

Multichannel Integration Evidence from the States and a Review of the Field

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1. Executive summary

Members of the Henley Centre for Customer Management requested a report on the status of multichannel marketing. The focus of the research examines best practice examples from the United States and a detailed review of the field. The research was conducted over the summer of 2012 and identified over 240 quality articles for inclusion in the review. Using systematic review methodology a number of key themes and respective indicators emerged from the field. Results of the study identified common multichannel platforms, tools that assist management in determining high-quality multichannel decisions, features of consumer behaviour, successful investment decision-making processes, channel optimisation and a review of consumer expectations of a multichannel marketing world.

2. Channels utilised

A company is considered 'multichannel' if it utilises more than one location to sell its products or promote itself. Even though a majority of companies today attempt to place themselves in as many outlets as possible, multichannel could even consist of just having a store and a website (Smith, 2009).

2.1. Physical store (bricks and mortar)

A channel that continues to remain popular is the actual location of the business, also referred to as 'bricks and mortar'. Although this channel is well established, it seems to be behind when it comes to marketing techniques. A vast number of marketers develop strategies for bricks-and-mortar stores without great consideration of consumer data (Smith, 2009).

Even with strategies being behind the times, a large majority of consumers (~87%) still make the trip out to the stores. One reason people are still motivated to go to the store is so that they can look at the product they want to purchase, in person, before making a commitment (Konus et al, 2008). Furthermore, many people visit the actual store so that they are able to physically communicate and interact with a staff member. It is important for the salespeople to provide outstanding customer service, since this helps to build relationships with customers (Revesz, 2012).

2.2. Direct mail

Using old-fashioned direct mailings to consumers is a marketing method that is still used today (Dawson, 2010; Henschen, 2011; Martin, 2011; Weinberg et al, 2007). In fact, a recent survey found that 'direct mail is still a top marketing priority for 2012' (PR Newswire, 2012). This may be a problem, however, since this method is expensive (Henschen, 2011), bad for the environment and largely ignored (Godfrey et al, 2011). Consumers find direct mail to be unobtrusive and extremely easy to disregard (Godfrey et al, 2011).

2.3. Phone

The phone is another mature channel, which is still being used in modern marketing (Dawson, 2010; Martin, 2011). This method of communication is still accepted because it allows for two-way communication, so the customer is directly interacting with the company. Although some people may feel this method is highly intrusive, others like the fact that they are able to directly interact with someone else from the comfort of their own home (Godfrey et al, 2011).

One of the main ways in which phone calls are utilised by businesses is through taking care of customer service concerns. Many consumers like the idea of having their specific problem resolved over the phone (EON, 2012).

2.4. Devices

Mobile devices are changing how people go about their daily lives, and this affects the marketing situation (Allis, 2012). People who have grown up with evolving technology, such as those in 'Generation Y', are now greatly unreceptive to older forms of advertising and media (Spiess, 2011).

Smartphones, for instance, allow people to be constantly connected and enable instantaneous look-up of information. If a consumer wants to find out more about a product or compare its price online, they can use their phone to look up that information while in the store shopping (Infogroup, 2012). These devices are also able to reveal a great deal about consumers, since it is possible to monitor the use of the phone and even the location of the user (Henschen, 2011).

Tablet computers, such as the iPad, also allow people to perform research on information more easily and promptly (Revesz, 2012; Schell, 2011).

Although only a small percentage of the population uses any sort of mobile device to aid in their purchase decision, their use continues to be on the rise (Stocker, 2012). Consumers find that there are upsides and downsides, which may cause some hesitation in the adoption of these technologies. People enjoy the benefits of the extensive availability of information, but may be turned off by inadequate customer service or worries over security (Revesz, 2012).

2.5. Email

Although contacting consumers through emails has been used for years, this method has only recently begun to improve and become more valuable. Companies are able to send personalised messages to consumers in order to promote a brand, product or service (Dawson, 2010; Henschen, 2011; Martin, 2011). This marketing method also allows consumers to see the message the organisation is looking to get across (Godfrey et al 2011).

There are many reasons a business may send an email to a consumer, which include informing them of a sale or promotion (Infogroup, 2012), addressing customer service issues (EON, 2012; Weinberg et al, 2007) and encouraging a transaction for a forgotten item left in an online shopping cart (Roberts, 2010).

It is not only the companies that are using email to promote themselves; some companies are now relying on their customers to refer friends through referral emails. People are more likely to open these referral emails since they are sent from a familiar acquaintance, rather than coming from the organisation itself. In fact, someone is three times more likely to open this type of email over one sent from the company's marketing department (Legwinski, 2011).

This type of communication can be viewed as semi-intrusive since there is some apprehension about privacy. However, emails are flexible since they can be looked at whenever the receiver has time and wishes to look at them. Furthermore, a consumer can delete an email if they decide the message included is irrelevant to them (Godfrey et al, 2011).

2.6. Social media

The general use of social media is becoming a part of many people's daily lives. People like to stay connected with their peers to find out what everyone is doing and share their own experiences (EON, 2012). Social media sites can be very influential when it comes to starting and ending trends (Spiess, 2011). By taking part in multiple social media channels, companies are able to use multiple platforms to get their brand out there and get consumers talking (Legwinski, 2011; Schell, 2011). That being said, it is important for companies to look to these sites to see where they stand among consumers (Spiess, 2011). Postings on the sites are observed and analysed so that companies can ascertain the general feelings towards their brand, whether good or bad (Henschen, 2011). For video sites, such as YouTube, advertisers monitor the adverts played to decide which ones are trending (Henschen, 2011).

Social media is not only useful for witnessing trends and hearing consumer thoughts, but these sites can be used for promotions as well. A business can talk about their products and inform consumers of any new updates within the company (Schell, 2011). Word can spread like wildfire on these sites, so promotions can create brand awareness fairly quickly (Stocker, 2012).

2.7. Twitter

Although Twitter may not have as many users as Facebook, it can be just as influential. Businesses can establish a Twitter account in order to interact with their followers (Martin, 2011). However, as with Facebook, an organisation should investigate whether their target market has a presence in the Twitter community (Legwinski, 2011). If a company decides that it should pursue the use of Twitter, it can use it to send out information about promotions or address the questions and comments of its followers.

2.8. Facebook

Facebook is currently by far the most widely used social media site. Using this site to reach the public can be a useful tool for companies (Martin, 2011); however, stepping into this territory needs to be done carefully. It is not enough for a company to create a Facebook page and then hope it aids in their success. The business needs to perform research to see if its target consumers are on Facebook and willing to use it (Legwinski, 2011). Furthermore, many Facebook users are sceptical about trusting businesses online. However, using a Facebook page to interact with consumers and educate them about the products will decrease that uncertainty (Revesz, 2012).

The Facebook page can also be a platform for consumers to promote the brand. Reading peer reviews, rather than company promotions, can increase the perception of reliability of the company and in turn may boost the number of people who 'like' the page (Dawson, 2010).

2.9. Website

Using the Internet to promote a business is essential, because people in today's world expect a company to have an online presence (Martin, 2011; Weinberg et al, 2007). A Company must identify a way to use its website to complement the rest of its business rather

than just latch the website onto it (Dawson, 2010; Liao et al, 2011; Revesz, 2012). The message conveyed through the company's website should reflect the brand and the image it wants to communicate to its clientele (Dawson, 2010).

Consumers use an organisation's website for a variety of reasons. They may go online in order to find help for an issue they may be experiencing or a question they have (EON, 2012). Furthermore, people may make use of the Internet when researching a product they may be interested in buying. In fact, one survey found that 70% of shoppers explored a company's website when trying to decide on a purchase (Revesz, 2012). Therefore, having a high-quality website is essential since it could be extremely influential in a consumer's purchase decision (Kumar, 2010; Roberts, 2010).

2.10. Mobile applications

With mobile devices becoming increasingly popular and more widely used, companies are developing applications (apps) in order to further communicate with consumers (Martin, 2011). It is advised that businesses should develop superior mobile apps initially so that consumers are able to use them and positively review them. As a result, that app will be well received as more consumers catch on to this growing trend (Revesz, 2012). Someone can stay connected to a brand with the use an app in order to comparison shop or even listen to an ad on a podcast (Kumar, 2010; Spiess, 2011; Stocker, 2012).

2.11. Reviews/ratings

Social media has allowed an increase in transparency for consumers. Such sites have given more power to those who use the products or services, rather than the companies themselves. More and more people turn to the Internet in order to investigate a purchase decision. When it comes to consumers who do use social media sites, 47% have shared the experiences they have had with a company (EON, 2012). These reviews can be invaluable to a company, since people tend to be more likely to make a purchase if they read about other experiences people have had and find positive reviews (Weinberg et al, 2007).

2.12. Text messages

Although this method is not utilised a great deal, some businesses send text messages to consumers (Dawson, 2010; Martin, 2011). This tactic may be personalised; however, some people may find this a nuisance.

3. Tools

3.1. Segmentation

Consumer segmentation is an important tool for companies to utilise when providing multiple channels. Consumers vary in which channels they use, therefore segmentation allows for enhanced customer interactions (Neslin & Shankar, 2009; Allis, 2012).

This is an essential step because it allows specific communication strategies to be developed with particular segments in mind. Individual groups of consumers may be more receptive of certain interactions with companies over other types of communications. Therefore being aware of the various segments interested in a business allows for improved decision-making when it comes to the distribution of resources (Kumar, 2010; Neslin & Shankar, 2009).

Knowing the divisions of consumers can also help a company decide where to advertise which of their products. It does not make financial sense to mass advertise all the business's offerings. If the company is aware of its consumers' buying habits, it will then be able to target important consumers more effectively (Henschen, 2011).

More valuable segments of consumers may call for more personalised communication efforts, so that a greater amount of funds should be allocated towards such segments. These valuable groups should receive exceptional treatment and be rewarded, so that they are more likely to be return customers (Allis, 2012). Segments that are less valuable to a company should be given less funding, since the messages going to these groups will not necessarily need to be as customised. If an organisation is able to appropriately allocate resources to its various segments, its profits can be significantly amplified (Kumar, 2010).

Segmenting people based on demographics can result in an improved insight into the profile of a typical consumer. Knowing this information can help a business to reach out to similar people and then categorise them into current segments (Thomas & Sullivan, 2005). Although demographic factors can be used in segmentation, psychographic characteristics may be even more important to use when dividing consumers into groups. This is because demographics may not be as reliable in predicting consumer behaviour as psychographic factors, such as attitudes, may be (Konus et al, 2008).

3.2. Customer-centric approach

In order to successfully implement a multichannel marketing strategy, a company must become focused on the customer rather than its offerings. This is because, as Smith phrases it, 'the customer is now in charge' (Smith, 2009). It is not enough to assume that the market's wants and needs are known. A company must learn about its customers and then market itself with that information in mind (Kumar, 2010; Smith, 2009). For instance, instead of identifying how to sell one product to a mass market, a company should work out how to sell its products to a particular consumer by finding out how to appeal to them (Kumar, 2010). A company must evaluate itself and make its decisions from a consumer's point of view (Smith, 2009; Weinberg et al, 2007). It is especially important to be sure to offer a variety of channels and choices for consumers (Stocker, 2012). People are often

unpredictable and make selections that were not foreseen by marketers. Therefore it is vital to monitor consumer behaviour to try to establish their evolving needs and wants (Weinberg et al, 2007). Furthermore, feedback from customers must be continuously monitored and assimilated into future strategies (Kumar, 2010).

3.3. Customer lifetime value

When it comes to a company's patrons, it is important to look at them not only based on who they are, but what kind of value they hold for the company. This term is known as the customer lifetime value, or CLV. Kumar (2010) notes that this term is defined as 'the sum of cumulated future cash flows – discounted using the Weighted Average Cost of Capital (WACC) – of a customer over his or her lifetime with the company'. The CLV of a customer in general varies depending on the channel through which that consumer was attained. Customers obtained through one channel may have a different retention rate compared with those obtained through another channel (Neslin & Shankar, 2009). Therefore it is important to look at the overall relationship with a consumer, rather than focusing on getting a purchase (Weinberg et al, 2007).

3.4. Timing

There are a few components of the timing element that are important to consider. The first is making sure that a consumer is contacted strategically, rather than bombarding them. It is necessary for companies to work out which of their communications are necessary and which are less critical, in order to create a sort of message hierarchy (Fowler, 2012). If a company is contacting someone too much, through too many channels, they may be offended and turned off by the company. Rather than wanting to look into that business more, that person will most likely respond in an adverse way. This is more likely to happen if the consumer feels as though the communication is becoming too intrusive (Godfrey et al, 2011). For that reason, companies should be strategic in how often they contact consumers (Fowler, 2012).

The second component is trying to figure out when people are more likely to interact with the various channels of a company. When it comes to shopping online, about 40% of individuals prefer to do so in the evening, between 18:00 and 22:00. However, only a small percentage (about 5%) of companies sends out promotional emails during this time. Furthermore, the majority of online shopping is done at the beginning of the week, from Monday to Wednesday. A vast majority of people (80%) tend to make in-store purchases at the weekend (Infogroup, 2012). It would make sense for companies to try to connect with people during the time when they are most likely to make purchases.

3.5. Customer data

An organisation must have an extensive comprehension of its consumers in order to effectively execute a multichannel marketing strategy. There must be a clear understanding of customer preferences and needs so that a company can decide how to best target people and provide the most desirable experience possible (Allis, 2012). However, it is vital that the information is cleansed so that the quality of data is high. This increases the value of the data for the company (Fowler, 2012; Martin, 2011). Once all data is collected and sorted, it is easier for a company to find any flaws in the data (Barker, 2011; Giddings, 2010). If a

company does not consistently update the information in its systems, it could be wasting time and making poor decisions (Barker, 2011).

Companies should know which methods of contact consumers prefer and respond to best, and be aware of previous customer value, demographics and purchase history (Kumar, 2010; Martin, 2011). When it comes to the consumer's purchase history, it is important to look at what channel was used, what the consumer bought and how much was spent (Thomas & Sullivan, 2005). Reviewing how a consumer behaves in individual channels and comparing that behaviour across channels will help to provide a complete picture of the consumer (Smith, 2009).

Although the possession and analysis of this data may improve the performance of the company (Neslin & Shankar, 2009), privacy issues are an increasing concern among consumers. Therefore companies may have a more difficult time trying to collect data, but they can decrease any anxieties with a guarantee that any personal data disclosed will be closely protected (Weinberg et al, 2007).

4. Moving between channels

4.1. Multichannel consumer behaviour

Consumers who are pressed for time generally do not partake in multichannel activities, and instead tend to favour one channel for shopping and doing research (Konus et al, 2008). However, multichannel shoppers may go through the buying process with the use of various channels. From researching about a product to any post-purchase support, people can make use of countless different channels. For instance, they may do research online through their Smartphone but then make the purchase in the actual store (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Weinberg et al, 2007). The choice of channel really depends on what the consumer is trying to do and how much extra assistance they may need (Liao et al, 2011).

People who do participate in multichannel behaviours tend to be more loyal and profitable to a company, due to the fact that these consumers are inclined to buy more (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Neslin & Shankar, 2009; Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010; Weinberg et al, 2007). People feel as though a business has more to offer when multiple channels are utilised and as a result they spend more (Godfrey et al, 2011). Furthermore, these shoppers tend to make more purchases, more frequently compared to non-multichannel shoppers (Neslin & Shankar, 2009; Thomas & Sullivan, 2005, Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010). In fact, multichannel shoppers spend, on average, four times more per year than single-channel shoppers (Giddings, 2010).

Another common behaviour of multichannel consumers is that channels used in the past influence purchases made later on. Consequently, businesses can examine past channels used in order to predict, to some extent, what channels will be utilised. Past channel use can also influence how a person views pricing. If a consumer has a good encounter in a store, they will not be as affected by the price of products online (Thomas & Sullivan, 2005).

As for how marketing efforts impact on consumers, it is common for people to become less receptive to the marketing actions of a company after they have already become a customer of that company. In the beginning of the relationship with the business, a consumer's decision on which channel to use is largely influenced by outside forces, including the marketing of that particular company. However, once that relationship is established, the channel choice of the consumer tends to be set in stone and it is more difficult for the company to alter the channel choice of the consumer (Valentini et al, 2011).

4.2. Consumer characteristics

Multichannel consumers could be described as having several generalised characteristics. One of these includes the idea that these shoppers tend to be innovative. A high level of innovativeness gives these consumers the desire to look into the latest channels (Konus et al, 2008). This group of consumers encompasses the younger generation, which is more willing to explore emergent technology (Valentini et al, 2011). This group also is looking to get more from retailers than older segments, just because that is what they are accustomed to (Spiess, 2011). Even though this faction of the population is highly receptive to new and

developing technologies, older generations are not completely out of the loop. They are still willing to explore and learn alternative channels (Revesz, 2012).

There has also been found to be a connection between multichannel behaviours and the income and educational level of the consumer. Multichannel consumers tend to have higher incomes and are better educated, which indicates that these people may have the necessary skills and resources to engage in that type of behaviour (Konuş et al, 2008). Furthermore, multichannel customers tend to be more price conscious, and therefore use a variety of channels in order to find the best price available (Konuş et al, 2008).

4.3. Management software

As a result of consumer data becoming more valuable, there have been improvements in how that data is collected and stored. The cost of data storage has been reduced over the past few decades, with enhanced technologies. This is beneficial to companies since there is an ever-increasing need for data to be analysed to work out how to operate more efficiently and better serve their customers (Kumar, 2010). The management software that a company acquires should be able to produce the variety of reports that the company may call for. The organisation should also do research on the software in order to find current information on the latest version and to look into how other companies are using such software (Schell, 2011).

4.4. Analysis of data

Once a company has collected data, it is crucial to look critically at it so they can make the most out of it. According to a 2012 survey, over 60% of businesses stated that they presently use this technique or are looking to incorporate it into their business in the near future (PR Newswire, 2012). Analysed data can give a company evidence about which groups they should target with a specific campaign, and which channels will be most effective (Henschen, 2011). It also helps a company to maintain a clear image of who their main consumers are, and what they are looking for. If the company can adapt to their customers' evolving needs and wants, they are less likely to lose them to competitors (Roberts, 2010). In addition, this information will allow a company to better predict the future behaviours of their clientele. Consequently, they will have an improved understanding of which channels a consumer is likely to respond to, as well as use for future purchases (Thomas & Sullivan, 2005).

Gathering information from each interaction with a customer will give an overall picture of the performance of the company, as well as how each channel is doing individually. These broken-down statistics will show a company how to enhance the effectiveness of each channel they use (Allis, 2012).

The key difficulty with analysing data for a multichannel business is that most data management systems have been developed for a single channel. Some of the tools include web and email analytics, social media monitoring and call tracking (Shapiro, 2012). As a result, companies have to piece together analysed data from those separate channels with the assistance of an individual. Furthermore, it is hard to follow exactly how a customer came to their purchase. This makes it increasingly complex to analyse the behaviour of a multichannel consumer (Weinberg et al, 2007).

5. Channel evolution

5.1. One-to-one marketing

Mass marketing messages were once used by companies to entice customers to buy products or choose their services. However, these 'one size fits all' marketing strategies no longer work for companies trying to appeal to consumers. Organisations have more information than ever about their target market and can now put a face to those people. As a result of this transformation in society, people are less likely to respond to traditional one-way marketing methods, such as print and radio advertisements, and are expecting to receive more personalised messages (Kumar, 2010). This shift towards one-to-one marketing has caused interaction with buyers to become vital, and as a result businesses have begun to focus their marketing objectives on having a more personal tactics (Musso, 2010; Weinberg et al, 2007). Consumers have, in a way, come to expect companies to use fewer generalised messages, and instead expect to be treated as individuals.

6. Investment decisions

6.1. Resource allocation

The distribution of resources should be based on hard data, rather than the cost of the channel. Companies should consider a wide range of factors when allocating money. These may include trends in the marketplace, previous performance of channels, segmentation, how competitors are spending money and channel effectiveness (Barker, 2011; Kumar, 2010).

Furthermore, customer segmentation should be taken into consideration when deciding where to spend money. By going this route, marketers can look into how valuable each segment is and allocate resources based on that. If certain groups are found to be more profitable, more resources should be devoted to them (Barker, 2011; Kumar, 2010; Weinberg et al, 2007).

6.2. Cost

Utilising a multichannel approach can be cost effective if it is carried out properly (Henschen, 2011). In fact, according to Allis (2012), multichannel marketing tactics may cut 'support costs by an average of 21% over 12 months'. As the number of channels increases, the numbers of marketing experts within the department will most likely need to increase as well. However, these employees will be able to be used across various channels, which allows a decrease in the number of employees per channel. For instance, a business may have 30 marketers for one channel, but may only need to hire a few additional staff members when they introduce another channel (Neslin & Shankar, 2009).

When it comes to selecting channels to devote resources to, it is not a good idea to base decisions solely on cost. As more consumers move to using mobile devices to stay connected, companies are devoting an increasing amount of money to online communication (Barker, 2011). Businesses in today's world are experiencing an immense amount of pressure to cut costs while increasing profits (Bruce et al, 2009). Although online channels are less expensive than other channels, an organisation should not automatically try to switch to mostly online communication. Rather, a business should devote resources based on several factors, including their target consumer preferences and the goals of the company (Weinberg et al, 2007; Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010).

6.3. Choosing channels

Deciding which channels to utilise can be a complex process since there are countless outside factors that companies need to consider. First of all, the purpose of the communication can have an impact on which mode is chosen. If the company is in the early stages of connecting with consumers, it will want to create brand awareness and begin to develop relationships with the public. In these relationships it is more likely to utilise mass media channels with the use of generalised messages (Kumar, 2010). The channels used in the early stages may differ from the effective channels used later on in consumer relationships.

Furthermore, the stage of the relationship in addition to the value of the consumer can influence which channels a company may push that person to use (Kumar, 2010; Neslin & Shankar, 2009). A company is more likely to devote a greater amount of spending to customers who it considers to be more valuable. For instance, it may encourage these people to call for a more personalised customer service experience, whereas it may wish low-value consumers to use email instead (Kumar, 2010; Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010).

Target consumer channel preferences should also be taken into consideration when deciding on which channels to pursue. Customers react in a more positive way when companies communicate with them through channels they favour compared to channels they dislike (Godfrey et al, 2011). Therefore it is imperative to know how clientele are behaving and which channels will be the best choice for the particular company. It is not about being multichannel for the sake of being 'multichannel'. Rather a company should invest in the channels that people are involved in (Stocker, 2012). However, companies should offer enough options to their consumers to keep them satisfied. Otherwise there is the possibility that those shoppers may be unhappy with their experience with the company and therefore discontinue their relationship with it (Choi & Mattila, 2009). The overall idea is that an organisation should consider each channel separately, but still figure out how to make them all work together (Dawson, 2010).

6.4. Crediting channels

One of the major problems with using multichannel marketing is deciding how to attribute credit with the correct channels. There are countless places where a consumer can now go to do research prior to making a purchase. If a purchase is made in store, it may receive all the credit. However, that customer may have seen an item in a catalogue and then gone online to the store's website to look at it further before heading to the store to make the final purchase. However, those locations, such as the organisation's website, may not be given as much appreciation if the actual transaction did not take place there. A business should therefore attempt to credit channels used for research in conjunction with those channels that are actually used to make the purchase (Henschen, 2011; Neslin & Shankar, 2009).

6.5. Metrics for measurement

Determining how effective a multichannel marketing plan is can be difficult. According to Kumar (2010) key performance measurement evaluations include the use of customer lifetime value and customer equity. However, the organisation should keep track of each of its separate marketing campaigns and calculate the results of each. It should look at how customer segments responded to advertisements and attempt to match purchases with specific marketing campaigns (Henschen, 2011). Offline channels are harder to track and analyse compared to online channels, yet there is an increasing number of tools making measurement easier (Shapiro, 2012). Most businesses are aware of how to measure the effects of these separate campaigns; however, they have a more difficult time trying to work out how channels work together to impact on the company's performance (Weinberg et al, 2007). Many businesses use a 'last touch approach' and deem a consumer's last interaction as that which caused the purchase. A marketer can allocate a certain amount of credit to each channel based on previous consumer preferences; by doing this the credit will be distributed among multiple campaigns rather than handing it all to one (Young, 2012).

6.6. Return on investment

Since channels have varying operating and consumer-acquisition costs, it is important to figure out what each of their potential returns on investment (ROI) may be (Neslin & Shankar, 2009). Linking together several channels to use during a marketing campaign can increase the number of consumers reached, which in turn can lead to a better ROI (Dawson, 2010; Godfrey et al, 2011). However, it is difficult to measure the ROI of a multichannel marketing campaign, just as it is complicated to measure the success of each of the channels together (Shapiro, 2012). Since consumers may carry out research using various forms of media, it may be difficult to attribute the final sale to every channel used prior to the purchase (Weinberg et al, 2007). Overall, companies can increase their ROI if they improve on the data they have and collect (Barker, 2011).

6.7. Customer satisfaction

Obtaining high customer satisfaction is extremely desirable for a firm to achieve. This is due to the fact that consumers who are satisfied with the performance of a company are not only more likely to make purchases from that company, but are also more likely to spend a greater amount (EON, 2012). Furthermore, these customers are more likely to stay with the company and make purchases in the future. This saves the company the cost of attempting to reach new consumers (Martin, 2011). Customer satisfaction can be increased in a variety of ways. It has been found that increasing the number of channels can boost the level of satisfaction among customers. Additionally, a business can present recommendations for products based on past purchases and preferences. However, this tactic needs to be exercised carefully, since recommending products that do not align with a consumer's likings may deter them from the company (Godfrey et al, 2011).

7. Optimising channels

7.1. Cross-department approach

In order for a company to be successful in its multichannel marketing endeavours, it must be well co-ordinated with the use of a cross-department approach (Musso, 2010). Customer data comes from all divisions of a company, ranging from the IT department to merchandising. Therefore it is necessary for divisions to be open so that information is able to flow easily throughout the company (Smith, 2009; Weinberg et al, 2007).

Running the company as one unit, rather than as multiple separate departments, enables it to be run more efficiently. This is because joint economic decisions can be made, rather than each department making its own, allowing for profits to be maximised (Neslin & Shankar, 2009).

7.2. Promotion of other channels

Using one channel to encourage consumers to visit another is a good tactic to enhance the use of a variety of channels, since multichannel users tend to spend more money. It is imperative for a company to promote its website when participating in something like a direct mail campaign. It has been shown that advertising of the brand's website in conjunction with another channel enhances the total outcome of the promotion (Dawson, 2010).

Although the Internet is a cheaper channel, it is important to try to get consumers into the physical store. These locations allow for more personal interaction (Weinberg et al, 2007) and create more in-store traffic, which may result in more purchases (Neslin & Shankar, 2009). One way in which a business can do this is by sending emails that contain promotions or sales. Just as important, though, is to get in-store customers onto the store's website by some means. This could be accomplished through recommendations by the employees, coupons for online use that are printed at the checkout or including the website details on the receipt itself (Roberts, 2010).

7.3. Interactivity

Recent years have seen a massive increase in the use of more interactive channels, such as social media and emails (Bruce et al, 2009). With customers now becoming the focus of companies, consumer interaction has come to be expected. Mutual interaction between the organisation and its clientele assists in the building of bonds between consumers and the company (Kumar, 2010). This increase in interaction has been facilitated greatly by the growth of the Internet and other technologies (Dawson, 2010).

7.4. Organisational culture

As companies adopt an increasing number of new touchpoints, they need to decide how to incorporate them into their already established culture. It is difficult for many staff members to willingly accept and adapt to the wide range of channels (Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010). It is also vital for companies to hire the right people when it comes to a multichannel culture.

They must possess the technical skills required to work in the industry, while still being able to work well with people and build relationships with their customer base. To go one step further, companies have begun to invest in hiring people with specific facets of expertise, rather than overall experts of e-commerce (Stocker, 2012). Most importantly, an organisation must properly train employees to understand each separate channel and figure out how to appropriately guide consumers to their best-fit channel (Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010).

7.5. Structure

Multichannel systems are bigger than marketing systems with only one channel (Weinberg et al, 2007). A company cannot function independently, with a 'silo management' style (Smith, 2009; Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010). Instead a company needs to learn how to be flexible so that it is able to adapt to a continuously evolving environment (Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010). This increase in size and complexity requires a company to structure itself in a co-ordinated, cross-departmental way (Neslin & Shankar, 2009; Weinberg et al, 2007.). Competition between channels may occur without this co-ordination, which could lead to consumer confusion and use of inappropriate channels (Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010).

7.6. Customer relationships

It is important for a company to develop bonds with consumers in order to secure future interactions with them. It costs less for a company to retain a consumer than it does to try to gain new ones. Furthermore, good customer relationships can increase the likelihood of customers talking to others about their interactions with the company.

Customer relationships can be developed through consistently positive encounters with the company, which then leads to an increase in confidence in the company. If a consumer is satisfied with their interactions with the business, they will be more likely to develop a bond with the brand (Liao et al, 2011; Musso, 2010). However, the chances of them developing a relationship will be hindered if they become aggravated with a company due to poor experiences (Liao et al, 2011).

Improvements in technology have led to better, more personalised communications (PR Newswire, 2012). Although these interactions can assist in building long-term relationships with customers, it is important for a company to monitor its interactions. A consumer's trust in the company will most likely decrease if they perceive messages from the organisation as being intrusive or overwhelming (Godfrey et al, 2011).

8. Consumer expectations

8.1. Spending habits (between channels)

It has been found that, in many cases, an organisation that is multichannel has higher prices than firms that are purely online based. This is generally due to the fact that these businesses offer more to customers, which in turn allows them to charge a higher price (Neslin & Shankar, 2009). Typically, consumers are willing to pay a little more in order to receive customer service. However, if they do not feel as though they received any added benefit, they will not want to pay a premium price (Choi & Mattila, 2009). Furthermore, social media users are more likely to spend a greater amount of money on a purchase, compared to the general public, if they are pleased with the customer service they encounter (EON, 2012). In addition, shoppers who consider themselves multichannel spend a greater amount of money compared with those who shop through one channel (Weinberg et al, 2007).

8.2. Message customisation

Although a company may send a generic message to the masses in order to increase brand awareness, other situations may call for a company to tailor the message of its marketing campaign (Dawson, 2010; Konuş et al, 2008). This is imperative, especially when a company is trying to grab the attention of a particular targeted consumer (Henschen, 2011). With businesses now revolving around consumers, and a growing trend of being constantly connected through channels such as social media, most consumers instinctively anticipate hearing messages that they can relate to (Schell, 2011; Bruce et al, 2009).

According to Kumar (2010) 'personalisation is when the firm decides, usually based on previously collected customer data, what marketing mix is suitable for the individual'. One prime example is how Amazon gives suggestions of products that a consumer may like, based on past purchases (Kumar, 2010). Targeting consumers with specific recommendations may make people more likely to make a purchase and therefore further invest in the company. Companies are able to generate value for a consumer when they are able to deliver a personalised experience (Bruce et al, 2009).

8.3. Convenience

Consumers expect convenience and ease of use when it comes to using multichannel companies. They want to have a wide range of options so that they can find the best channel to suit their needs, without too much hassle (Choi and Mattila, 2009). They do not want to have to devote any more time than is necessary, or to have to go out of their way, in order to interact with a company. That is why consumers find online shopping convenient. They can shop right from home and do not have to waste time or money in order to physically travel to the store (Musso, 2010). There are some downsides to the convenience of online shopping, though. Consumers are frustrated when they make a purchase online and cannot return it to the actual store. This inconvenience to the consumer may deter them from future interactions with the company, and they may search for another company to fulfil their needs (Roberts, 2010).

8.4. Message consistency

Developing and implementing a clear message across all the channels of an organisation is necessary in a multichannel marketing scheme. It can be challenging for a company to make sure they provide sufficient information and service levels at all points of contact (Liao et al, 2011). However, this consistency can aid in making consumers aware of the identity of the brand (Neslin & Shankar, 2009; Weinberg et al, 2007).

Each separate channel should work together in an attempt to complement each other. Customers should be able to move easily from one channel to the next without feeling any disconnect (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Dawson, 2010; Weinberg et al, 2007). Any division in message may result in customer uncertainty and frustration, and ultimately the loss of the customer (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Konuş et al, 2008). However, message consistency can improve a company's results and their relationships with their clientele (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Henschen, 2011).

8.5. Integration

Consumers now have the belief that a company will be entirely integrated: from its marketing message to every channel it uses. Therefore a business should focus on blending itself, so that consumers have a uniform experience across the entire brand (Allis, 2012; Bruce et al, 2009). This idea includes the concept of a consumer being able to move between various media forms with ease (Dawson, 2010; Revesz, 2012). Integration also should include adding social media aspects to channels that already exist in order to make them more interactive and relatable (Legwinski, 2011). By integrating new channels with ones that already exist, companies can create added benefits that the single channels could not offer by themselves (Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010).

Integration is key in keeping consumers happy (Bruce et al, 2009). If an organisation fails to fully integrate itself, it may lose potential clients (Valos, 2009; Valos et al, 2010). In fact, Roberts (2010) states that 'up to 60% of potential customers slip through numerous gaps in their multichannel purchasing strategies' as a result of poor integration.

8.6. Customer service

Superior customer service can help strengthen a company's image and relationships with its clientele (EON, 2012). In the market today, this calls for outstanding interpersonal skill, personalised service and quick response (Allis, 2012). The experience a consumer has during their customer service encounter can affect their future business with the company. If the person is unhappy with their experience, they are more likely to view the company unfavourably and think twice before making another purchase (EON, 2012).

Providing good service for a customer can lead to those people talking about their experiences with others. Customers who utilised social media channels for their service were also more likely to share with others their positive encounters with the company than those who did not use social media (EON, 2012). Overall, however, there has been an increasing trend for consumers to attempt to solve problems on their own, using the Internet or company's website, before seeking the help of the customer service department (Weinberg et al, 2007).

8.7. Cost perception

It is reasonable to expect that consumers may view price variations across channels as unfair. There are certain exceptions to this rule, however. If price differentiation is normal within a certain industry, for example airline costs, then consumers will view this practice as less unethical than if a company in an industry where this is not commonplace were to vary prices across channels (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Konuş et al, 2008).

Another way in which price differentiation may be achieved without perceived unfairness is to improve the service or the offerings of the higher priced channel. Consumers may be willing to pay more, as long as they receive more in return. For instance, consumers may be willing to pay more in a store if they receive good customer service during their time there (EON, 2012; Neslin & Shankar, 2009).

9. Who is doing it well? Case studies of multichannel companies

9.1. Domino's Pizza

The pizza chain, Domino's, could be looked at as an example of a company that knows how to do multichannel marketing well. The major reason that this business is an ideal example is because it takes a customer-centric approach. The company has reinvented itself, both through improved recipes and finding more ways to incorporate consumers into the experience. By using up-to-date marketing techniques, Domino's was able to increase its earnings during 2011 (Baker, 2012).

Lance Batchelor, CEO of Domino's, summarised the techniques it used in order to maintain its success:

'We continue to use these relatively low cost methods to promote new products, reward our top customers and create excitement in the brand.'

(Baker, 2012)

Domino's has decided to market itself to consumers in a more personal way. One of the major ways is by interacting with consumers as much as possible and keeping them engaged. Domino's has been able to do this by building up its use of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. These sites are used as a place to advertise promotions and special offers (Baker, 2012). Both sites are also used as a customer service platform. Domino's is interested in what their customers have to say about the brand. They want to know what they are doing well and what consumers are unhappy about. This knowledge is invaluable to the company, which is why it also encourages consumers to review their orders on the website. They are confident in their product and brand but know there are areas where they can improve (Schiff, 2012).

Domino's is not only using the Internet to gather consumers' thoughts and concerns. It has also become a stronger presence where consumers are spending more time: online and on their mobile devices. The pizza chain recognised that consumers appreciate the convenience of the Internet, and as a result Domino's has developed its website and mobile app to engage customers in the pizza delivery process (Kumar, 2010; RestaurantNews.com, 2011; Schiff, 2012). Although people are able to place orders on the website and through the mobile app, the website displays an animated pizza so consumers are able to actually see the pizzas they are creating (Kumar, 2010; Schiff, 2012).

The use of online ordering has increased tremendously in recent years. In the week 28 November to 4 December 2011, a record one million pizzas were ordered from Domino's via the online system and mobile app. At the end of 2011, online orders comprised around 30% of all of Domino's orders (RestaurantNews.com, 2011). Furthermore, Domino's saw 14% of all online sales come from apps in the final quarter of 2011 (Baker, 2012). This number is only likely to grow as increasing numbers of people are using mobile devices. Not only can consumers order a pizza online, but the site and mobile app allow customers to use the 'pizza tracker', which follows their orders throughout the whole process until delivered to their homes (Schiff, 2012).

9.2. Best Buy

Another company that has turned its focus to exceptional multichannel experience is Best Buy. This specialised business is aware that it is competing with cheaper online-only retailers and discount chains, such as Walmart and Target. As a result, Best Buy understands that it needs to concentrate on its clientele and figure out how they want to shop and what they are looking for (Kale, 2012). The company is moving forward with its intentions to increase its online presence while decreasing its overall physical presence (Bustillo, 2011; Wolf, 2011). Best Buy increased its online revenue by 13% in 2011 alone (Wolf, 2011). It is making its bricks and mortar stores smaller and offering a wider range of products online (Webb, 2011; Wolf, 2011). Selling a large majority of products online only allows Best Buy to offer those products for a lower price (Webb, 2011). They also offer a daily special sale price online with their 'deal of the day'. Furthermore, Best Buy also offers a marketplace in which third parties sell through the Best Buy website (Wolf, 2011).

It has also increased its presence in mobile technology by introducing a number of apps for smartphones. It has a basic app that provides information on such things as products and store locations. The 'reward zone' app allows reward members to keep track of their purchases and points earned for products. The 'buyback' app allows consumers to look up their old electronic devices and see what they are worth. The customer can then choose to sell back their product in exchange for a gift card, which can be used to buy a more recent model of the resold product. This programme is an incentive for consumers to stay up to date with the latest forms of technology while keeping their money invested in Best Buy (Kale, 2012).

Best Buy understands that a key part of having a successful multichannel approach is by delivering a consistent message across channels. They have cited wanting to take a 'bricks and clicks' approach and plan to do that by creating a closer connection between a consumer's online and in-store experience (E-Commercefacts, 2012). One way in which the company has made this link easier is by allowing consumers to order a product online, but pick it up in the store (Haus, 2011; Webb, 2011). Best Buy also offers a 'friends and family pickup', where one consumer can order a product online and have it sent to a store for someone else to pick up. For instance, a mother can order a product and have it ready to be picked up at a store by her son's college (Haus, 2011). This cuts out the shipping costs while getting the consumers into the store at the same time.

Best Buy has improved the way it collects data and now keeps real-time information on customers. This allows Best Buy to lock into trends of consumer wants and needs much quicker than they were able to in the past (Haus, 2011). By looking at the trends, Best Buy was able to clearly see areas in which consumers were increasing their spending but the company was lacking. This is the reason Best Buy began to open small 'Best Buy Mobile' stores. These stores focus solely on selling mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets (Bustillo, 2011; Webb, 2011; Wolf, 2011). Rather than having to go to one of the huge Best Buy stores, consumers can go to the Best Buy Mobile store and receive more personalised attention. These stores have allowed the company to secure a solid footing in the growing area of mobile devices.

Not only is collecting data through devices and sales important, but Best Buy also knows it is vital to listen to the consumers concerns as well. It has begun to tap into a valuable resource: their employees. The workers at Best Buy experience firsthand the complaints and omitted needs of consumers on a daily basis. As a result, the company launched its programme: 'The voice of the customer through the employee'. This allows workers to share thoughts that consumers have told them. Best Buy is able to hear feedback that it might not hear otherwise (Haus, 2011).

	Channel Decisions											Consumer Behavior												
	Channel	Investment Decisio				Optimizing Channels							Consumer Expectations				Response							
		One-to-One Marketing	Resource Allocation	Cost	Choosing Channels	Metrics for Measurement	ROI	Customer Satisfaction	Cross Department Approach	Promotion (of other channels)	Interactivity	Organizational Culture	Structure	Human Resource Support	Customer Relationships	Spending Habits (between Channels)	Message Customization	Convenience	Message Consistency	Integration	Customer Service	Quality	Consumer Evolution (new vs old customers)	Consumer Channel Decision
Kumar (2010)		X			X				X				X		X									
Valos et al (2009)										X	X													
Bruce et al. (2009)			X		X				X						X				X					
Baker (2012)																								
Schiff (2012)																								
Henschen (2011)		X	X		X										X						X			
Neslin & Shankar (2009)				X							X				X				X					
Dawson (2010)				X		X			X						X		X							
Giddings (2010)					X										X									
Legwinski (2011)																				X				
Allis (2012)			X				X									X		X	X	X				
Fowler (2012)																								
Valos (2010)			X							X	X													
Thomas & Sullivan (2005)				X																				
Liao et al (2011)														X				X				X		
Barker (2011)		X		X															X					
Godfrey et al (2011)				X		X								X	X	X								
Martin (2011)			X											X										
Shapiro (2012)			X		X	X																		
PR Newswire (2012)					X									X										
Smith (2009)							X																	
Schell (2011)															X									
Revesz (2012)				X		X					X							X	X	X				
Stocker (2012)																		X						
Konus et al (2008)										X														
Roberts (2010)								X							X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
EON (2012)						X								X	X					X	X			
Weinberg et al (2007)	X		X		X	X	X				X				X			X	X	X				
Infogroup (2012)								X																
Valentini et al (2011)						X																X	X	
Musso (2010)	X						X			X	X		X			X		X						
Choi & Mattila (2009)		X													X	X	X		X					X
Spiess (2011)																								
Young (2012)				X	X	X									X									

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The Henley Centre for Customer Management

The primary objective of the Henley Centre for Customer Management is to promote customer focus and service excellence best practice through observing practice in leading companies and synthesising this into useful knowledge that helps members to improve their own customer management and customer service plans and implementations.

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