

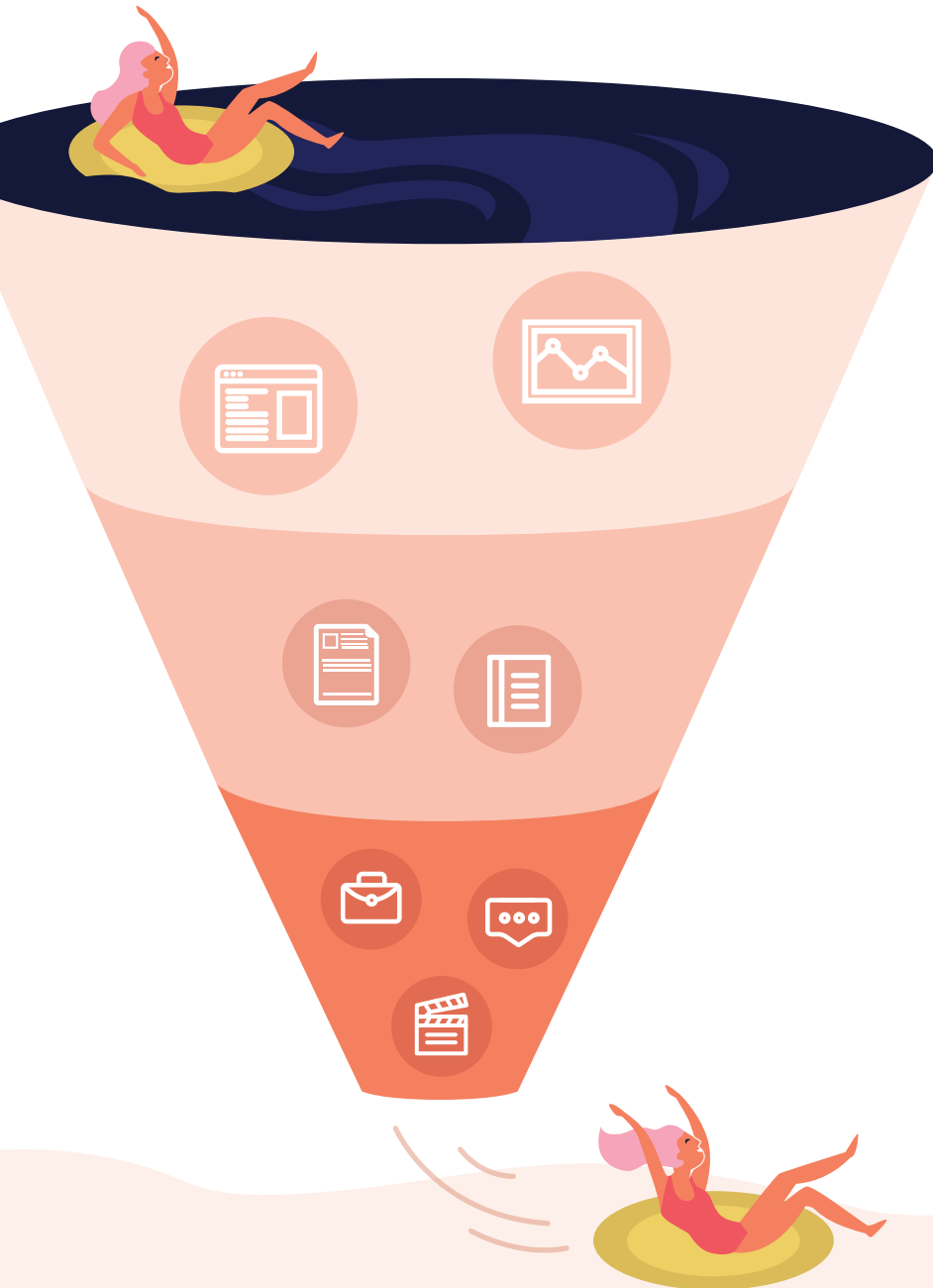


How Content Personalization is Driving Conversions and Revenue

IN 2019

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GOALS AND METRICS

Personalized content should be **driving higher conversions** — that’s the long and the short of it. What those conversions are is up to marketers themselves to choose, but it’s safe to assume that certain asset types are designed for certain types of conversions.

Top-of-funnel content like blogs and infographics should be facilitating conversions like newsletter subscriptions, webinar signups and requests for more content.

Middle-of-funnel content like white papers and eBooks should be driving asset downloads and demo requests.

Bottom-of-funnel content like case studies, customer testimonials and product videos should be converting users to actual sales and purchases.

Aiming for improved conversion rates on each of these fronts is a starting point. Additionally, studies have shown that organizations that use content personalization most often see higher conversions in the form of visitor engagement and lead generation. Marketers also see increased time on site and more pageviews.

WHICH TYPES OF CONTENT ARE BEST SUITED FOR PERSONALIZATION?

Personalized experiences are preferable to impersonalized ones across the board. If you're looking for more immediate ROI, it may be best to personalize customer experience that's toward the end of the buyer journey. This could be product pages, online shopping carts and other ecommerce-adjacent tracks.

A poor interaction at this stage can be costly. Conversely, a positive one can push users across the goal line toward a final purchase, **resulting in direct revenue.**

That said, there is definitely value in starting further up the funnel, with assets like blogs, eBooks and video. A blog post that's customized perfectly toward a given persona stands a better chance of being read on site, being opened via email, being forwarded to recipients' colleagues, being shared on social media and generating user commentary. Now this isn't personalization by the strict definition of the word, but it is personalization to the degree that it maps to a persona category, not necessarily an individual person.



PERSONALIZE CONTENT BASED ON KEY AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

As noted, personalization takes many forms, and it can be as structured and tiered as needed. A personalization strategy can be segmented to target a(n):



INDUSTRY OR MARKET

Speaking to a group of like-minded professionals in a given industry or region at a high level.



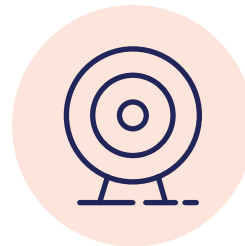
CUSTOMER JOURNEY STAGE

Prospects and leads may be engaging with your brand at different stages of their journey. Content needs to be personalized to their respective intent and sales phase.



PERSONA

Addressing a specific subset of individuals within that industry or region. On average, marketers tend to have three to five buyer personas.



ACCOUNT

Account-based marketing (ABM) is a granular form of high-risk, high-reward campaigns. And to make it work, you need highly relevant, intent-driven content that pertains only to the accounts being targeted.



INDIVIDUAL

Otherwise known as individualization, this segmentation is incredibly microscopic and requires more technology, such as real-time data from user interactions, third-party data from previous online behaviors and a dynamic personalization platform that translates, converts and displays this data as an individualized content experience within milliseconds.

A LOOK AT CHANNEL-SPECIFIC PERSONALIZATION AND DISTRIBUTION

Virtually any online touchpoint can be personalized, and all of us have experienced it without even knowing it. In fact, every time you Google something, the search engine results page (SERP) you are shown is **personalized to you**. All of your previous browsing history is tracked via cookies, forming a breadcrumb trail of who you are, what you search and why you've come to Google, and the search engine parses through this data and returns a page that's as relevant as possible (provided you're not using an incognito window or blocking cookies).

The same concept applies to email lists, ecommerce platforms, augmented/virtual reality tools, social feeds and paid advertising. Relevant content is curated for user experience via rules-based algorithms. If, for instance, you are located in Chicago, watch a lot of Great British Bake Off, purchase items weekly through Amazon Prime and have a gmail account (which contains key personal info), you might trigger a multitude of automated actions from personalization platforms. As such, you'll be served digital ads wherever you go. You'll also likely be emailed by Amazon Prime to encourage you to purchase recommended items (baking sheets, spatulas, etc.), in addition to having your Netflix update to reflect baking show suggestions.

Your entire digital footprint is commodified and sold right back to you.



TECHNIQUES NEW AND OLD: EMAIL AND AR/VR

Non-domain and non-social channels like email can be personalized in the sense of list building and segmentation. Only certain prospects receive a given email, and based on their actions, they might receive a subsequent email that's even more targeted — hence drip campaigns. Personalized subject lines and greetings are now commonplace in marketing, and they work quite well.

Thirty-five percent of email recipients judge whether they open an email based on subject line alone, and by putting a name in the subject line you immediately drive higher click-through rates, as shown by HubSpot. Furthermore, personalized emails are rated as the top email marketing strategy by marketers year in and year out. Because email is already the top distribution channel for B2B marketers, personalization is especially powerful and productive: It's essentially like taking a skyscraper and adding even more levels to it every month — there's really no ceiling.

AR/VR technology is a newer example of hyper-personalization: It's based entirely on human movements and choices. The virtual landscape overlaps with the physical, and what's on the screen (either through a headset or mobile app) are features that are preset but still action-triggered.





EXAMPLES OF PERSONALIZATION DONE WELL

Personalization is table stakes today, especially at the enterprise level.
Here are some of the examples of it in action.

SPOTIFY ▶

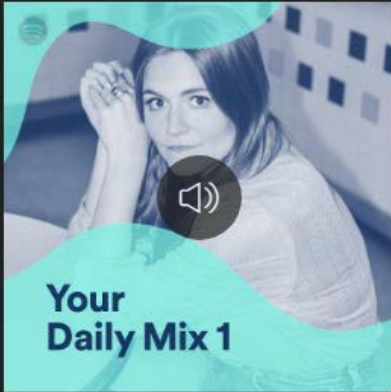
Compiling user preferences into curated playlists makes Spotify a master of content personalization in the audio format.

AMAZON ▼

As an ecommerce innovator, Amazon is the gold standard of understanding their customers and leveraging every bit of locational, behavioral and transactional data to promote cross-selling and repeat visits. Based on my purchasing behavior, Amazon knows to offer a carousel of book recommendations, three of which I now own — so they were spot on.


Made For You

Your Daily Mixes



Your Daily Mix 1

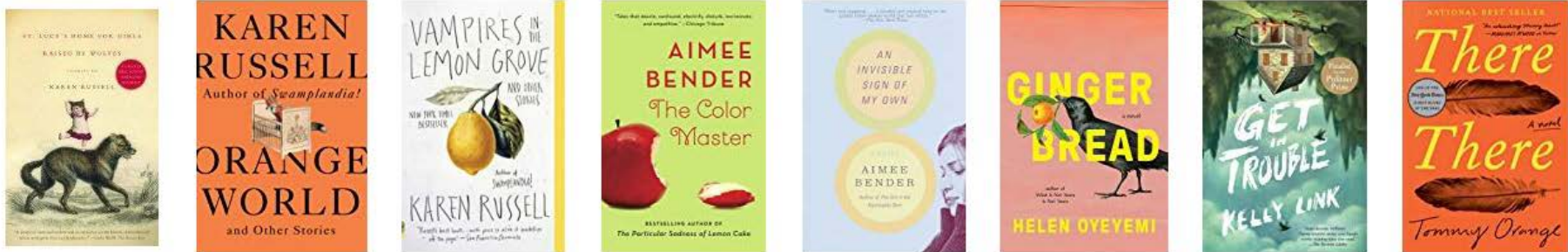
Daily Mix 1
Erin Rae, Cordovas, Sarah Shook & the Disarmers and more



Your Daily Mix 2

Daily Mix 2
Phoebe Bridgers, Margaret Glaspy, Haley Heynderickx and more

More items to consider [See more](#)





BRAFTON EBOOK ▲

The term “financial content marketing” generates 50 searches per month, and we re-optimized an eBook around this. Though the traffic seems minimal, the intent is very commercial and geared toward a very small target audience. We didn’t want this post to serve every reader on the web; we wanted to personalize it to those in the financial space. The result is that we rank No. 1 in Google for this term.

STELLA ARTOIS ◀

Weather-based personalization is a humanizing way to interact with digital and physical customers. The display board at this train stop changes depending on the weather, so Stella can serve an appropriate ad that suits the environment around passersby.

FITBIT ▶

An extreme example of health information personalization, Fitbit sends weekly fitness reports straight to users' inboxes. No one else in the world receives this data, as it is completely personalized to me.



PERSONALIZATION GONE WRONG — AND COSTLY

On the other side of the personalization conversation is the fact that it's not always easy, cheap or effective. And when investing in a new type of customer experience, even small issues can lead to huge cost overruns and a loss of brand affinity.

Accenture found that businesses lose **\$765 billion a year** due to poor personalization and declining customer trust. **Forty-three percent** of people say they're more likely to purchase from a company that personalizes experiences, highlighting just how much is at stake.

Part of the issue is that people find it “creepy” when personalization goes wrong, such as when a digital voice assistant incorrectly responds to them or totally whiffs when attempting to anticipate their needs. Another **79 percent** are “frustrated that some companies can't be trusted with their personal information.” Personalization, of course, relies on that information, so when consumers hand it over, knowingly or unknowingly, and they receive a bad experience on the front end, the transaction feels voyeuristic and exploitative.

When confronted with these issues, consumers move their money elsewhere, preferring to do business with brands that 1) get personalization right and 2) can be trusted to use their sensitive data.



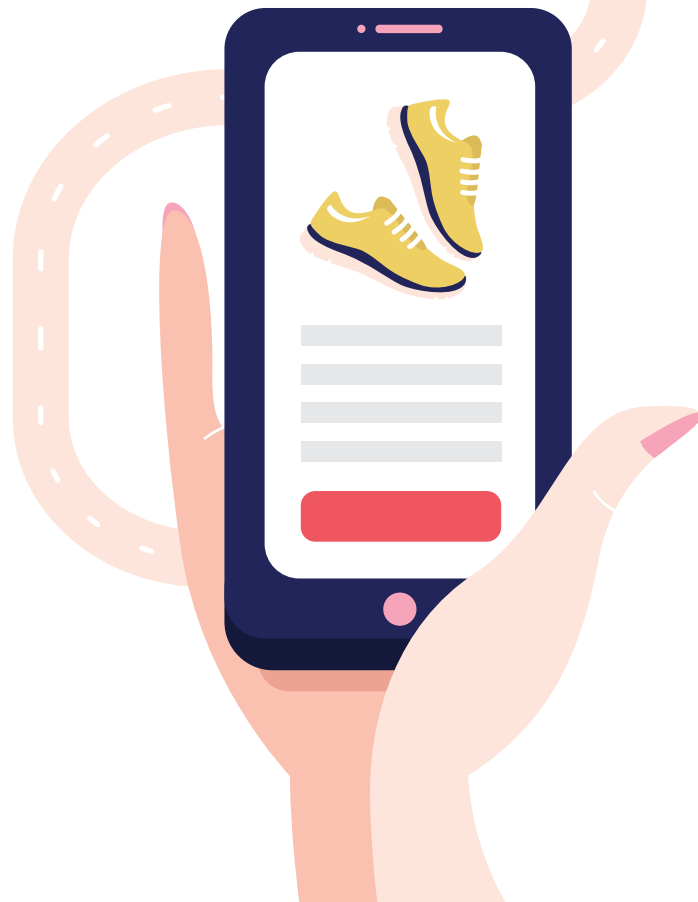
HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Data privacy concerns are real, and international law is being rewritten to accommodate consumers' distrust of companies that track, store and sell data, as evidenced by the European Union's 2018 adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Anxieties about the ever-invasive influence of Silicon Valley giants like Google and Facebook, too, have tipped the scales in favor of **heavier data transparency and more ethical business operations.** That's why we have the likes of WhatsApp and DuckDuckGo.

Personalization is effective but also off-putting to some consumers. It's creepy, too clinical and too knowing. It's like being followed all day. Who among us doesn't swear by a version of this story: You're speaking to a friend about a topic or product. Later, you pick up your phone and you're served ads about that exact same topic or product, either through social media or when browsing the web. You never queried online, you never spoke to Siri, you never clicked on anything to trigger this event.

It's too much, and it's uncomfortable.

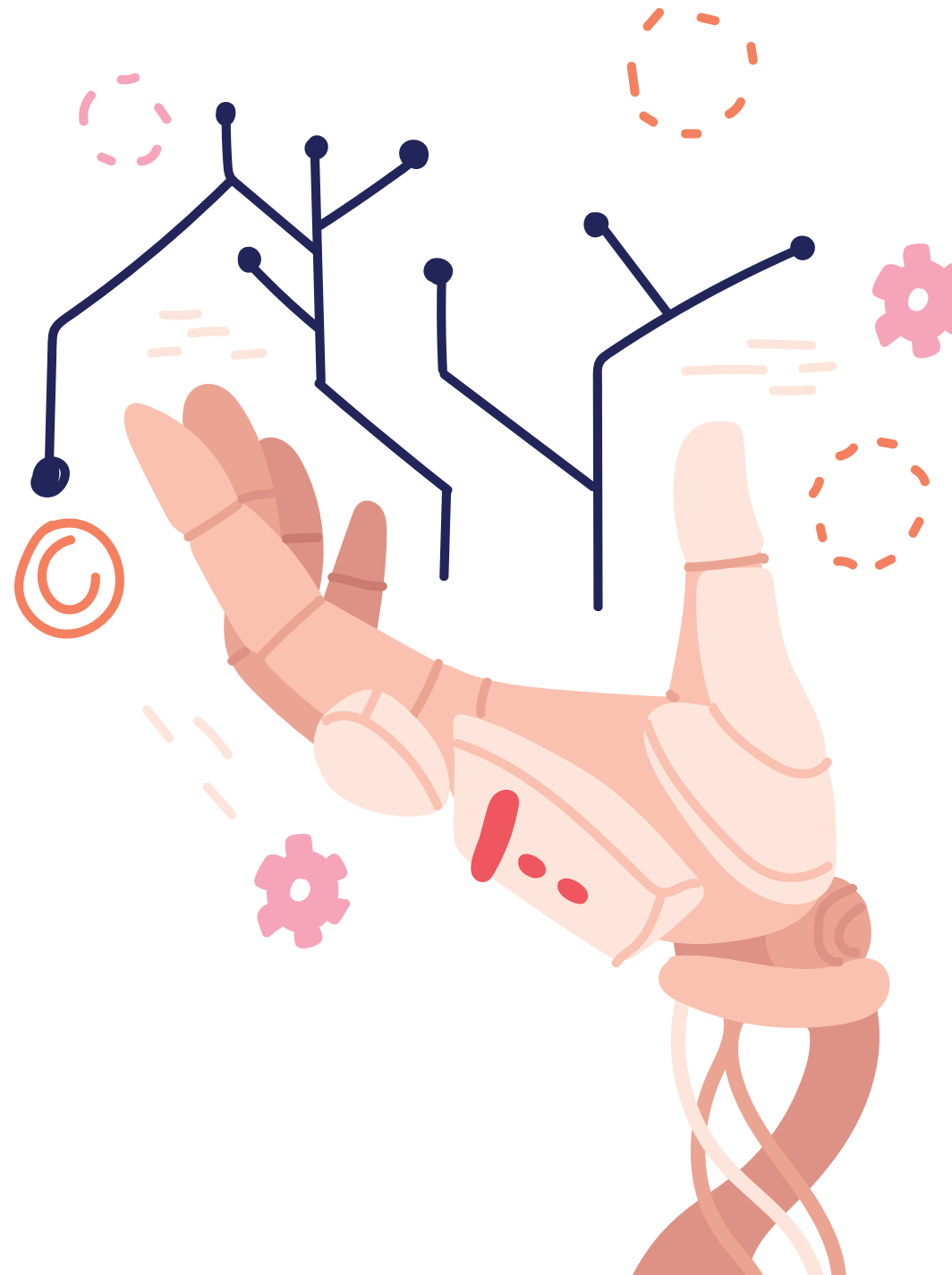


THE FUTURE OF PERSONALIZATION

Artificial intelligence will certainly play a more prominent role in the construction and execution of personalization strategies in the future. AI is used in ecommerce, ad buying, web browsing, content creation and other realms of marketing, and it could prove enormously effective at **streamlining personalization costs and management** as well.

AI already powers newsrooms around the world by creating custom media reports and press releases based on inputs such as users' location, social media posts and other publicly available data. It can craft a single article about a recent news event, then adjust it slightly, in language, phrasing and structure, to best appeal to each type of consumer in its profile.

As these algorithms continue to improve, using machine learning and neural networks, they will scale to take over virtually every form of content and distribution, and marketing will be more personalized than anyone at present can imagine. **You can call it the individualization of the 21st century.**





CONCLUSION

Fast-forward 50 years, as tech investor Roger McNamee has, and there will be a time when Google and Facebook no longer exist. McNamee, an original adviser to Mark Zuckerberg, predicts the “internet giants” won’t be able to outrun the economic and political externalities they’ve created.

In the pursuit for maximum personalization — vis a vis data surveillance — online companies and platforms may have over-personalized, over-extended their reach. Consumer trust only goes so far. After all, is a 100 percent personalized experience new, or refreshing or enhancing to individual users?

Sure, right now it may be. It’s cool. It’s advanced.



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