



What Brands Are Doing
to Achieve Customer Centricity

alium

Customer Centricity 2025

Alium Brand Insights Report

What Brands Are Doing to Achieve Customer Centricity

Customer centricity is this year's Shoptalk theme.

Putting the customer at the center is a great concept, but how are retailers and brands executing it in reality?

This research provides insights from 700 deep dive conversations with marketers and ecommerce professionals about the realities of customer centricity.

We reveal the top five most common approaches as well as the benefits, challenges and top vendors for each approach:

Top Five Brand Priorities To Achieve Customer Centricity

- Personalization
- Loyalty Programs
- Mobile Optimization
- Identity Resolution and First-Party Data
- Real-Time Product Availability



Top Five Brand Priorities To Achieve Customer Centricity

PERSONALIZATION

Personalization is a tried-and-true customer centric marketing strategy, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Most companies are on a long and winding personalization journey which involves improving access to data, orchestration across channels and technologies, and better understanding customers in real time.

LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Loyalty programs codify the relationship with the customer and drive LTV. Programs vary considerably, from multi-tiered points programs, to simple referral rewards, to VIP experiences for top customers. Customers want a program that makes sense based on their relationship with the company over the long term.

MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

Commerce everywhere is a dream every brand and retailer aspires to, and that means mobile has to work perfectly. Whether multitasking on the couch or comparison shopping in a store, giving customers the ultimate mobile experience is a major part of customer centricity.

IDENTITY RESOLUTION AND FIRST-PARTY DATA

Data is the lifeblood of customer centricity across channels. Understanding who the customer is, what they've done, and what they want requires robust data capabilities, something most companies still struggle with.

REAL TIME PRODUCT AVAILABILITY

Amazon, social media and mobile apps have created a very high bar for brands and retailers. Customers expect to be able to buy something instantly and get it immediately. The typical inventory and order management capabilities are not able to keep up. Companies struggle to balance inventory across stores and channels, and lack the unified product view they need to support a seamless "anywhere, any time" sales process.

PERSONALIZATION

“We leverage data science models that have indicators of a customer who is likely to lapse in the next few weeks, and we combine that with our personalized recommendations engines, and personalized promotion capabilities. All the customer data goes into the model, the model spits out, ‘This customer should get a 20% off,’ ‘That customer should get \$250 off \$500,’ all the various promotions. So we’re able to personalize the audience, the promotion, and the recommendation of the content.”

Neiman Marcus

“It’s [personalization] is really leading with the vision of what we want to bring to our customers, what’s missing, really listening to what the customer problems are, “How does personalization fix that, or help with that, and close the gap? And what are those things that we need in order to close the gap?”

Macy’s

TOP CHALLENGES:

- 1. Technical Integration and Data Issues:** Companies often struggle with integrating personalization tools properly into their existing tech stack. This includes issues with data synchronization, identity resolution, and the lack of a centralized platform to handle personalized experiences across multiple channels (i.e. in-store and online). The complexity of the tech stack and insufficient integration capabilities can lead to fragmented customer profiles, making it challenging to deliver personalized experiences effectively.
- 2. Resource and Expertise Shortages:** Implementing personalization requires a deep understanding of data science, API integration, and the overall tech ecosystem, which is not always readily available. Companies face challenges in finding and retaining personnel with the necessary skill sets. Additionally, the learning curve associated with new systems and the lack of internal expertise can delay or complicate effective personalization implementation.
- 3. Vendor Limitations and Support Issues:** Many companies encounter limitations with their current toolsets, such as their email service providers or content management systems not meeting their needs for real-time data processing or complex personalization. Additionally, poor vendor support and a lack of tailored guidance can hinder the successful deployment of personalization technologies.

FREQUENTLY MENTIONED USE CASES

Dynamic Promotions

On-Site Product Recommendations

Email Personalization

Omni-Channel personalization

TOP RATED VENDORS

Nosto

8.6

Dynamic Yield

8.17

Optimizely

7.56

Twilio Segment

7.12

Hightouch

6.63

LOYALTY PROGRAMS

“Loyalty is our biggest way to offer value to our customers and to encourage them to stay with us and book directly with us rather than through a third party.”

Red Roof Inn

“Loyalty is the tool by which we keep customers in our own domain. We use it, one, as a way to keep our best customers with us. And there’s obviously the financial benefit there. The more esoteric benefit around loyalty, in my estimation, is around driving constant improvement, real-time customer feedback, using this as a mechanism to drive improvements and have a flywheel within your business.”

GNC

TOP CHALLENGES:

- 1. Cultural and Internal Business Challenges:** Many companies face cultural and internal challenges when implementing loyalty programs. This can involve getting organizational alignment around the program and ensuring that loyalty is seen as a holistic goal rather than just a separate program.
- 2. Understanding value:** Loyalty programs, specifically points based programs, “churn and burn”, can be seen as heavily promotional and may not align with brand values. Some loyalty programs can act as a short-term fix that plateaus quickly and becomes an ongoing expense without significant long-term returns.
- 3. Technical Integration and Personalization:** Integrating loyalty programs with existing systems and enabling effective personalization are significant challenges. Companies often need to overcome difficulties with system integration, data synchronization, and creating a personalized experience for users.

FREQUENTLY MENTIONED USE CASES

Loyalty Points Programs

Refer-A-Friend

Store Credit/Gift Card

Promotions Engine

TOP RATED VENDORS

Rise AI

7

Friendbuy

6.5

Yotpo

6.15

Epsilon

5.71

Punchh

5

MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

“With mobile apps, we have a captive audience, and we can have first-party data, and prime real estate on their phone is through lock screen messaging.”

Chicos

“With mobile, it’s a part of our hospitality offering. Your key is on your mobile device to get into your room. We’ve tried to integrate the overall app experience into what makes Hilton great as a hospitality experience...”

Hilton

CHALLENGES:

- 1. Technical Constraints and Platform Limitations:** The structure of existing platforms can limit how well a company can implement mobile-first strategies. For instance, some teams have struggled with vendor limitations to provide a user-friendly mobile experience. Companies often need specialized development teams to overcome these hurdles, which adds complexity and cost.
- 2. Compliance Concerns:** In the US brands are worrying about fines if opt-in / opt-out data is not correctly managed. Some brands have yet to invest deeply in SMS due to concerns around compliance outside of the US—storing data in the EU has been mentioned.
- 3. Integration and Fragmentation Issues:** Managing different tools and ensuring they integrate seamlessly can be challenging. Companies have reported difficulties in making sure that mobile apps, websites, and marketing tools are effectively talking to one another. This fragmentation can lead to a disjointed user experience where customers receive mixed messages or face inconsistent interactions across different platforms.

FREQUENTLY MENTIONED USE CASES

Mobile Push Notification

SMS Marketing

In-App Messaging

SMS Transactional Messaging

SMS Customer Service

Mobile Wallet

TOP RATED VENDORS

Klaviyo

7.78

Attentive

7.64

Wunderkind

7.08

Braze

7.04

Salesforce Marketing Cloud

6.71

IDENTITY RESOLUTION AND FIRST-PARTY DATA

“Identity resolution is really important. And when it comes to privacy, feeling good about how we are using our data, and the partners that we have, having a good reputation, and then also really high match rates. That’s the key for us.”

[American Eagle Outfitters](#)

“Any e-commerce vendor will tell you that aggregation of data from zero-party, first-party, second-party is super critical for our business...”

[Wayfair](#)

CHALLENGES:

1. Data Unification and Standardization: One of the major challenges is the unification and standardization of data across multiple systems. Companies often have customer data spread out over many different systems, lacking a consolidated view. This makes it difficult to unify the data and perform effective identity resolution. Having no agreed-upon data standards can complicate the implementation of a customer data platform (CDP) or master data management (MDM) practices.

2. Mapping Identities Across Contexts: Challenges arise when individuals use personal email addresses in one context, but work emails in another - or when they are logged in on a mobile app, but not logged in on a website when they’re on their laptop. This can complicate identity resolution as it is hard to map an individual’s personal identity to the organizational identity. Further complications arise when the same names or devices or IP addresses represent multiple entities, making it challenging to address the right person in a household, for example.

3. Vendor Challenges: Some companies rely on vendors for identity resolution but face difficulties when these vendors provide inconsistent or non-transparent data. This can lead to mistrust and challenges in evaluating the accuracy of data being used for performance tracking and decision-making. Deciding on whether to handle identity resolution in-house or to rely on external vendors, and picking the right partner, remains a constant challenge.

FREQUENTLY MENTIONED USE CASES

Identity Resolution / Data Onboarding

Customer Segmentation & Audience Building

CDP (Customer Data Platform)

Reverse ETL

TOP RATED VENDORS

Klaviyo

8.15

Hightouch

8.08

Twilio Segment

8

LiveRamp

7.88

Adobe Real-Time CDP

7.5

REAL TIME PRODUCT AVAILABILITY

“I think that [product availability] is the number one concern for the contractor base. They don't care how easy it is to order. But if I'm going to leave my job site and go to your store, if your inventory is wrong, I'm not coming back.”

Jon-Don

“When you come to the website, we show you all of the inventory that we have in our warehouse, plus a subset of the inventory that we have in our stores. So the idea is to say, “Well, we have all this inventory, let's maximize the opportunity to sell to the customer. Basically every single store is becoming a mini distribution center.”

Windsor

CHALLENGES:

- 1. Outdated Technology:** Many companies face issues with outdated software systems that hinder effective inventory management. For instance, one company highlighted that their ERP solution was 15 years out of date, leading to difficulties in inventory management and allocations processes, creating “phantom” inventory locations without real physical stock.
- 2. Limited Inventory Capabilities:** Another company described the challenge of operating with broad but shallow inventory. Companies find it difficult to ensure that items reserved online for in-store pickup are actually available, due to having limited stock on hand and an inadequate staffing model.
- 3. Scaling Technology for Order Management:** There are constraints with existing order management systems (OMS) that cannot efficiently support large-scale operations or integrate well with other technology platforms. This limitation includes difficulties in managing complex operations like “buy online, pick up in store” with obsolete or insufficiently robust systems.

FREQUENTLY MENTIONED USE CASES

Inventory Management

Order Management System (OMS)

Shipping & Fulfillment

Marketplace Management

TOP RATED VENDORS

ShipStation

9.2

Olo

8.5

Shopify/Shopify Plus

8.26

Salsify

7.46

BigCommerce

7.29

ABOUT ALIUM

Brand leaders rely on Alium to get the unedited truth from their peers about the technologies that drive their business. Alium's peer-led vendor research is created from comprehensive buyer conversations that are analyzed and synthesized by AI. Brands gain actionable intelligence to find the right partner for their needs. Vendors use Alium to better understand their position in the market, get product feedback, and understand enterprise purchase cycles.

METHODOLOGY

Using Alium's AI Assistant, five key themes of Customer Centricity were identified: Personalization, Loyalty Programs, Mobile Optimization, Identity Resolution & First-Party Data, and Real-Time Product Availability. Each theme was associated with relevant technology use cases, such as content personalization for Personalization and order management systems for Real-Time Product Availability. The study extracted the most recent interview data, selecting the top five vendors per theme based on average ratings ($n \geq 5$).

ALIUM MEMBERS INCLUDE EXECUTIVES FROM



1-800-Flowers.com
 American Express
 Anastasia Beverly Hills
 Authentic Brands
 Bell Media
 Bergdorf Goodman
 Best Buy
 Big Lots
 Bloomberg
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 Brownells
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 Chegg
 Comcast
 Consumer Cellular
 Daily Harvest
 Danone
 Diane von Furstenberg
 Dole Sunshine Company
 Equinox
 Feast & Fettle

Firstleaf
 General Motors
 Girl Scouts of the USA
 Godiva Chocolatier
 Grande Cosmetics
 Groove Life
 Haleon
 HelloFresh
 Hugo Boss
 J. Crew
 Jambys
 JD Finish Line
 JetBlue Airways
 JPMorgan Chase
 L'Oréal
 LG Electronics
 Lowe's
 Maple Leaf Foods
 Marc Jacobs
 Maude
 Megaport
 MILLY
 Ministry of Supply

Mizzen+Main
 Nestlé
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 OpenStore
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 Prudential
 Public Goods
 Rack Room Shoes
 Roku
 Rooms To Go
 RugsUSA.com
 Scandinavian Tobacco
 Snapchat
 SoundCloud
 Sovereign Brands
 Steve Madden
 Subway

Sunwing
 Swoveralls
 Ten Group
 Tend
 The Knot Worldwide
 ThirdLove
 Thorlo
 Thredup
 Thuma
 Tory Burch
 Tourneau
 U.S. Bank
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 Venus et Fleur
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 VICI
 Walmart
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 Zinus
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 and more...