Customers Need a Human Touch in Digital Marketing
What is “Human to Human Marketing”? 

Amazing advances have been made in technologies that help digital marketers do more than ever before. But marketers must resist relying too much on technology. They risk losing sight of the most important factor for successful digital marketing: the human touch.

Whether the company is B2C or B2B, customers want to talk to and do business with people, not organizations or brands. Many buying decisions include a very important emotional component that is best influenced by interactions with the people in a company. Prioritizing the right human touch helps shape buying behavior and positive outcomes.

On the other hand, technologies like marketing automation are critical to sustaining that human touch, especially when trying to reach a multitude of diverse customers. These technologies can help nurture more sales-ready leads, and free up marketers for creative work and for working more effectively with customers as people. Humanized marketing focuses on establishing sincere relationships with customers and building the trust that can only come from person to person communication.
Evolution of Customer Analytics

Customer Analytics
Uncover the Human Factor

Marketers need to uncover who customers are and apply that customer intelligence to humanize marketing. Connecting meaningfully to customers requires engendering more individualized interactions and experiences. More attention should go into personalized communications with customers that work well for a particular channel of engagement.

But personalization can only be effective with accurate, up-to-date information on customers, products, channels, locations, and other relevant information. Creating and continuously updating customer segmentations and personas with new customer information allow marketers to address each customer more relevantly and personally, essentially building a “360° view” of customers.

Customer data analytics bring the most value as continuous processes: to expand customer understanding, to help support responsiveness and personal conversations, to build relationships and trust. Increasingly, companies that deliver better individualized experiences to their customers are more likely to outperform competitors in sales and revenue, as well as retaining customers for the long term.

Often marketers rely too much on their own silos of data and don’t include a wide variety of data sources.

Collecting customer information from all channels and interactions, and from all relevant internal sources, adds important data points for analytics processes. Analytics work best when data silos in the organization are reduced, and different perspectives are used to create analytical models.

The integration of customer-related data is cross-organizational, and requires the cooperation of all customer-related functions, including CRM, product management, and sales. Resources outside of the marketing organization will be needed to integrate data from multiple disparate systems. And the results of customer data analytics must be shared across the organization to ensure the most up-to-date customer intelligence for all functions.
Talk to Customers — Person to Person

The heart of human to human marketing arises from the conversations that companies have with their customers. These conversations may take place as telephone exchanges, messages, live website chats, social media posts, or other communication modes.

With the multichannel nature of digital marketing, customer conversations frequently start on one channel and then continue on others. Companies need to make sure that continuity is maintained as these conversations move from channel to channel, whether marketing is directly involved, customer service or any other customer-facing functions. Make it easy for customers to reach out and talk, especially on websites and mobile apps. Clearly display links to all communication capabilities, such as live customer service, social media sites, forums, emails, or in-app chats.

Customers are increasingly engaging with companies in live conversations on different channels and expect real-time interactions all the time. This is an important opportunity to show the human side of a company. Drawing on customer intelligence and personalization capabilities, it’s also the time to focus on the customer perspective and language to communicate in meaningful and interesting ways. For live engagement to work well, it should be integrated with automated digital marketing functions.

To better communicate with customers, it’s important to align the phases of buyer journeys with channels and interactions. Determine which channels typically map to the most important journey stages, based on the behavior of customers. If resources are limited, support only those channels. Adept orchestration of all channel communications with customer strategies and supporting technologies will ensure a more human approach. Behind the scenes, customer conversations should be shared with all relevant functions, to improve customer understanding, as well as products and services.
Human to Human Marketing

Remember to Listen to Customers

The outcome is an invaluable and lasting positive impression of the brand.

Listening well also connects the company to the desires and goals of customers. Empathy plays an important part, standing in the customer’s shoes and asking the right questions to understand more about what the customer needs and wants.

Reliability is critical. Make sure someone is always there to listen and connect on every channel. Interactive communications with customers require respect, full attention, personalization, and fast movement. Sincerity is another must-have. Companies must truly participate on communication channels, instead of only paying lip service to multichannel interactions.

Humanized marketing means listening to, and then understanding, what customers are saying. If a company listens well, it can transform customer input into actions that will show customers that it really cares. Responsive actions should be taken as quickly as possible:

- Improve and streamline operational issues
- Enhance products to better serve customer needs
- Implement customer suggestions and showcase customer requests
- Fix problems quickly, whenever possible
- Send the most relevant information
- Connect customers with the right resource
- Inspire customers to try new experiences with products and services

The outcome is an invaluable and lasting positive impression of the brand.

Listening well also connects the company to the desires and goals of customers. Empathy plays an important part, standing in the customer’s shoes and asking the right questions to understand more about what the customer needs and wants.

Reliability is critical. Make sure someone is always there to listen and connect on every channel. Interactive communications with customers require respect, full attention, personalization, and fast movement. Sincerity is another must-have. Companies must truly participate on communication channels, instead of only paying lip service to multichannel interactions.
Investing in the Right Resources for Customer Interactions

Customer communication across channels is imperative for success, so companies have to step up and invest wisely in all customer-facing functions, including marketing.

Investments should be made to provide enough of the right resources to respond well to customer needs. Beyond people, training, management and process creation are part of the investment, as are the right supporting technologies.

Humanizing customer interactions should be a strategic initiative for the entire company since engaged and happy customers benefit everyone. The costs should be shared across all functions that participate in and benefit from effective customer communications. This includes marketing, customer service, sales, IT, and corporate level customer initiatives. As with customer service, companies should cease to consider customer-facing functions as cost centers and should see them as important initiatives to engage, gain and retain customers that want the company’s products and services.

The cost of doing a poor job of customer communication is painfully high. Not only are customers lost — their potential loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations, and new and repeat business are gone as well. The damage to company reputation can be irreparable. The lack of support for communicating with customers over multiple channels means the company fails to serve many customers and prospects.
Protecting Customer Privacy

Collecting customer interaction data, as well as asking customers for information, is important and necessary to build reliable customer intelligence. But a great responsibility comes with that customer information: protecting customer privacy and data security. Companies have lost customer trust or even been sued over their failure to protect customer information.

Companies have a great opportunity to build customer relationships based on trust by openly showing respect for customer privacy and giving customers the power to decide what information they will share. Don’t require customer information all the time for published content and assistance. Make it easy for customers to opt in or out. Post customer information policies with easy-to-understand language that describe what the company is doing to protect customer privacy and data security.
Achieving the Human Touch with Help from Technology

A genuine personal touch is vital to transform digital marketing into human to human marketing. But it’s not enough, especially for organizations that interact with large numbers of customers and prospects. Sophisticated technologies are needed in the background to enable marketing teams to analyze and understand diverse customers, to be able to engage with customers in a real manner.

Marketing automation capabilities have become more important for achieving a personal touch when communicating with diverse customers. For example, lead scoring reveals the most sales-ready leads, and provides insight into which leads should be further nurtured. Then the most effective personalization and content selection can be applied to each kind of lead.

Technologies for website and content management, data analytics, and digital marketing help connect the dots for humanized and personalized brand communication with customers. These tools can only work well when human to human marketing is a strategy — and when a constant flow of up-to-date customer information drives automation and management processes. Companies more effectively reach individual customers on their terms through continuous data collection and analytics, and realistic customer segmentation and personas.

The core lesson here is to balance technology and automation with common sense and sensitivity to customers. Always consider: what’s best for each customer, what will engage each customer, what will relate to customer interests. Customers expect marketers to know a good bit about them and to respect their preferences and interests.

Technologies make a difference for humanized marketing when the effort is:

- Customer-focused — not company-centric
- Customer-journey driven — not sales cycle fixated
- Multichannel, engaging, and interactive — not robotic and undifferentiated
Quality Content: an Essential Ingredient of Humanized Marketing

One of the best ways for companies to show their human side is to interact with customers through high quality content. Become a trusted resource for information, guidance and ideas that truly help customers. It’s often difficult for marketers to understand that content marketing is not about the brand — it’s always about the customer.

Backed by analytics and marketing automation capabilities, companies use customer intelligence, segmentation, and knowledge of each stage of the buyer journey to serve up the right personalized content on different channels. Apply customer lessons learned to produce humanized content — talk to customers in their language with real understanding.

As a central element of content marketing planning, it’s important to develop an editorial calendar that covers multiple channels. A thorough editorial calendar works to keep interactions fresh and content quality high, while maintaining continuity and consistency in content. It’s essential for managing the use of different channels and media concurrently, while ensuring that content aligns with buyer journey stages and personas. The editorial calendar also plays a role in meeting goals and tracking the performance of content. But always include the flexibility for unexpected content opportunities to engage with customers in real-time — to show the human side of the brand.

Surprise Customers with the Unexpected

Smart companies frequently monitor social media for comments and questions from current and potential customers. Recently, a well-known entrepreneur, and prolific tweeter and blogger, tweeted that she was craving a particular treat from a top U.S. restaurant chain. She was at a large airport and, as a joke, asked the restaurant to meet her at her gate. The entrepreneur had a big surprise when staff from the restaurant chain indeed showed up with her treat.

Obviously the Twitter conversation before, during, and after this delightful experience is invaluable and quite memorable for both the entrepreneur and the restaurant.
Harmonize Online and In-store Experiences for Real Human Touches

To better engage customers on their terms, a major retailer interweaves its website with its large Pinterest community and with customer visits to its physical stores. The website has a “Pin” button next to every item, and showcases top Pinterest items on the website. The retailer also continuously monitors popular items posted on Pinterest and spotlights those items in the physical stores. The retailer connects individual Pinterest wish lists with customer wish lists on the website.

The retailer supports customer sales in stores through an app that matches Pinterest items with the available inventory on a store-by-store basis. Tablets are available to customers to help them easily locate merchandise in physical stores and to access Pinterest posts and their individual wish lists quickly.

Customer Storytelling

An excellent way to connect to the human side of customers is to tell their stories: what they do, what matters to them, what problems they are trying to solve. If it makes sense, briefly include how company products and services helped them. Customer stories should never overly focus on the brand or products — it’s always the customer that is important. Customer storytelling evokes emotions that often draw in other customers. Many media work well for customer stories: video, podcasts, interviews and slide shows. Add lots of creativity to reveal who customers are.

Invite customers to share their experiences and interesting moments with products and services or interactions with various people in the company. Make it easy for customers to tell their own stories, and not just through comments and ratings. Social sites like Instagram and Pinterest provide visual storytelling opportunities for customers to share great or humorous moments. Companies can set up special events and forums to challenge and reward customers for their stories.

And be sure to acknowledge customer storytelling — comment, respond, help them, and provide services. Show customers that the company listens, understands, and acts.
Human to human marketing only works in the long run if the company delivers products and services in the same manner. This means customer-focused strategies for all aspects of the organization, drawing on lessons learned from humanizing marketing.

Companies that set digital marketing goals that solely fixate on acquiring leads and driving sales are missing the mark. Humanized marketing should pursue goals that help customers, such as providing education and information that improve their businesses or their lives. The goals of human to human marketing map to real communication that engages customers in ways that customers find valuable.

As in their personal lives, companies need to give customers opportunities to get to know them. This means connecting customers to people in the company through engaging experiences, useful conversations, and creative content. Human to human marketing should make sincere connections with customers that build a long-lasting foundation for ongoing relationships, advocacy, and loyalty.
70 years ago, most marketing was on a strictly human to human basis. The proprietor of a neighborhood hardware store knew what the customers wanted because people physically came in and asked, and the store owner could anticipate their customers’ needs.

Because they’d bought some garden seeds or a screwdriver and some screws, the customer might need to buy fertilizer or some more screws the next time they came in. The customers appreciated this relationship, and sales were made because the customer felt like there was a personal relationship with the store, and they were being reached as people (because they were). Because of these relationships, store owners occasionally found themselves invited to their customers’ garden parties.

But that local hardware store grew up and moved online. Somewhere along the way, that personal relationship got lost in a sea of data and generic marketing. How does that hardware store now make that same connection they had those years ago when they’re serving customers in eight time zones and carrying thousands of SKU’s?

Here’s an example of how our hardware store does human to human marketing:
Analytics Start the Process

The first step is capturing data. Our store needs to know who comes to the website, where they come from; be it from a Google search for screwdrivers, an email ad, referral site, social media campaign, or an organic visit. How much time are they spending on the site? At what are they looking? Are these visits converting to sales? What is the customer’s journey?

With Kentico 8.2, our store can understand the type and behavior of their visitors. By using Kentico’s Web Analytics tools, they can capture data on visitors (countries, registered users, visitors, mobile devices, etc.), traffic sources (referrals, search engines, search keywords, etc.), content views (file downloads, landing pages, exit pages, page views, etc.), browser capabilities (browser types, operating system, screen resolution, etc.), to manage campaigns clearly and easily. This information is captured in “real time” and our store can track each of these individual statistics (and more) on an hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. With this data, the store knows that certain visitors have come from certain campaigns, are following a particular customer journey, and can drill-down into the data to track them.

Segmentation Breaks Data Into Manageable Pieces

This data (and there will be plenty of it) must now be narrowed down and organized into useful segments. The store knows what criteria matter to its sales structure, so they will need to set different values for each piece of data collected. Using Kentico 8.2's Segmentation module, our store can efficiently break down this customer data into multiple groups that share the same value criteria based on several different factors. Let’s say, for example, that our store has two customer segments. One is spending less time on the site and puts more things in their e-shopping baskets (and either buy a few small items like paint brushes or pliers, or they leave the site and never complete the purchase). The other customer segment makes many trips to the site and spends several minutes each visit reading product descriptions and reviews. They don’t often put products into their basket, but when they do, these products are larger, like a vertical band saw, and they tend to complete the purchase.
Personas Put a Human Face on Those Data Segments

Even with clearly defined customer segments, it is still important to reach those different customers as people, rather than give every visitor the same generic content. Included in Kentico’s Online Marketing Solution, the Personas module allows our hardware store to take that information and develop a persona about who the customer is; asking and answering what drives them, how did they get to where they are, and how can we reach them effectively? Through personas, the store can assign new and returning visitors to each persona based on criteria the store feels are key to that persona’s customer journey. Then, they can offer effectively targeted content to those different personas. The store, both today and 70 years ago, is in similar situations.

70 years ago, it was clear what drove the customer because their journey was obvious — it had feet and walked in the front door. Today, using Kentico 8.2’s Personas module, our store can build a persona about the customer based on how they’ve reached the site, where they’ve been on the site, and then show them the content that’s most useful to them. It’s as if pixels had feet.

Our store might, for example, create a persona (call it “Steve” — the small project persona), based on factors like what they click on (products in value under $100) and how much time they spend on each product page (less than one minute), do they view the discount section, and whether they put items in their shopping cart, but do not complete the sale. Our store knows Steves want products at a good price with simple and inexpensive shipping options. Based on customer behavior, the store knows how many Steves there are, and is ready to reach all of them.

For our “large customer” (call it “Ron”), our store can create a persona that reflects a customer who reads more technical information; they look at more expensive and larger tools (over $500 and that require oversize shipping rates), they spend more time on the site (over 10 mins per visit) and may make one large purchase at a time. Our store knows Rons want information, not a cashier, before they make their purchase.

Marketing Automation Reaches the Right Personas the Right Way

Marketing Automation allows the store to define and execute easily automated marketing campaigns to engage new customers, nurture leads, and maintain an on-going conversation with the customer. Marketing Automation takes the best of Kentico 8.2’s Online Marketing tools, including Contact Management, Email Marketing, Segmentation, Personalization, Campaign Management, and Lead Scoring; and orchestrates them into a manageable process to automate lead nurturing, drip marketing, and cultivating relationships with clients and prospects which convert them into customers. It’s a powerful tool that turns the simple hardware store owner into an orchestral conductor.

For our store owner, it’s like pulling together lumber, masonry, wiring, plumbing, and roofing materials to create the custom house that a customer wants. In our examples, the Steves can now be targeted with automated emails about sale pricing, better shipping offers, or smaller items the store owner knows that Steves might want. For the Rons in the data pool, the store can use Marketing Automation to feature information. For example, communication to a Ron might include eight new ways to make hidden joints in Ron’s next furniture project. Or where a Ron can find the best-reclaimed lumber.
Contact Management and Social Marketing Helps the Cycle Begin Again

Now that our store has created a hard-hitting campaign that produces strong sales and a healthy ROI, the store owner can put their feet up and relax. Or, in the real world, they can take that data and, using Kentico’s Contact Management module, combined with their existing CRM system, keep track of each customer as they come back to the site. If the customer hasn’t been back in a while, our store knows what type of content might bring them back. Instead of sending out a generic email blast to the whole contact list, our store owner can send out targeted content, or offers which speak to that customer.

When the Internet appeared, the personal touch that so many got used to at their local store went by the wayside. Marketing was impersonal, unappealing, and uncomfortable. Luckily, what was once a process of shaking several hundred hands and knowing the name behind each is back. With the right tools, marketing to customers on a human level becomes as easy as it was 70 years ago. Think of it as reaching out and shaking a hundred thousand hands, being able to give a name to each, and knowing what each needs and wants just as if they had walked through the door. It’s human to human marketing, and it’s here.