

The importance of marketing automation in the time of Covid-19

By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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Marketing automation is taking digital marketing by storm and for good reason. Being able to automate traditionally manual online marketing processes using less man- and brain power makes marketing to the right audience at the right time far more possible and effective. We spoke to JanDirk (JD) Engelbrecht, MD at Everlytic about marketing automation and its importance for modern businesses, especially under the current restrictive circumstances.

■ Please elaborate on the idea behind automation?

Automation allows brands to have unique, individual relationships with each of its customers at scale. It takes the creativity, strategy, and experience of a marketing department and extends its capacity and capabilities. In essence, automation may be as simple as triggering autogenerated responders to an action such as purchasing a product, or it may be vastly detailed and complex, guiding each user through a personalised, most suitable marketing treatment based on branching logic and advanced conditional rules based on the customer's data profile and their engagement with your programme.

The purpose is to increase revenue and enhance the customer experience using scalable technology that *knows* the customer.



JD Engelbrecht, managing director at Everlytic.



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■ Please comment on the importance of marketing automation, especially in the time of Covid-19.

The Covid-19-induced lockdown has, in many cases, caused already-stretched marketing and communication teams to either have to do more heavy lifting, or to pick up the pace because some team members, unfortunately, were let go. Marketing teams are under significant pressure to be more personal and more targeted but to do this at significant scale.

Whilst very daunting given strained resources, the rationale is sound: if you divide your customer base into homogenous groups or even treat each customer as an individual, you optimise revenue and enhance customer experience at a micro level which, when combined, delivers synergy where the sum of all the groups or individuals' enhanced experiences lead to more revenue than would have been possible if you treated everyone the same.

The takeaway is that the technology extends the capacity of a marketing team to deliver amazing customer experience that results in increased retention, sales and satisfaction.

■ How can marketing automation improve a company's digital marketing and sales efforts?

It is all about presenting the most relevant offer to the right person at the right time on a channel they choose to engage on.

Automation can be driven off very simple, bare-bones data sets, but it finds its true value when combined with robust, fit-for-purpose data that describes the relationship with the customer; examples being where the person is in the conversion cycle, what their communication need state is, what value segment they fit in, and not to exclude any of the many other descriptive characteristics of the customer.

These data points have the power to opt customers into certain journeys and move them from one to another as the data changes. A simple example is that you want to push a sales message for a prospect but once they become a customer, you'd want to put them onto an engagement and exploration journey, followed by a retention programme.

The crux is that you have a finite number of communication engagement opportunities with a customer and that you need to optimise each engagement by presenting a tailored and relevant message that drives your commercial objectives, which should of course always be aligned with the intent to optimise customer engagement and experience. Marketing automation technology such as Everlytic allows you to make the most of each engagement without having to employ massive teams that most organisations can't afford to maintain.

▣ ***How does it benefit small businesses, if at all?***

Traditionally, marketing automation platforms' inflated pricing has kept it out of the grasp of small to medium-sized business. Everlytic is a bulk and automation-driven communication platform that prices based on consumption. We believe presenting a globally competitive product to our customers is our responsibility and that the technology should be accessible. As mentioned, automation features extend the capacity and power of your marketing teams and it assists in increasing customer engagement, their experience, and ultimately your profits if the programme is well-designed. Everlytic offers an accessibly priced automation platform that will enable you to unlock synergies in your business.

▣ ***Why do you think some companies, with the same platform and same resources, have 10x more success with their investment than others?***

Given the same access to technology, I'd say there are a few differentiating success factors:

- The quality and suitability of the data that drives the platform. This refers to whether data is accurate and correct, as well as whether descriptive data is exposed that can feed and guide marketing programmes.
- The multi-disciplinary buy-in from across the business; and data is located in different silos of an organisation and the development and integration resources required to integrate the underlying and supporting systems with the automation technology belongs to different business owners. Unless everyone is aligned, playing nicely together, and provisioning the required resources, the system will take unbearably long to implement and performance of the system will be hampered by internal politics.
- The quality of thought with regards to the primary communication journeys aligned with business objectives, the quality of the creative, the effort invested in creating dynamic content for different customer segments, and ultimately also how users are moved between journeys as their data and engagement profiles change to mirror their status in the business.
- The service and support the platform partner provides. This is something Everlytic prides itself on. We not only provide a globally competitive platform that is priced much more reasonably than competitors, but our support is exceptional and we support our customers in getting set up on the platform, but also assist to demystify and present the potential opportunities.

▣ ***What should companies look at before they dive into automation?***

- Get cross-organisational buy-in by telling a valuable story that involves all required departments. Tie their inputs to the upside.

- Make sure your data is correct and fit for purpose.
- Prior to buying, design your marketing communication programmes – the treatments you wish to apply to consumers based on their individual stage in the buying or communication lifecycle. Having these done beforehand will get you up and running sooner and allow you to create momentum that gets you buy-in from the business.
- Don't over-complicate things immediately. Get your primary journeys, decide what data will qualify a user into and out of these journeys, and consider how they jump from one to another. Practical and executable programmes will get you most of the way; after that's running seamlessly, you can start building onto it and creating niche treatments that will incrementally build value.
- Understand the true cost of the solution. Nothing kills momentum like cost creep. Whilst Everlytic doesn't charge for the automation tech and bases our pricing on consumption that is equal to the price of bulk communication, we are an exception to the rule. Many vendors offering these services either charge extra for various modules to unlock features, and generally the costs of messaging is significantly more expensive than normal bulk communications.
- Having local support and relationship managers committed to your successful implementation is critical. Vendors should staff specialists that are able to add value. Whereas the technology itself becomes an extension of your team, the relationship manager assigned to you should also. Aside from Everlytic, I'd say there are no locally developed solutions that can compete in terms of features and functionality, meaning that other solutions are generally resold, with specialists often being offshore in different time zones and with support tickets often falling into the back of the queue behind developed markets.

Everlytic prides itself on having the best customer service and support in South Africa and because we own all the technology ourselves, we are responsive and pragmatic.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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