

E-tail and CX: Meet customers where they are, the way they want

 By [David Maintjes](#)

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We have heard it said many times before but it doesn't change the fact that it is true: technology is, and will continue to be, crucial to an online retailer's competitiveness and success. Retailers know that today's consumer, and no doubt the consumer of tomorrow, has more choices than ever before and if they feel underserved or unsatisfied their recourse is as simple as "swiping left".



David Maintjes, CEO at Telviva. Source: Supplied

Of course, retailers are not in a dating game with their customers but the concept rings true. Online commerce simply must take consumer behaviour and tastes into account and curate an experience that makes them want to stay, fill their cart, buy products, and return. This can only be achieved through a very well-crafted personalisation strategy that is incrementally improved by adding layers of new technology as and when it is needed.

Building effective personalisation strategies

About a year ago, [McKinsey found](#) that 71% of consumers expect personalisation, while 76% get frustrated when they don't receive it. Read that again - only three out of 10 customers don't expect a personalised experience and only two in 10 don't get irritated if they don't receive it.

Personalisation is in many ways the golden key to the much-vaunted but often neglected "customer experience", or as it is more widely known, CX. CX is made up of many different components, not least responding to a customer's needs as and when they demand it. Accenture recently found that 91% of customers it surveyed, which is almost everyone, would be more likely to shop with brands that provide them with relevant offers and recommendations.

Companies must segment their data to be able to build effective personalisation strategies, where customers feel recognised and acknowledged, as opposed to being inundated with irrelevant recommendations.

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What technology to invest in?

Once a retailer has placed CX front and centre and accepted that personalisation is vital to ensuring a happy customer, there are a number of technology investments that can support and augment both their personalisation strategy and overall CX.

The first is investing in an omnichannel platform that allows a customer to seamlessly switch between channels such as chat, either via social channels or on mobile sites, and voice, where contact centre agents equipped with real-time context can add to the overall personalisation experience by greeting them by name and resolving their query quickly. At every touch point they get what they need, and this compliments automated recommendations.

Live chat and chatbot applications can be integrated into platforms to provide real-time support to customers. No one reading this would be surprised to learn that some customers browse online stores at 3am. As artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning continue to develop at lightning speed, more and more applications will integrate AI to provide more intelligent service, as opposed to pre-programmed responses, which will eventually culminate in effective virtual assistants.

Video content, such as customer testimonials and product demonstrations work towards enhancing the overall customer experience and giving them the information and answers they need. This will eventually evolve into augmented reality, which is designed to give customers an even greater immersive and interactive experience.



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These last two trends tie very closely to the concept of social proof. We live in an era where a company or brand's credibility is gauged through reviews, ratings and social media mentions. Businesses would do well to manage this world proactively, and leverage it to its advantage, as opposed to being on the reactive back foot.

Have you ever watched a Gen Z navigate any site, whether social or retail? They are lightning-fast and almost always use their mobile device. Businesses should thus invest in mobile optimisation and seek out applications that enhance speed, such as one-click checkout and super-fast delivery options.

The point is to understand that effective CX strategies must resonate with the modern consumer. That means engaging

customers in their world, on devices and at times that suit them, in an efficient and fast manner, while accepting that they expect a fully personalised experience.

ABOUT DAVID MEINTJES

David Meintjes is the Chief Executive Officer at Telviva. David is a qualified Chartered Accountant who holds a Masters degree in Business Management from the University of Johannesburg. He has been a key internet business player from the start, serving as Financial Director, Commercial Director and CEO of UUNET SA, the first commercial ISP in South Africa in 1996.

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