

Practical advice for achieving personalisation at scale

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ADMAP

Discusses the various models marketers could use to achieve personalisation at scale and advises on how to utilise the Problem Solution Mapping approach.

- Rather than pursuing the outdated principle of “right content, right time, right individual,” the core tenets of “personal” experiences are highly achievable through data-driven experience design principles.
- To truly scale your Personal Experience Design, marketers need to invest in developing a scalable personalisation team focused on data-driven experience design that is as closely aligned with your product team as possible.
- As you build this personalisation team, start with one of the four organisational models: emergent, controlled, centralised and democratised.
- The suggested approach is to apply a unifying framework, which the authors call Problem Solution Mapping (PSM), which uses a rigorous process that starts with goals rather than ideas to resolve experience-related problems using solution hypotheses.

Personalisation

This article is part of a series of articles on personalisation. [Read more](#).

Personalisation is both an ocean of possibilities and a persistent frustration. For most companies, it's a line item on the budget that's been there for years and has often produced unclear benefits. And still, the promise of personalisation persists as a lofty pursuit for so many digitally inclined businesses. Our recent [findings](#) reflect this gap, showing that consumer expectations are outpacing brands' efforts to be personal. Yet, those same consumers are more likely to shop with a brand that treats them in a personal manner. In fact, nearly all consumers (91 percent) are still more likely to shop with brands that recognise, remember, and provide them with relevant offers and recommendations.

As often defined, “personalisation” can sound like a moon-shot ideal, but it can take so long to accomplish that, by the time it is “done,” it may no longer be relevant. Today, companies are creating data lakes, building a single view of customer data, creating recommendation engines, implementing localised ad targeting...the list goes on.

They are trying to swim in an ocean filled with myriad technologies, customer data, applications, and endless possibilities to assist them in “doing personalisation.” But the ocean is unswimmable.

What businesses can do is move away from trying to “do personalisation” and think about how to “create more personal experiences.” This shift to a Personal Experience Design program means an organisation starts with a focus on the customer problem and then develops the hypotheses to solve it rather than, for instance, starting with personalisation technology and what it enables. Without question, the hypotheses will very likely require software acquisition or data services or architecture changes, but the difference is that those requirements are experience-led versus technology- or data-led.

The goal of a Personal Experience Design program should be to create personal experiences that use data to make it easier for consumers to get what they want on their terms. And consumers are happy to share their data to enable this. Our research shows that 83% of consumers will share their data for this purpose as long as businesses are transparent about how they are going to use it and customers have control over it. The report also found the need for a fundamental shift away from traditional communication modes to interactive conversations to enable marketers to drive new levels of personalisation, trust, and meaningful experiences.

As user control and data transparency increasingly become imperatives of digital experience design, the promise of personalisation is coming into focus. Rather than pursuing the outdated principle of “right content, right time, right individual,” the core tenets of “personal” experiences are highly achievable through data-driven experience design principles. Like all user experiences, the only good personal design is not that which is most complex or most novel. It is that which demonstrably solves user problems.

The best place to start is the planning and requisition of full-time dedicated resources. To truly scale your Personal Experience Design program you can’t just have an analyst in the basement, nor can it be simply an A/B testing team. You need to invest in developing a scalable personalisation team focused on data-driven experience design that is as closely aligned with your product team as possible.

As you build this personalisation team, start with one of the four organisational models below and continuously adapt over time. Every model below has trade-offs and risks, but we promise that if you concentrate on solving customer problems and internal problems, then you will always have the best possible team working on your roadmaps.

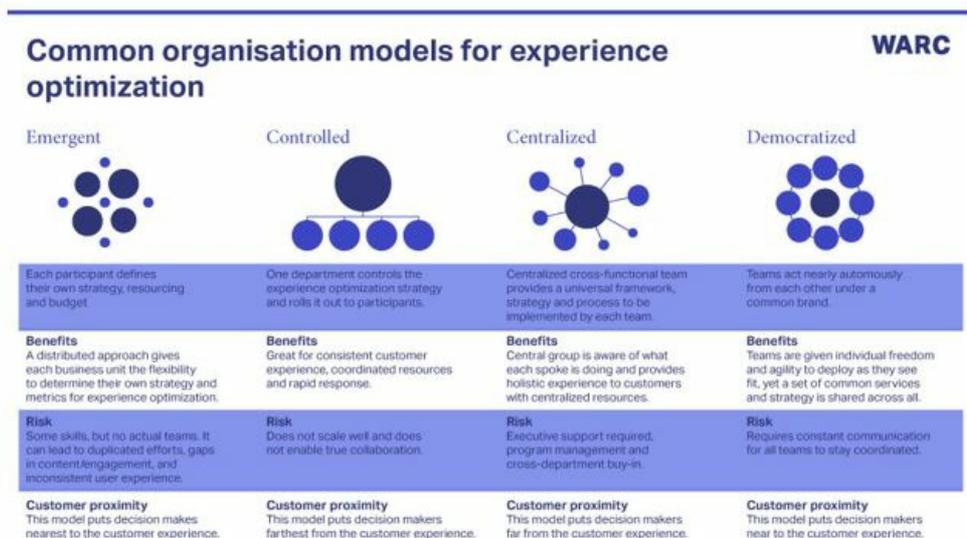


Figure 1

Whichever model you choose, every brand or team tackling personalisation needs to operate from two shared and aligned roadmaps. One should focus on solving the most impactful customer experience problems, and the other should focus on solving organisational problems that help scale your operations. These tactical pieces, including building the roadmaps that concentrate on customer and internal problems, are foundational to building personalisation at scale.

When prioritising experiences to personalise, too often we concentrate on ideas that are precious to us, and not necessarily on what is precious to our customers. We cobble these ideas (that we think are great) into a roadmap, and then go out and buy technology to execute that roadmap. We then turn around and do the same thing with our internal teams. We read that Spotify or Facebook has the hot new operational model and decide that we think it should copy and paste pretty easily over to our team and capabilities. How is that **working out**?

Leading brands have teams that relentlessly focus on solving customer experience problems and internal problems based on what is important to customers and internal teams. So, how do you tactically go about doing this?

Our approach is to apply a unifying framework we call Problem Solution Mapping (PSM). The goal of PSM is to use a rigorous process that starts with goals rather than ideas. There is a natural tendency to start with “great” ideas, which unfortunately is not a recipe for success. By focusing on goals and understanding the problems limiting them, we’ve found that the resulting experiments and experiences are much more likely to have a significant impact that matters to the business.

You can create your own problems-focused roadmap by setting shared goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) to resolve experience-related problems using solution hypotheses — all researched and validated with data pulled from your digital and physical user experiences. What problems are people having on your website? With your email? On your native app? By examining the data, listening to your customers, and conducting user experience research, you start to develop a list of experience-related problems. Then you turn around and continue listening to your internal teams and the groups they work with and looking at the process, culture, people, and technology they use. From there you start to develop a list of internal team issues that are getting in the way of scaling.

PSM ensures that your efforts deliver confident, measurable business outcomes. The best personalisation teams in the market use PSM, or a version of it, to concentrate and focus on customers’ real user experience problems – not problems driven by the highest-paid person’s opinion. The best organisations are also continuously and relentlessly testing hypotheses to solve these problems and then pivoting on the data they learn from these tests.

However, in our experience, best-of-breed teams don’t stop there. Once they have a user experience roadmap focused on personalised experiences, they follow the same procedure to create the roadmap to scale up the data-driven experience design team we talked about before. Do these questions sound familiar?

- *“How hard is my personalisation team thinking about what our customers really want?”*
- *“My customers are difficult to pin down. How do I know my Personal Experience Design program is targeting the right group with the right personalised experiences?”*
- *“What should my personalisation team look like?”*
- *“Is my team even set up to tackle the real problems that our customers have?”*
- *“If I make a change to be more test-and-learn focused, can my culture actually change to let that happen?”*

- “How am I changing the customer experience in a meaningful way?”

If these questions are familiar, how are you tackling them? We believe that these are tough internal scaling problems to tackle – especially, along with completing your day-to-day work.

It’s also important to note that as Personal Experience Design programs mature, new roles will emerge that will be required to convert the organisation from operational to transformational, and fully unlock its potential. For example, your current working pod may already include roles such as an optimisation director who works directly with designers, developers and analysts. In the future, the more advanced roles will help the work scale and mature to meet the changing landscape of your business, as seen in Figure 2.

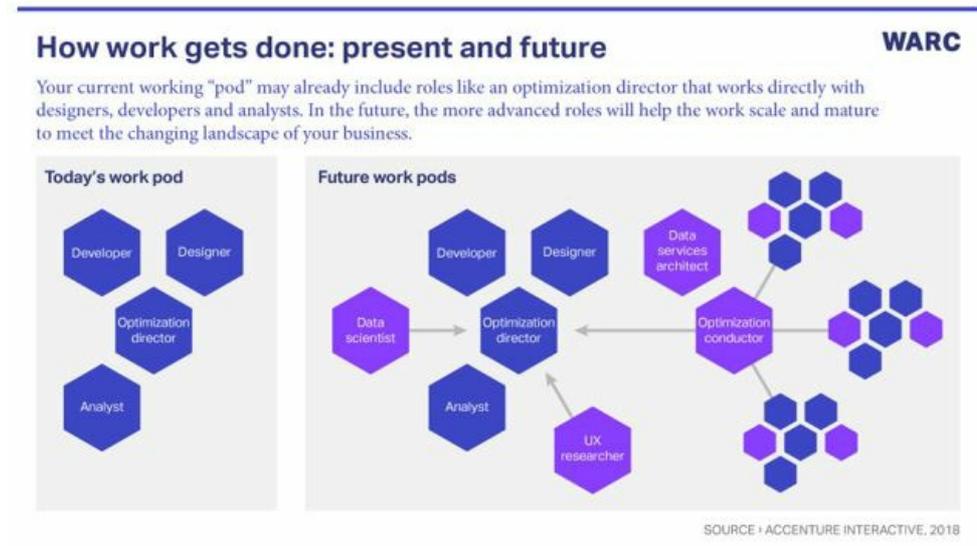


Figure 2

A common question we get is how the operating and organisation models need to evolve to support scaling data-driven experience design capabilities. There are three core steps:

- Assess the current mix of resources, business needs, and overall maturity to chart a way forward for your organisation.
- Adjust the organisation model to match the strengths of your current resource mix with the needs of the business.
- Measure the effectiveness of the new mode and continue to evolve the structure.

The chart below provides more granularity on each of these steps.

How to organize for data-driven experience design

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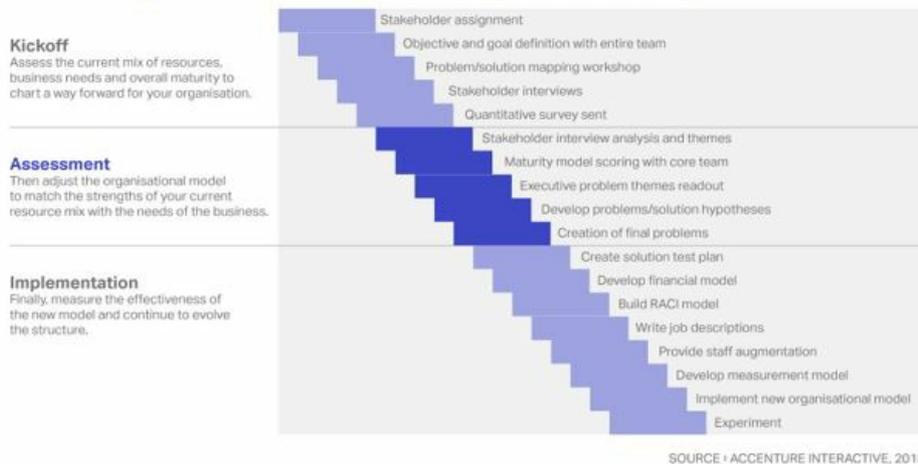


Figure 3

With this approach, leading programs can look back and see two clear roadmaps based on solving problems: one that is relentlessly solving for data-driven experience design and one that is mercilessly tackling internal problems the team faces that create valuable personalised experiences.

Where do you stand? Which roadmap have you started? And which one have you not? You need both roadmaps to stop “doing personalisation” and start using Personal Experience Design to solve experience-related problems and create the relevant customer experiences that lead to measurable business outcomes.

About the authors

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As the global personalisation lead at Accenture Interactive, Jeriad’s practice enables clients around the world to create unique and curated experiences for their customers seamlessly across channels.

Jeriad has a PhD in Operations Research, holds multiple patents and co-invented Accenture’s artificial intelligence technology for advanced audience planning and segmentation.

He has been recognized in Advertising Age’s Marketing Technology Top 25 Trailblazers List in 2017 and has been quoted in publications such as *CMO.com*, *The Drum*, *MediaPost* and *Ad Age*.

David J. Neff

VP of consulting, Clearhead, now a part of Accenture Interactive

David J. Neff is part of the global personalisation team at Accenture. His practice helps growing marketing, e-commerce, and product teams scale people, process, tech, strategy and culture when it comes to personalisation.

He has 18 years working with nonprofit and Fortune 500 clients on their digital strategy and is the author of

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His latest book, *IGNITE: Setting your Organisation's Culture on Fire with Innovation*, is focused on scaling product innovation.

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