career and academic endeavors
3) the general social interest of the subject in the marketing sector

My personal interest in the subject was a key factor in achieving and retaining the quality of the work. The subtopics were orientated thoroughly due to the remaining interest in the subject from the beginning to the end of the project. The more familiar with each subtopic I became, the more my interest in personalizing marketing content increased. I found this to be solid support, especially when doing the work that otherwise felt heavy and challenging at times.

Attaching the aspect of data-driven customer experience brought an even more interesting starting point for the project. As a future marketing professional, I intend to specialize in user experience and user interface designing, to which the topic of this work is also strongly related. The topic of the thesis also supports of graphic design studies that I pursue alongside the bachelor's degree. As the thesis felt rewarding in a professional sense, I believe it also contributed to the quality of the project output.

When initially searching for a subject for the thesis project, the social interest and attention paid to marketing personalization in recent years convinced me of the topicality of the subject. Creating a project on a timely subject increases the quality of the work when its content is likely to be more relevant to the reader than an outdated subject that does not interest or inspire its reader. Orientating into the concepts of marketing personalization and data-driven customer experience deepened my own understanding of why they are so strongly interrelated and a hot topic in the field today. The reason for this can be assumed to be in the multiple advantages they can provide for businesses.

The quality of the work done can also be assessed based on the reliability of its content. The content of this work has been compiled mostly using literature published in the field, academic references such as articles and research papers, and other writings published by professionals in the field. Since the work consists merely of secondary sources, a further perspective on the theory would have been obtained through primary sources such as conducting a survey or interviewing professionals. This could have further improved the quality of the theory parts as well. However, these were deliberately excluded from the thesis mainly due to the strict schedule and the extensive coverage of the empirical part. Though, the quality of secondary sources used improved towards the end of the work as more academic writings were included, which I believe also raised the level of the content to be more reliable in this thesis.

The quality of the project was also maintained by contributing to the time required for the project to achieve the desired result. The work was not completed too fast and not too slow. The time allocated in the planning phase was calculated to be sufficient, and the implementation of the project followed the set project management schedule successfully. Even though correcting the text required some extra time, it improved the quality of the text. Thus, the project management went as expected, and its success affected the quality of the project as well.

5.1.2 Challenges encountered during the project

Although the thesis project proceeded primarily as expected and the outcome corresponds to the plan and expectations, various challenges still arose along the way. However, some of these challenges were braced before the actual writing part was initiated. As is generally the case with larger projects, scheduling has an important role in the progress of any project. Even though the weekly schedule including the list of writing tasks was defined, time management between other study assignments and leisure activities still posed unexpected challenges. Due to the writing mission being relatively comprehensive in a relatively short period of time (circa 3 to 4 months), it contributed to an increase in stress levels and fatigue during the thesis project. However, the steady progress of the process motivated me to start working on a new task or writing section of the thesis every week.

In addition, delimitations of the chosen subject and abiding with it also posed some difficulties as each subtopic could have been further specified and orientated as their own primary subjects. Nonetheless, a detailed list of planned content assisted in focusing on the subject defined. Keeping the text of the thesis report objective, in addition to the discursive use of references, caused somewhat corrections and rewriting within the text chapters, which in turn created pressure to tighten the project schedule. Despite the challenges of an intensive schedule, the completed work was returned within the planned deadline.

Writing the thesis in English instead of Finnish also posed new challenges as such extensive work in English was my first. However, the choice of language was selected by my own initiative as the other option was to conduct the project in Finnish. A thesis conducted in English, on the other hand, would strengthen my language skills in addition to offering a better position when applying for postgraduate studies. In addition, the use of English seemed anyway like a natural choice for the thesis project due to the aspect of international specialization in the study programme at Haaga-Helia, where a great part of the studies has been conducted in English.

Because the global pandemic prevailed intensively during the thesis project, it set limits on physical visits to the Haaga-Helia library. For this reason, a significant part of the reference material used in this thesis occurs in electronic forms and is accessible either through the study institution’s own database or on the internet. However, some of the used references had already been borrowed from the institution’s library before the thesis project initiated. These materials comprise literature from Chaffey (2019), Charlesworth (2018), Hanlon (2019), and Ryan (2017), which can be found in the list of references in this report.

5.2 Further study suggestions

As the thesis progressed, I realized how broad the subject of personalization in marketing really is. Every subtopic covered in this work could make its own primary subject for further studies or research for discovering new subtopics. Based on the desktop research and knowledge gained during this thesis project, delving into the subject area of digital customer experience to analyze data-driven marketing methods could be recommended as for further study suggestions. Digitalization and the development of technology will allow digital customer experience to be conveyed more effectively in the future by creating emotional and audience-convenient marketing messages. For instance, metrics and indicators for measuring customer experience success will be vital tools for marketers in the future. Further review of relevant customer experience indicators and the evaluation of their benefits to marketers, could provide an interesting and useful research topic.

5.3 Reflection on learning and development

This section comprises two subsections making connections between the academic and personal learning experiences during the thesis project. Contemplating the learning outcome through academic categorization supports the recognition in growth and development as a student and future professional, whereas the personal categorization scrutinizes the learning outcome as an individual. In addition to presenting the learning outcomes, this section aims to identify the areas that would need further development and the matters that could have been done differently in terms of learning.

5.3.1 Academic learning outcome

A notable academic learning outcome is the increased use of written English. As the project initiated, I noticed how strongly language translations and searching information in

English would influence the execution of the project as a whole. An additional workload caused by translations and revision of correct academic words and terms occasionally slowed down the progression of the work. Despite the minor language challenges, my academic English skills strengthened substantially as the writing process proceeded. Expansion in the vocabulary will support applying scientific knowledge to business and marketing practices in the future and prepare for the industry-specialized positions internationally.

Another significant learning outcome of this thesis is understanding how the extensive use of reliable sources supports the justified presentation of a subject written objectively in an academic paper. An academic writing style requires presenting theories and factual statements unambiguously based on references instead of personal interpretations or viewpoints, which I understood better during the project. However, a discourse created between sources used and the objectivity incorporated into the writing style posed challenges during the writing process. Therefore, special attention had to be addressed to the extensive use of sources and discourse created between them. Familiarizing with the techniques of referring to sources was practiced through active use of them. Nonetheless, further practice of the aforementioned methods will be needed to succeed in future academic projects.

Part of the objective setting of this thesis was that the project would support my personal growth as a future digital marketing professional. Knowledge around marketing personalization and related techniques was relatively modest before writing the theory part of the project. Scrutinizing thoroughly the subject of data-driven marketing from different perspectives and focusing on marketing metrics, in particular, are important to understand as a professional. In addition, the selection of the subject evidently proved to be an excellent choice as it complements my part-time studies in graphic design, of which the final portfolio was simultaneously prepared in addition to this thesis project. The empirical part of the thesis, i.e. the guide, ended up being part of the graphic design portfolio as a work sample of content creation and visual design. Therefore, working on the thesis project was particularly instructive due to the contribution to the other study program.

The thesis project also proved how substantial impact thorough planning combined with detailed delimitations setting has on the success of academic work. Accurate and comprehensive planning, including a clear objective setting, needs to be guided by the primary and subresearch questions or problems. This project taught how it is important for the writer to continually consider the project questions that define the work to also adhere to the project’s set delimitations. The delimitations of this thesis could have been further refined, for example, by choosing either a business-to-consumer or business-to-business point of view. On the other hand, however, the work was not intended to exclude the other fully but to take both into account due to personal interests.

5.3.2 Personal learning outcome

Like academic learning, I also feel that the strengthening of personal skills was quite extensive during the project. Although independent remote working has become familiar over the past years, a project of this scale was the first I have done entirely independently as distance learning. At the end of the project, I was surprised at how exhausting distance learning alone can be and how important social interactions are in our everyday lives. Each challenge and problem had to be first figured out independently before it made the most sense to seek advice remotely elsewhere. However, this approach strengthened the self-initiative way of working, solving problems, and managing time.

Even though in this project the time management went according to my personal expectations, it is an area that still needs more attention in the future projects. The thesis project was completed on time according to the schedule, however, scheduling the project could have faced major challenges if any of the risks considered in the work plan had taken place. These could have been such as a change in the thesis subject or becoming ill during the pandemic. Nor would the schedule have been reached if focusing on the project full-time had not been possible from the beginning to the end of the project. Time management was an area I had to actively pay attention to, which was managed by setting intermediate goals along the project to ensure staying on the set schedule.

All in all, the independently executed product-based thesis was the right method for this thesis project. However, I do plan to implement a postgraduate thesis using either a qualitative or quantitative method. Overall, I feel satisfied with the completed thesis and the learning outcomes on both the academic and personal levels. Extensive professional and personal skills were gained in advanced marketing techniques as well as in independent project work and academic writing. A discipline to work systematically and a genuine desire to become acquainted with the subject led to a successful outcome.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The guide "*How to boost content marketing through personalization*"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Digital content marketing very much revolves around personalization today. Yet, many businesses seem to struggle to execute it in real-life. Personalizing your marketing message can significantly boost your company's sales and improve customer relationships, which are the heart of every business.

This guide reveals the key components every powerful personalization strategy should consist of and how to utilize them in practice. The guide is intended as a useful tool mainly for marketers working for organizations operating in the European Union market area either in the consumer market or business to business market. However, digital marketing is rarely limited to only one specific area, and global agility is increasingly expected from modern companies and entrepreneurs these days. Therefore this guide can provide valuable information for marketing professionals around the world.

The guide is part of my Bachelor's thesis in a degree programme in Business Administration and Economics at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland. The thesis project consists of a theory report part and a product-based outcome that is this separately produced instructional guide for content marketing purposes. The thesis report provides a theory framework for this guide and is therefore recommended to read before delving into this more detailed opus on how personalization can be put into practice in content marketing.

1. WHAT IS PERSONALIZED CONTENT?

Content personalization can be done in many different ways, but its main purpose is to deliver a meaningful message to someone who needs it or is interested in it. The premise of this guide is to consider 3 components that make up personalization today (*figure 1*); creating content, collecting data, and customer experience (CX). Creating a meaningful message tailored to someone requires data based on the target person's preferences, which in turn can produce a unique CX by providing relevant content.

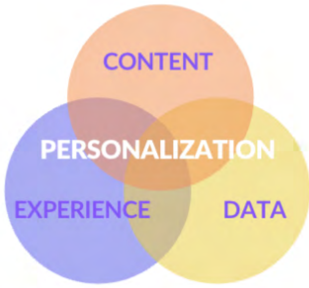


Figure 1.

74%

OF CONSUMERS ARE LIKELY TO BUY BASED ON EXPERIENCE ALONE

According to Forbes, roughly around 74 % of consumers are likely to make a purchase based on customer experience alone, and nearly 80 % consider experience equally important as the quality of a product or service. Therefore, CX is one of the most important elements handled in this guide, along with data collection, to create personalization in an exponentially growing digital world. Based on these impressive numbers mentioned above, every business should consider personalization as one of the primary parts of their marketing strategies.

SOURCES: FORBES 2020

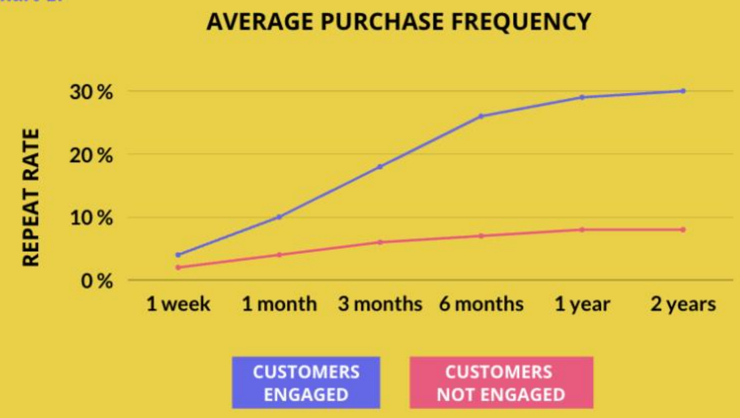
Advantages of personalization for businesses

When done right, personalization will bring along improved sales numbers and successful customer relationships. On average, successful and effective personalized marketing can increase sales by 10 % or more and deliver a return on investment (ROI) five to eight times higher. Customer relationship is an intangible resource that should present a high value for every company. It is part of customer-centric marketing, where the priority is given to customer's interests and needs before advertising products or services. Getting to know your ideal customers can improve engagement in the customer relationship which can eventually bring significant advantages to your business. Chart 1. demonstrates how according to E-TailingGroup, consumers who are exposed to engaging customer-centric marketing might purchase up to 300 % more often than consumers not being exposed to such marketing.

300%

HIGHER PURCHASE FREQUENCY, AND 5–8 TIMES HIGHER RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Chart 1.



SOURCES: E-TAILING GROUP S.A.

2. PERSONALIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Now that you have an idea of what personalization is and what its key elements are, it's time to start the process utilizing the right methods. To provide a personalized customer experience, it is essential to find out whom the customized message is designed for, what type of content is relevant for your audience, and what stage of the customer relationship is it best to reach the audience. This chapter first delves into how you can segment your target audience using different segmentation grouping and create fictional personas of your ideal customers.

ENGAGE WITH THE CUSTOMER AT EVERY STAGE OF THEIR COUSTOMER JOURNEY

The chapter continues by presenting 4 different types of targeting approaches that can be useful when setting a strategy to target content for the audience. Once you know who or what type of group you are going to target, it is time to find out the types of content the audience might be expecting from your brand. The best way to do this is to acknowledge the different stages that each customer experiences by outlining a customer journey for them. A customer journey is a strategic and important tool to better understand the customers and their needs.

SEGMENTING THE AUDIENCE

Segmenting your audience into groups helps determine to whom you should target the content and what type of data is needed to collect to fulfill the customer's needs. By doing this, you can offer customers what interests them, which can positively affect your business success. There are 5 effective ways to categorize your customers based on different factors, all presented in this section. Choose the segmentation category or categories that best aligns with your business goals.

5 segmentation categories:

geographic, demographic, psychographic, behavioral, & benefit

Geographic segmentation

The segmentation process often starts with categorizing the audience based on where and what kind of environment they live in and the country-specific or cultural preferences in that specific area. These are called geographical factors, examples of which can be found in the "factors" box on the right. Marketers can analyze location data most software and applications document through GPS and satellite technologies.

Factors

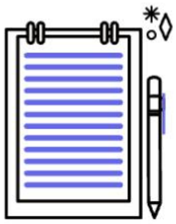
- **Location** (countries, states, cities)
- **Climate** (seasons)
- **Population** (type and density)
- **Market size**
- **Cultural preferences** (food & clothing habits, traditions)
- **Languages** used
- Country-specific **laws and regulations**

Demographic segmentation

Factors

- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Income**
- **Level of education**
- **Occupation**
- **Family structure**
- **Marital status**
- **Religion**

Demographic information consists of socioeconomic factors such as age, education, and income. Categorizing people based on their demographic factors is generally easier to obtain than information related to people's opinions, for example, due to the lower amount of data required. Most people find it acceptable to share their demographic data for marketing purposes.



Psychographic factors

Psychographic factors are the primary factors influencing people's decision-making in their everyday lives. This type of segmentation often provides the most versatile picture of the segmented group. They are best to find out through conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, or search engines.

Factors

- **Interests**
- **Values**
- **Personalities**
- **Beliefs**
- **Opinions**
- **Attitudes**
- **Activities**
- **Lifestyles**
- **Social status**

Behavioral segmentation

Factors

- Purchase decisions
- Shopping behavior
- Purchase frequency
- Brand loyalty
- Buying stage
- Feel of the product

As the name already suggests, behavioral segmentation divides the target market based on similar behavioral patterns and actions related to shopping and brand loyalty. Behavioral factors may differ greatly between customers, which can make it challenging to observe. The best way to determine a person's shopping habits is by conducting customer surveys and qualitative studies with open questions or possibly use previously collected customer data.

Benefit segmentation

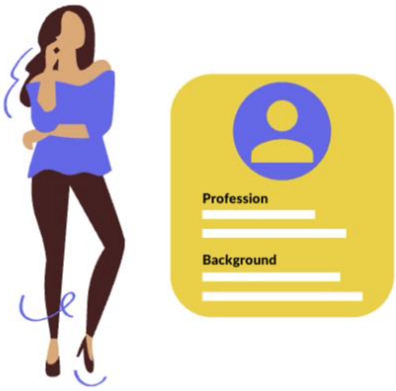
As in most cases, customers are looking for deals that will benefit them. Benefit segmentation is a mostly used method for smaller niche markets where the market is divided based on the advantages or perceived value the customers receive. Benefits can be based upon quality, special features, customer service, and other related advantages.

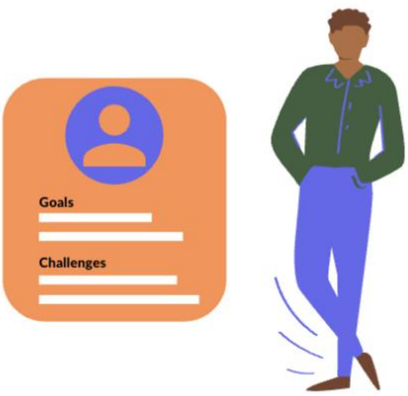
Factors

- Benefits
- Preferences
- Differentiation
- Unique products
- Customer loyalty

CREATE BUYER PERSONAS

Fictional buyer personas of the ideal customers can be created to support the segmentation process. To be able to target your ideal customers, it is important to understand what are the things they value the most and what kind of problems they are looking for solutions to. The buyer personas are simple in concept, but they can provide powerful insights of how a certain target group behaves and thinks.





6 question words for guidance:
Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

A buyer persona can help marketers better understand **who** their buyers are, **what** do they wish to accomplish and what drives them to make a purchase decision, **where** and **when** do they prefer doing their shopping and for what reason (**why**), and **how** do they think and behave. Examples of two fictional buyer personas can be seen in the next two pages.

OLIVIA

Location: Helsinki, Finland
Degree: Master of BA
Employer: Digital Creative Agency
Industry: B2B
Interests: visual design, product marketing, service marketing
Social media accounts: Twitter, LinkedIn, IG/FB, Pinterest

PERSONA 1

Digital Marketing Manager

Job description

- Planning and implementation of marketing content working closely with a creative director and web developer.
- Establish strategies to meet business goals and manage customer projects.
- Execution of measuring campaign performances and reporting results.

Goals

- Increase product and brand awareness
- Increase number and quality of leads from a website
- Make sure company meets client needs

Challenges

- Providing data on marketing activities
- Managing the out-of-date company website
- Unsure how to research keyword opportunities
- Developing a content strategy

Motivators

- Personal professional progression
- Recognition from the company board
- Successful customer projects and deals
- Free time spent with her family and friends

Media for news

- Finnish news channels Yle, HS, Kauppalehti
- International news channels Forbes, New York Times, BBC, The Guardian

PERSONA 2

Game Designer

ALEX

Location: Helsinki, Finland
Degree: Master of Science, IT
Employer: Gaming company
Industry: B2C
Interests: programming, video gaming, esports, virtual reality
Social media accounts: Youtube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit

Job description

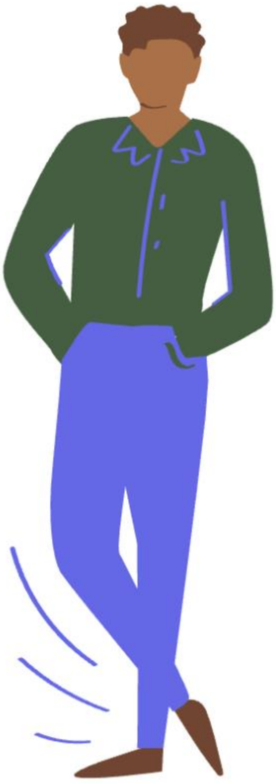
- Designing characters and animation
- Write codes and use programming languages
- Occasional project management tasks
- Testing and observing the early versions of video games

Goals

- To gain tips and strategies from gaming professionals
- Staying up to date on new designer programs
- Maintain code languages

Challenges

- High competition in online gaming
- Long working hours with small gaming details
- Lack of time to test demo games



Motivators

- International gaming competitions
- Online games and console games
- Finding like-minded people locally and online
- Guys game nights organized once a month

Tech & Programs

- Windows & macOS
- Adobe Illustrator & Photoshop
- Unity, Stencyl and GameMaker Studio

SOURCES: CHAFFEY 2019, COOPER ET AL. 2014

PERSONALIZING THE EXPERIENCE PAGE 11

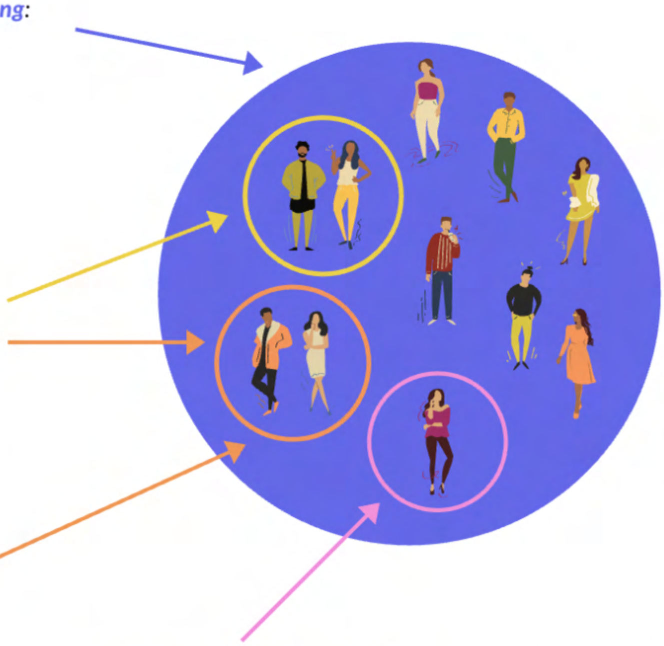
4 WAYS TO TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE

The 4 methods to target your audience:

Now that you've defined who your target audience is, it is time to decide which of the groups are you going to target and with what kind of content. Focusing on the targeted groups will help you create more valuable content that will benefit the most important people; your ideal customers.

***Undifferentiated "mass" marketing*:**

- Targeting the entire market without segmentation
- Less expensive but unlikely to bring any impactful marketing results!



***Differentiated "segmented" marketing*:**

- Targeting 2 or more groups
- Different marketing message for each group
- Popular and effective way to respond customer needs

***Concentrated marketing*:**

- Targeting only 1 group
- Specialized and exclusive content tailored just for the group's needs
- Often used for niche markets

***Individualized "micro" marketing*:**

- Targeting each individual separately on a niche market
- Building a relationship with the specific customer
- A fully customized experience for each person

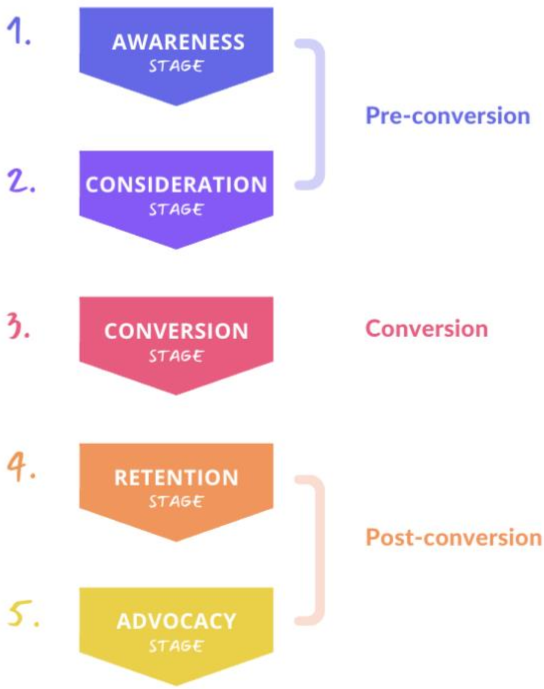
SOURCES: WOOD 2017

TARGETING 1/2

CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The Customer Journey, or better known as the Buyer's Journey, describes the whole experience each customer encounters in one way or another during their customer lifetime, starting from a research process leading up to a purchase decision (see a figure below). Often marketers may put their primary emphasis on the pre-conversion and conversion stages when, in fact, the most lucrative stages often are the post-conversion stages when a purchase has already been made.

Make sure you cover content targeting for all of these 5 stages, and your personalization performance will be a success!



70%

OF THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY IS COMPLETED BEFORE A PERSON HAS EVEN BOUGHT ANYTHING

80%

OF THE SALES IS CREATED BY 20% OF THE TOTAL CUSTOMERS ie. THE LOYAL CUSTOMERS

SOURCES: QUESTIONPRO S.A., SELLERS 2020

1. AWARENESS STAGE

A person is considered to be in the awareness stage when they initially become aware of a problem or a need they might have. When targeting people on this stage your objective should be consistently spreading general and attractive content that is easy for people to find. Focus on creating content that is helpful and educational for your target audience.

Digital customer touchpoints:
Online ads, email newsletters, blogs, SEO, social media, influencers

2. CONSIDERATION STAGE

At this stage, customers begin to compare options. They already have a clue about what they need and are now looking for the right fit. Your goal is to convince potential buyers that your brand is best for them but without sending an image of enforced sales. Focus on creating attractive and engaging content.

Digital customer touchpoints:
SEO, How-to articles, blogs, free guides, infographics, case studies

3. CONVERSION STAGE

The buyer has made a decision and is ready to purchase. At this point, make sure to include call-to-action (CTA) buttons in your content to encourage customers towards the purchase. Send out exclusive offers and promotions to the audience that will create a sense of urgency for them to complete the purchase.

Digital customer touchpoints:
Online shop, website, mobile application, discount offers

4. RETENTION STAGE

Retaining current customers is multiple times more lucrative than seeking new ones, which is why building a relationship should be a key factor even before customer conversion. At this stage, your primary objective is to keep the customer satisfied and turn them into a loyal customer who brings consistent business. This can be done through frequent communication and delightful content.

Digital customer touchpoints:
Direct email, follow up messaging, retargeted ads, exclusive offers

5. ADVOCACY STAGE

Once the loyal and happy customer reaches the advocacy stage, they have turned into a fan of the brand who will continue to use your products or services and independently promotes them on behalf of the business. Since the customer's word-of-mouth marketing is likely to bring in new customers, your job is to nurture your customers and maintain that positive customer experience. Keep creating engaging content and encourage people to share a review or a rating of your business. Also, reach out to influencers or guest bloggers for possible co-operation.

Digital customer touchpoints:
Loyalty program, personal promotion, blog, email, newsletter

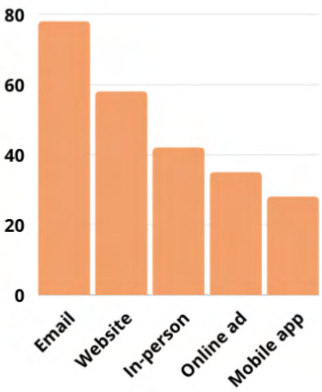
Enjoy the results of your hard work and start the customer journey process all over again!

SOURCES: QUESTIONPRO S.A., SELLERS 2020

3. DELIVER RELEVANT CONTENT

At a time when more content is being offered to the public than ever before, delivering relevant content is one of the most important parts of a content marketing strategy. Paying attention to relevancy will not only provide interesting content for its audience but can also arouse their interest in the brand and business behind the content. In addition to enhancing customer engagement, chances of becoming an industry leader can improve significantly as well. This chapter finds the key elements for you to build your strategy on, starting from setting SMART goals and creating smart content. The end of the chapter introduces three key channels for delivering personalized and relevant content, which are email, blogging, and through a website experience.

Chart 2.



According to a study conducted by Research International & Evergage (*chart 2*), the most commonly used digital channels for delivering a personalized experience are through email and website. Email marketing does have by far the largest reach with around 50 % of the global population using it. However, before moving on to the digital channels, you would need to define goals for what is expected from the marketing campaign which can be done by using a SMART goal method presented on the next page.

SOURCES: RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL AND EVERGAGE (2019)

SETTING SMART GOALS

When setting goals, using a SMART method can ensure that your goals are on point and meaningful for both the business and the target audience. The below figure clarifies the SMART acronym's meaning with guiding questions when setting goals for a personalized content marketing strategy or setting smaller campaign-specific goals.

SOURCES: RYAN 2019, WARNER 2019

SMART CONTENT

Turning your content into ***smart content*** means that it is optimized and tailored for the people who use the content and dynamically changes as per the target audience segment. By creating content that resonates with its audience and changes according to the viewer, will create a highly personalized experience. ***Dynamic (smart) content*** can attract and better guide its user through the customer journey and digital channels than unoptimized static content would where the content remains unchanged and displays the same message to all of its viewers.

Dynamic content ✓

↓

highly personalized experience

Static content ✗

↓

same for every viewer

When creating smart content for personalized messaging, there are **5 features** your content should consist of;

1. **content is targeted for someone**
2. **it is online optimized**
3. **content is relevant for someone**
4. **integrated across digital channels**
5. **it is profitable and converts customers**

Even though creating personalized content often requires more time and resources than creating generic content, publishing it is over **5 times more lucrative** on average than creating content that does not interest the target audience. Smart content will bring the most benefits when it is automated as much as possible. The structure of the smart content is better reviewed on the next page.

The 5 Features of Smart Content

TARGETED

Offer what customers want and need at the most convenient time. Collect data through CRM and marketing/content software to do accurate targeting. First create content variations for 2-3 target groups to measure the success and then expand to more groups if needed.

OPTIMIZED

Make content visible and easy for customers to find online. Let a content management software take care of optimization through AI-powered algorithms that can learn from each user visit.

RELEVANT

Make your content relevant for its user by turning it dynamic and responsive through automation. Collect and analyze data through cookie settings on a website and by defining previous site visits and user behavior to enable content optimization and adaptability for each visitor or user.

INTEGRATED

Activate your content across all digital channels that are relevant for your business and your customers. Email and websites are among the post popular channels for delivering highly personalized marketing messages.

PROFITABLE

Delightful and engaging content is known to convert customers into a profitable business. Pick the right metrics to measure content performance and business numbers such as return on investment (ROI) and conversion rate.

SOURCES: BRENNER 2019, CONTENT MARKETING INST. S.A.

THE POWER OF EMAIL

38

EMAIL BRINGS ROUGHLY 38 TIMES MORE ROI THAN OTHER CHANNELS

For years email has outperformed other digital channels bringing in roughly 38 times more return on investment than other digital channels when delivering personalized marketing content. Its powerfulness lies in the email being a **universally accepted** digital instrument between businesses and customers for relatively **easy communication**. In addition to being cost-effective, one of the best qualities is the possibility of setting automated emails and options to measure a single email performance or email campaign performance.

Often, emails are addressed to the recipient using a person or company name on the subject line, however, the main emphasis in personalizing content should always remain in optimizing the **content** suitable for the person's **interests**. Adding tailored content recommendations or product promotions are effective ways to catch your target audience's attention. Emails can also be triggered and automated based on website visits or content changes, such as "thank you" messages for new subscribers and "new products" messages for existing customers. Email marketing tools such as HubSpot, Sender, and Mailchimp can help automate emails triggering them by the actions of email subscribers.

Top 5 ways to personalize emails

1. **Use person/company name on the subject line - be tactful, not pushy!**
2. **Add product or content recommendations in the message by segmented group or by an individual**
3. **Create highly tailored messaging and promotions**
4. **Trigger emails based on site visitor or user behavior**
5. **Trigger emails based on product or content changes**

SOURCES: DIRECT MARKETING ASSOCIATION (2015), RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL AND EVERGAGE (2019)

Smart Call-to-Actions (CTAs) to Include In an Email

For the targeted audience to take the desired action, adding a clear call-to-action such as a clickable link in an image or a button of a short line of text is a powerful way to encourage the recipient to respond to the message. Adding smart CTAs in an email is one way to include smart content that can be crafted to contacts from various journey stages, segment groups, and targeted individuals. Examples of effective CTAs suitable for each customer journey stage can be found at the bottom of this page.

CTA examples 1

People who are early in their buyer's journey stages (awareness & consideration stages) are in need of information. Include CTAs that link to a blog article or links for getting more information.

- Subscribe to the blog
- Sign-up for information
- Get a free guide

CTA examples 2

Use CTAs that encourage people who are further along in their buyer's journey stages (purchase stage) to make the decision to purchase a product or to create a personal online account.

- Add to cart and save 15%
- Get started with my account
- Start my free 30 day trial

CTA examples 3

Converted customers (retention & advocacy stages) often expect to receive some type of post-contact from a business they have dealt with. Add engaging and exclusive CTAs in the content you are sending out for your current customers.

- Join our community
- Meet our staff
- Schedule consultation

51%

OF ALL WEB TRAFFIC IN EUROPE IS CREATED IN SMARTPHONES

Use Mobile-Ready Templates

A mobile-ready email, i.e. responsive email, is a message that is designed to look great and function properly on a smaller mobile screen than it would on a template designed only for website use. Changing your emails into mobile-ready templates that are built for messages to be opened in mobile devices can maximize your email open and click-through rates. Such templates can be coded from scratch, but the easiest way for companies is to use ready-made templates, which can often be found online for free from service providers such as Canva, Campaign Monitor, and Sendinblue.

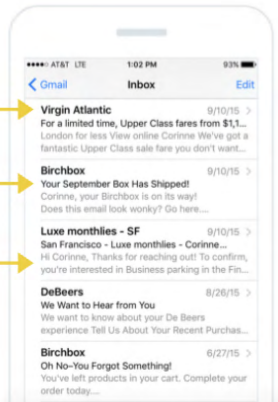
Tips for mobile-ready emails

- Choose a sender name that best describes your business and is easy for the recipient to recognize
- Shorten message subject line – less than 30 characters
- Write an intriguing preheader text
- Use pre-created mobile-ready templates to save time and resources
- Use images and visuals that quickly deliver the main message
- Make sure the size of the buttons and links are big enough for touchscreens

sender name

subject line

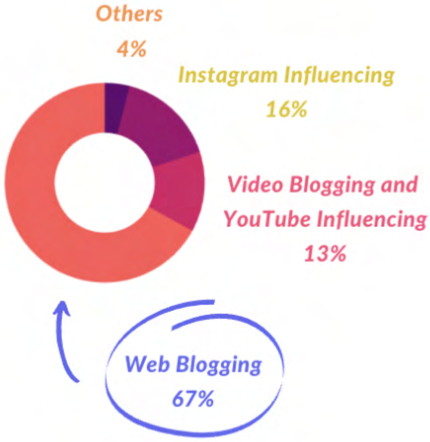
preheader text



CREATE CONTENT THROUGH BLOGGING

Chart 3.

The most popular channels for social media influencers in Finland 2019



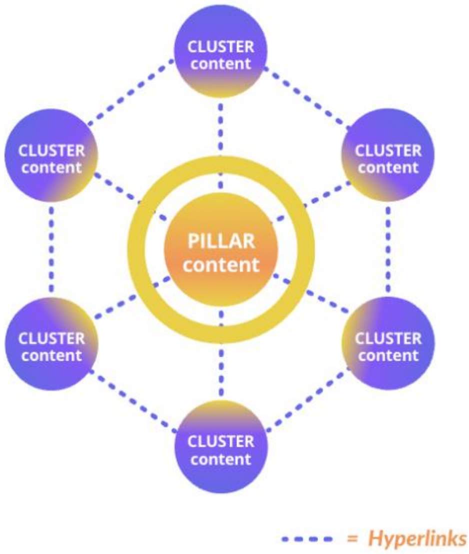
Blogging is broadly implemented for commercial and hobby purposes, which are often associated with active commercial collaborations and partnerships. The popularity of personal lifestyle blogs has declined significantly, and today's consumers and businesses prefer more **communication-focused blogs that will benefit the reader**. Even when a blog is considered non-commercial, crafting educational and informational posts will bring the most value for the blog followers. Expertise blogs are no longer limited to just one platform, but target audiences are sought through different channels, such as Instagram and YouTube. Still, blogging on a web-based platform is the most popular and influencing way to pass informative and educational content (chart 3).

A blog is a great place to offer your target audience an inside look at your brand culture and to keep readers informed about brand news and events. It can also boost your search engine marketing (SEM) when building the text around relevant keywords. The content can be personalized through ***smart text*** that links to other relevant blog posts. This can be identified as a ***Topic Cluster Model*** which is better presented on the next page.

SOURCES: PR AGENCY MANIFESTO 2019, SHELDON 2019

Topic Cluster Model

A blog's organic traffic, which is the traffic from other than paid marketing acts, can be increased effectively using pillar and topic cluster contents or pages. A topic cluster model binds up several blog posts, ***cluster contents***, around one central blog post, ***a pillar content***, which topics are all somehow related to each other. When the cluster contents are all linked to one pillar content and to other cluster contents, they effectively maintain the blog posts' lifecycle and are easier for the readers to find. The model shown on the right demonstrates one pillar topic supported by six cluster topics linked to the main post.



How to get started with Topic Clusters

- **Map out 3–5 core topics related to your buyer personas, try to find out their challenges and problems**
- **Do some keyword research on related subproblems and create 4–6 subtopics around each of the core subjects**
- **Create the content and add internal links between the core page and subpages using smart text or CTAs inside the text**
- **Use relevant keywords in your text but keep the primary focus on storytelling**
- **Add links for further reading blog posts or articles on the bottom of the page**
- **Test that the links are working properly and monitor content performance**
- **Remember to update your content from time to time**

ONLINE VISITOR IS LIKELY TO COME BACK FOR INTERESTING CONTENT TURNING EVERY VISIT INTO A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO CONVERT INTO MONEY

WEBSITE EXPERIENCE

A visit to a website in which content is personally relevant to the visitor is often much more pleasant and delightful than a visit to a page in which content does not resonate with the person's own needs. When content is personalized, it enhances the **user experience (UX)** and contributes to strengthening a **brand image positivity**. Focus on maintaining a personalized UX and make it a little more special for the leads that matter the most to your business, as most websites are the key touchpoints for your leads to convert into paying customers.

Using a separate content tool (program) can help you automate smart content on your website in two ways:

1. **To choose which content or elements in the content you want to personalize for website visitors**
2. **To specify which version is shown to one type of audience and which to another type of audience**

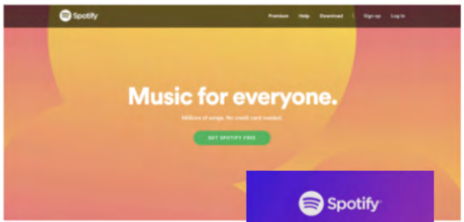
A content tool is often worth the extra investment of what it can do to boost your campaign performance. Examples of suitable tools out on the market for personalizing content include BuzzSumo, Semrush, and Prepr, to name a few.

Use a Content Tool to

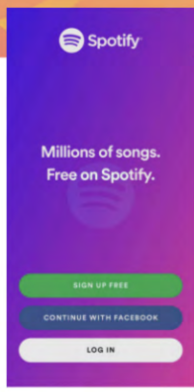
- **analyzing what content performs best for which type of audience**
- **edit ongoing content marketing campaigns**
- **translate content into local languages based on location data**
- **improve content SEO rankings to spot and fix SEO related problems**
- **preview and schedule content publications**
- **create related keyword lists**
- **store content all in one place in cloud files**
- **track and measure content results**

Landing Page That Captures

A landing page is a page where a website visitor first "lands" after clicking a link that leads to your website. Landing pages should be more simplified and contain less information than the main website and arouse interest in exploring the rest of the site. A good example of a simple but effective landing page is Spotify's versions for web and smartphones seen in pictures 1 and 2. Both are visually pleasing and have **one clear goal**, to get visitors to log in to their platform through a clear and visible CTA. In addition, landing pages can be tailored for individual audiences in a way where a person who visits the site through social media will land on a different kind of page than a person who clicks a link on a newsletter, which is an effective way of personalizing the website experience.



Picture 1. **Spotify landing page on web**



Picture 2. **Spotify landing page on mobile**

Ways to Personalize a Landing Page

- **Use pre-filled online forms (visitor's name/contact information)**
- **Show targeted offers and ads according to visitor's purchase history**
- **Target content based on visitor's geographic location**
- **Personalize the landing page's preferred ad or content based on visitor demographics (if known)**
- **Create customer trust through your landing page**
- **Add a clear CTA that drives towards one goal, for example logging in to the page**

In addition to conversion, the key function of a landing page is to gather additional visitor information for sales needs. When a visitor arrives on a personalized landing page, their behavior can be tracked through every click in real-time that gives marketers new information about a potential customer. Perhaps the simplest way to personalize a landing page is to use **pre-filled forms** where the visitor's login or contact information is filled for them. Visitor purchase history, location information, and demographics can all be used to place personalized ads and personalized offers on websites. Pay special attention to the text of the site, typos often cause mistrust and suspicion of a brand image. Select only **one goal** for your landing page and create a **clear CTA to drive towards that goal.**

SOURCES: LAINE 2019

4. METHODS TO MEASURE

No matter how creative or influential the marketing content is, its effects can only be assessed by measuring results. For many, it is natural to look at the results only when the project ends, but the best benefit is obtained when the measurement is done evenly along with the completion of a campaign. This way, each stage of the customer journey and targeting is better taken into account, and it is easier to focus measures on those activities where improvements are further needed. This chapter introduces the primary methods and most applicable **key metrics and indicators** to use when measuring marketing campaign results. In addition, the end part of the chapter discusses how to stay up to date on a content status by running content audits and using a content calendar.

KEEP THE METRICS SIMPLE AND FOCUS ON THE ESSENTIALS

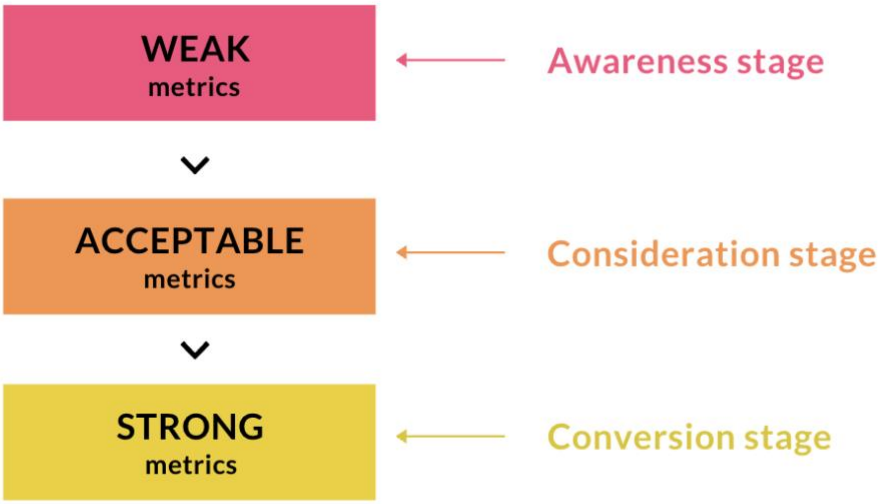
Your marketing team should have a few **common goals**, in addition to which each team member uses **individual indicators and metrics** according to their role. The presented key metrics and indicators in this guide are all selected to apply reviewing results of personalized content at some level. Notice that using too many metrics at the same time can produce unnecessary work and hassle. Choosing the right ways to track progress is always case-specific and often the best ways are found through active testing of different methods.

SOURCES: CHARLESWORTH (2018)

STAGE METRICS

Metrics commonly used in digital marketing can be divided into three separate categories that reflect the first stages of the customer journey. These are called **weak, acceptable, and strong metrics** presented in the figure below. The so-called weak metrics assimilate to early-stage customers who are just becoming aware of their needs, while the acceptable metrics can be recognized for measuring activities targeted to people who have moved on to the consideration stage to compare their options for purchasing. However, the stronger metrics you use, the better you can focus on driving stronger performance from your campaigns. This is why strong metrics that focus on measuring conversion action at the conversion stage, and after it, are considered the most important measuring instruments for content marketing and personalized content.

Let's take a look at what are the key metrics for each of these three categories in the next pages.



SOURCES: HANLON 2019

Weak Metrics

(awareness stage)

The weak metrics are considered to produce less meaningful data for your knowledge and should not be given too much weight in any significant decision-process. Metrics such as site traffic and clicks, number of followers and subscribers, content shares online, likes and favorite products, and time people spend on a site are all considered metrics you shouldn't build a content strategy on. However, it might be nice to check and see which direction these numbers develop from time to time.

Examples of WEAK metrics

- **Page traffic and page views (posts, videos, ads)**
- **Likes on social media**
- **Followers and subscribers**
- **Content shares**
- **Favorite products (e-shop)**
- **Comments on the site**
- **Total number of links**
- **Time spent on site**
- **Number of clicks**

Examples of ACCEPTABLE metrics

- **Number of blog visitors**
- **Email subscriptions /unsubscriptions**
- **Content downloads**
- **Click-through rate**
- **Ratings and reviews**
- **Overall email bounce rate**
- **Marketing qualified leads**

Acceptable Metrics

(consideration stage)

Acceptable metrics can help understand indicative results but do not provide strong enough data to conclude a campaign's wider success or specific marketing action. For example, it is useful to know how many visitors a blog has in a certain time period or how many people have downloaded a piece of content such as a free e-book or guide. These numbers can be used to provide decision-guiding data that supports the active tracking of stronger metrics.

SOURCES: HANLON 2019, WAIDA 2021

Strong Metrics

(conversion stage)

Metrics that measure productivity and conversion actions are considered strong metrics which create the foundation of successful campaigns. Tracking the numbers and measuring results that actually matter for your business or just for a specific marketing campaign provides an insight into whether progress has been made and what parts still need to further developed or changed. The stronger the metrics you use, the better you can be on top of things and take precautions when needed.

The most commonly used strong metrics in marketing are ***return on investment (ROI)*** (measuring the profitability of a specific investment), and ***conversion rate*** (indicating the percentage of users or customers who take the desired action, for example, to visit a website or purchase through a specific call-to-action). The strong metrics should always be chosen to suit each campaign and purpose separately to support set goals that drive results. To get the most out of the measuring process, using marketing automation software can create efficiency and prevents human errors. Most metrics such as the ***revenue generated from a customer*** and ***cost per customer*** can be tracked automatically with suitable software or an online-based platform that can help save a lot of time and money, and will eventually increase business performance with improved financial numbers.

Examples of STRONG metrics

- **Return on investment (ROI)**
- **Lead conversion rate**
- **Site visit conversion rate**
- **Cost per customer**
- **Advocates positively promoting business**
- **Retained customers**
- **Revenue generated from a customer**
- **Email or page bounce rate (individual level)**
- **Content engagement**

CHOOSE THE METRICS THAT ALIGN WITH YOUR GOALS AND DRIVE TOWARDS RESULTS

CUSTOMER SUCCESS KPIS

Perhaps the most important factor in the success of a business is how satisfied its customers are. Therefore, getting comfortable with using different customer success KPIs should be on the top of your list. Customer success shouldn't be comprehended as a metric but rather a philosophy that evolves from the company itself. It can be best tracked with **indicators construed from different metrics** and with **qualitative studies such as interviews and surveys**. This section lists 6 useful KPIs for monitoring customer success, explaining why and how to best practice and calculate each of them.

Customer Churn Rate (CCR)

Expresses the rate at which customers stop buying products or unsubscribe from a service. Churn rate is important for any business to follow because it directly indicates if the customers' needs are being satisfied or not. The CCR is recommended for calculating monthly and annually. To receive the most accurate results, new customers are best to exclude from the churn rate calculation.

Calculation formula:

$$\text{Churn Rate} = \frac{\text{lost customers}}{\text{total customers beginning of period}}$$

Net Promoter Score (NPS)

Measures customer satisfaction through how likely people are to recommend your brand to someone else. NPS can be determined by sending a survey or directly asking customers to rate on a scale of 0 to 10 points how likely they are to recommend your brand. Promoters are the ones who chose 9 or 10, passives 7 or 8, and detractors 0 between 6. Calculating NPS every 3 to 6 months gives you an idea of how loyal people are to the brand.

Calculation formula: **NPS = % promoters – % detractors**

SOURCES: FONTANELLA 2019, WOLF S.A.

Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT)

Similar to NPS but strives customers to rate their experience with the company using 5-point Likert scale questions on a survey. This indicator lets you understand how customers feel about your company which has a major effect on sales. CSAT can be measured as often as needed but is the most effective when tracked together with the NPS as these two complement each other.

Calculation formula:

$$\text{CSAT} = \frac{\text{positive scores}}{\text{total scores}} \times 100$$

Qualitative Customer Feedback

Expresses what customers value, like, and dislike about the brand. Qualitative research with open questionnaire responses, sent out as a customer survey or feedback form or interview in-person every 6 months or annually.

Calculation formula: Open feedback

Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)

Indicates the total revenue a single customer is expected to generate over their customer relationship. It is one of the most fundamental KPIs for businesses since it will somewhat determine their future growth. The longer a customer continues to purchase from a business, the greater their lifetime value becomes. Decreasing values indicate a re-evaluation of a customer experience and company offers.

Calculation formula:

$$\text{CLV} = \frac{\text{avg. purchase value} : \text{avg. purchase frequency}}{1 : \text{churn rate}}$$

Customer Renewal Rate

Measures the percentage of customers who renew their subscriptions. A high renewal rate means success in maintaining customers, low rate depicts customers low success when engaging with a brand or using a product.

Calculation formula:

$$\text{Renewal Rate} = \frac{\text{renewed subscriptions}}{\text{customers up for renewal}} \times 100$$

KEY EMAIL METRICS

EMAIL MARKETING IS ONE OF THE MOST EASIEST AND ACCURATE STRATEGY PARTS TO MEASURE

Email marketing is one of the most popular and easiest marketing actions to measure due to its quantified possibilities through a number of clicks and opens, for example. Earlier presented metrics such as ROI, CCR, subscribers, and content engagement, just to name a few, can all be used for measuring email performance as well. This section introduces the **4 most relevant metrics** that are highly effective and accurate to measure targeted and personalized emails. These include email *open rate*, *click-through rate*, *conversion rate*, and *bounce rate*, which could all be measured on a weekly basis.

Open Rate

Maybe the most commonly used metric when measuring email performance is the open rate. However, the open rate does not provide an accurate picture of how well the content inside of the message is performing. It can still be used for assessing how well the campaign is being received and to assess general trends in the type of messages recipients open the most. On average, an open rate that is 15% or higher is considered as a good open rate and indicates that the campaign is doing well. Whereas anything below 15% indicates a low performance which can easily be fixed with a better optimized subject line or sender name.

***WHAT:** Measures the percentage of opened emails out of total emails delivered.*

***HOW:** Calculate the email open rate by dividing the number of emails read (opened) with the total number of delivered emails, multiplied with 100.*

Click-Through Rate (CTR)

This metric offers direct insight into how many recipients engage with the content and is an effective way to monitor which call-to-actions perform the best. A high CTR indicates a campaign success when a low CTR can, in turn, indicate that the content could be uninteresting or otherwise irrelevant for the recipients. For higher CTR, make improvements to your targeting process and try to find the right audience.

***WHAT:* Recipients who clicked on a link inside the message.**

***HOW:* Divide the total number of clicks by the number of emails delivered.**

Conversion Rate (CR)

Conversion rate is one of the most important strong metrics in content marketing indicating the percentage of people who found content valuable and meaningful enough to take the action email is asking them to take. CR can be measured by integrating web analytics, such as Google Analytics, into the email platform. CR helps marketers to identify the most valuable customers and users.

***WHAT:* Percentage of recipients who completed the desired action, for example, purchasing a product.**

***HOW:* Divide the number of taken actions by the number of delivered emails.**

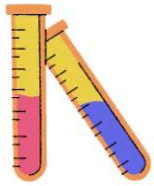
Bounce Rate

The bounce rate is used for optimizing and improving email delivery. Errors can occur, for example, when a recipient's email is temporarily disabled (auto-responses or full email boxes) or when an email address is incorrect or misspelled. Use a bounce rate as an indicator for cleaning your contact list from invalid email addresses.

***WHAT:* Percentage of unsuccessfully delivered emails to recipient's inboxes.**

***HOW:* Divide the total number of bounced emails by the number of emails sent.**

SOURCES: GUNELIUS 2018, RICHARD ET AL. 2015



A/B TEST YOUR CONTENT

To improve the results of your content marketing campaign requires being aware of what part of the campaign is functioning well and what is not. To do this, running tests will eliminate any unnecessary assumptions and you can better define what are your next steps towards success. A/B testing, also known as split testing, is an effective tool that can be used to test any content, emails, landing pages, individual CTAs, or pretty much anything you've created. This section instructs how to get started with A/B testing and how to combine testing and personalization for improved results.

The purpose of A/B testing is to find the best practices by running experiments to compare alternative versions of the same content or a marketing element to see which one brings a better outcome. Since personalization is mostly all about tailoring the experience, the A/B testing model is especially well suited for testing **campaign and content ideas**. Create more than one version of your content or site which each contains different points of interest of your audience, and choose the best metrics to measure those testing results. Running tests for **different segments** is also recommended as you may gain some new information regarding people's preferences which can support the segmentation and targeting processes. Online provides an excellent environment for running tests these days which makes it easier to integrate testing into part of everyday work. As testing is another tool for measuring results, A/B testing should be part of your content marketing strategy simply for its ease of use.

How to Get Started

- **Define what is expected from the campaign to achieve and what do you want your customers or users to do with the content**
- **Pick the most suitable metrics to measure the results**
- **Decide which campaign or content parts need to be tested**
- **Create 2–3 variations of the same content and provide them either to the same target audience for different people, or separate segments**
- **Monitor how people react to the content and record results**
- **Determine which elements work and which would still need to be improved**

SOURCES: SIROKER & KOOMEN 2013, YALIF 2017

STAY UP TO DATE

Staying up to date on details related to future tasks and actions regarding already published content, it is necessary to ensure your whole team can communicate seamlessly and stay on top of important timelines. A *content calendar* can be an effective tool that helps keep content relevant, well-organized, and technically functional during its lifecycle when each campaign is marked on the calendar. In addition, running an inventory, or better known as a *content audit*, is another way to monitor content performance from time to time. This section first reviews what a content audit consists of, which is then followed by presenting the concept of a content calendar on the next page.

How to Run an Audit

- **List the types of content you are going to audit, for example, blog posts, product descriptions on a website, other publications, etc.**
- **Gather and categorize them on a spreadsheet**
- **Analyze the state of the audited content, for example, which parts are underperforming or which are outdated**
- **Start acting and clean up the content**
- **Take notes for follow-up actions if anything can't yet be updated**

Content Audit

Like often in marketing, you and your team might consistently create a large amount of content in a short period of time. Keeping everything together and organized can become a challenge on its own. Running a content audit to review all the existing and published content can maintain consistency when compiling everything into a **joint list on a worksheet**. It allows easier analysis of which parts need to be updated, which should be re-written, or if some publications need to be deleted. Running **smaller audits more frequently** can keep the process less overwhelming, and this way auditing can become part of your everyday work. However, to ensure that the audits are truly performed at certain time periods, they should be added to a content calendar with other important dates.

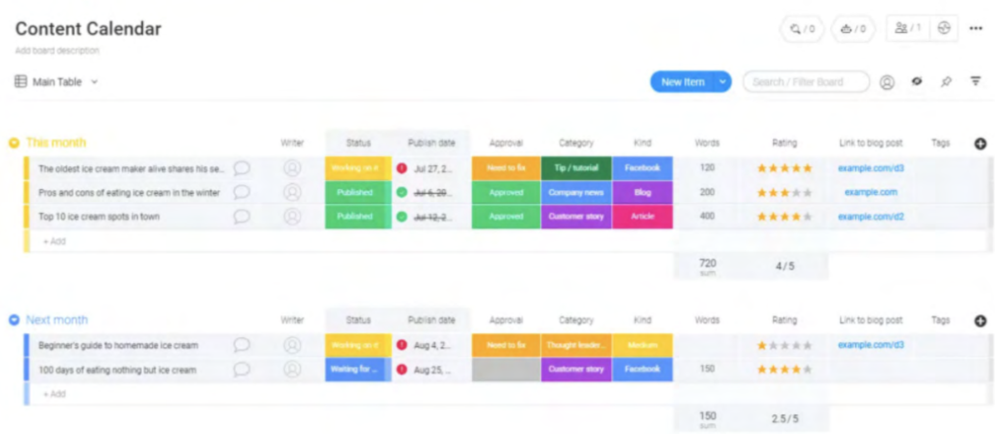
Content Calendar

A content calendar is a shareable digital schedule of which job is to keep your whole team informed and up to date on any upcoming content activities and updates. Shearable means that all of your team members should have access to review it. Using a content calendar you can maximize your team's productivity and ensure not to miss any important timelines. Often a simple spreadsheet works really well, but a variety of web-based software tools are also available. Using a real-time platform offer benefits to its users through smoother workflow and project management, in addition to which they are often also affordable in relation to the advantages. An example of how a web-based content calendar may look like is shown in a picture below which is a screenshot of an internationally popular platform called Monday.com.

What to Add to a Content Calendar

- **The pieces of content to be published and in which channels**
- **Publishing and deadline dates (recommended to plan 3 to 6 months ahead)**
- **Status of on-going campaigns and required actions for updates**
- **Content metadata (title, URL, document type, etc.)**
- **Promotional actions taken**
- **Future ideas for publications**
- **Tip! Use color-codes to highlight importance or certain type of tasks**

Picture 4. **Example of a content calendar (Monday.com)**



SOURCES: HANLON 2019, KUKA 2020

5. CHALLENGES & REGULATIONS

The structures of personalization can cause a lot of pain and challenges for most companies which can entail flat and ineffective solutions. The rapid advances in technology and especially data processing are a bottleneck for many entrepreneurs for prioritizing personalization in their marketing strategies. In addition, consumers are also showing concerns about their privacy and organizations processing customers personal data. However, many are still willing to share their information if benefiting from it through, for example, an offer or discount that brings them value. This section will first look at the greatest challenges and obstacles marketers face, followed by a review of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that businesses need to comply with when operating in the European Union (EU) countries or handling any EU citizens personal data.

71%

OF CONSUMERS FEEL FRUSTRATION WHEN THEIR SHOPPING EXPERIENCE IS IMPERSONAL

As we know, personalization has a major impact on consumers' shopping behavior, and many are willing to spend more money when they receive more targeted recommendations. Still, many of the consumers feel disappointed due to the lack of personalization, which causes some level of frustration for around 71 percent of the shoppers when their experience doesn't meet their actual needs. As consumers' expectations rise, it causes retailers and marketers to struggle to meet them along with the evolving technology.

SOURCES: AGUIRRE ET AL. 2016, FLORY 2020

TOP OBSTACLES IN PERSONALIZATION

#1 OBSTACLE FOR PERSONALIZATION IS THE LACK OF PERSONNEL

Despite the success factors of personalized marketing, many companies still struggle to implement it or fail to do any personalization. According to an internationally performed study executed by Researchscape International & Evergage, Inc. (*chart 4*), the greatest obstacles for marketers to prioritize personalization in businesses are a lack of the right personnel, sufficient budget, and the needed knowledge and skills. In addition, technology solutions, data collection, and data utilization are also common challenges companies often associate with.

Although according to the same study, around 98 percent of the marketers believe personalization helps improve customer relationships, it is still seen as an expense in many companies. However, personalization should rather be seen as an investment that produces multiple results in the long run. 85 % of the survey respondents mentioned that their customers even expect personalized content from them, indicating that the future personalization of marketing content will be inevitable for almost every company that practice digital marketing.

Chart 4.

SOURCES: RESEARCHSCAPE INTERNATIONAL & EVERGAGE INC, 2019

THE GDPR IN MARKETING

Since 2018 the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has had its affections on marketers' everyday work when operating in the EU or handling any personal data of EU citizens. The legislation also affects companies globally if they process and store any personal data in the EU region. Because the regulation requires companies to be transparent in their data collection processes at the risk of large sanctions, no company should be able to afford to ignore the GDPR in their day-to-day work. Although the regulation of the subject is broad, companies can ensure their operations by drafting two key documents that need to be publicly available to their customers. These are **Privacy Policy** and **Privacy Notice** documents explained on this page. A checklist for GDPR purposes is provided on the next page.

Privacy Policy

What it is?

A document stating general data policies used by the organization. It discloses the rules and ways how personal information is being handled inside the company. Required to be publicly available but is intended for the organization's own use for guidance.

Instead of having one long and complicated document, try to keep the text **easy to understand**. Explain how data is collected and processed at your company and how you obtain consent from users. Add a separate page on your company website under a category such as "about us" that is easy to find and where you tell about your company's privacy policy. Adding a link where people can contact you through a form if they have concerns related to privacy data, is a good way to somewhat automate the process.

Privacy Notice

What it is?

A document addressed to inform people how their personal information is being used and protected by the organization, which explains parts related to privacy policies. Its objective is to help customers make informed decisions by being aware of the data collected and used.

Provide your company's contact information and/or data protection officer details (if you have appointed one), and make sure they are **easily accessible for your audience**. Include all the categories you collect personal data from, such as location data, online identifiers, and financial information (bank account/credit card details). Add sources where you collect these data and how you process them. Remember that this document is primarily addressed to your customers, while the Privacy Policy provides practical guidelines within the company.

SOURCES: DIBBLE 2019, GDPR EU 2021

This checklist allows you to understand the GDPR better and to make sure your company is protecting each of its customers' personal data the way it is required. The checklist covers areas around the lawful basis and transparency, data security, accountability and governance, and privacy rights which all are important to include in a GDPR compliance process. The full checklist can be seen on the GDPR.EU webpage.

Data collection is no longer just a matter of collecting data but needs to be done in a way that consumers have agreed to and feel comfortable with. As regulations continue to tighten around the world, successful marketing is expected to have more agility and creativity in addition to the responsibility to win the attention of the target audience. Always make sure your collection of data is relevant for the purpose and that people have given their consent to process their personal data. By being open and transparent in the data collection process, not only do you follow the regulations but also often gain the trust of your customers which strengthens their relationship and feelings towards your brand.

Checklist for GDPR

- Provide clear information in the organization's privacy policy about data processing
- Consider appointing a Data Protection Officer
- State your legal justification for processing data
- Make sure people can contact you, consider creating a contact form available for website visitors for inquiries
- Make it easy for customers to request information about them or correct if inaccurate
- Make it easy for customers to ask for deletion of their data
- Take into account data protection and create an internal security policy
- Use encrypted emails and anonymized data whenever possible
- In the event of data breach, have a process in place to notify the authorities

6. FUTURE TRENDS IN MARKETING

For years, personalization has been predicted to be the prime factor for driving marketing success, and it hasn't changed to this day. In fact, personalization is increasingly becoming expected by customers worldwide which requires businesses to find new ways to satisfy such expectations. Fortunately, in businesses and marketers' favor, advances in technology will constantly create more efficient ways to analyze and optimize data to create highly and individually produced personalized experiences at every customer stage.

A HOLISTIC CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE NEEDS TO BE DELIVERED ALL THE WAY TO PEOPLE'S HOMES, WHERE CUSTOMER JOURNEYS OFTEN ALSO START

With the major market changes brought in 2020, consumer behavior in the face of coercion has changed radically. Customer service alone is no longer enough. A holistic customer experience has to be delivered to people all the way to their homes, where they also most often start their customer journeys. Physical places have digitized, and homes have become multi-purpose spaces for studying, shopping, running international businesses, and everything in between. For marketers, this means that the customer must be offered such an impressive shopping experience that they will remember it for a long time. To do this, the experience needs to evoke emotions inside the person, and preferably personal ones.

SOURCES: BOUDET ET AL. 2019

Data-driven, human-centered content marketing

As future marketing will include more and more data-driven solutions created by machine learning programs, human work will become increasingly focused on producing creative, storytelling, and emotional content. In the future, machines will support more predictive marketing analysis based on historical content performance data and can provide us multiple layers of real-time reporting with data visualization. AI will provide more seamless workflows helping humans do better persona targeting and do repeatable work for us. Using intelligent algorithms, machines will let us deliver more engaging content through, for example, data-led CTAs and impacting content results in areas such as SEO marketing.

Even though machines will reduce manual human work, the need for human creative and qualitative thinking will be in more demand. While machines can put data together for us, people are the ones who create the stories and contextual content arousing feelings and opinions. Setting a tone of voice in writing or creating a personal brand style and visibility are among the key tasks for future marketers. The endless flood of information and the increasing demands by consumers may feel overwhelming to deal with. Still, data processing and technological advances will provide powerful tools for these pain points that marketers often face today.

The Role of the Machine

- Providing more descriptive and predictive statistics
- Real-time reporting from constant data refresh
- AI providing seamless content workflows (e.g. content ideation, writing, targeting etc.)
- Increased volume by automation
- Interactive/smart content replacing traditional text and images
- Increased engagement through data-led CTAs

The Role of the Human

- Leading the storytelling and emotional awareness in people
- Defining the tone of voice in content text and brand visibility
- Leading differentiated contextual content through empathy and situational awareness
- Differentiating authorship in writing with a personal style
- Creating opinionated content with a human aspect
- Production of visual and interactive content (e.g. videos, images, creative content)

SOURCES: WILSON 2019

7. CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, personalization can significantly boost company sales and improve customer relationships, which both are linked to each other and should be the center of every business. Personalizing content is becoming the new norm in digital marketing and the most competitive companies today create more space in their business strategies to deliver a highly personalized customer experience without forgetting the data-driven technical solutions. Those who practice personalization are often also at an advantage over those who do not since the value of personalization is evident in the results of the businesses actively practicing it.

The future of digital marketing looks strongly a winning field of machines, artificial intelligence, and data-driven marketing methods. Despite the challenges and rapid development, technology offers more benefits than disadvantages to future marketing and it can support the marketer to perform their own tasks more efficiently. Even though many businesses have already found a solid source of income from personalization, it is yet not too late to jump on board even if personalizing the content wouldn't previously be familiar.

This guide was initially created mainly for the author's learning purposes and for people who are working in the field of marketing. However, I believe it can bring value for any business management or an entrepreneur who is interested in modern advanced marketing techniques.

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