

# The key to unlocking multichannel success

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## Introduction

The customer's path to purchase will continue to grow in complexity; cross-, multi-, and omni-channel shopping is here to stay. People today use multiple devices for researching, purchasing, and returning products, and because they engage with businesses in a non-linear manner, they also expect their experiences to be consistent, no matter the channel.

In the end, these advances in technology will work to continually improve the customer's experience. But the execution itself gets very complex. With customer data streaming in from as many channels as there are, businesses must have a strong grasp on managing it or risk losing the benefits that come from being able to use their data successfully.

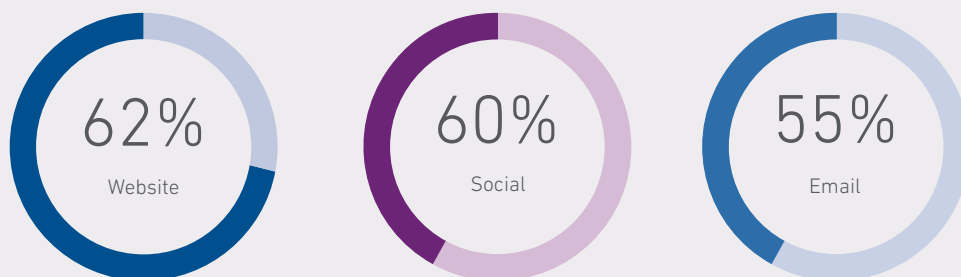
This white paper will detail how to manage data quality when dealing in multichannel environments, and how we can help you make a great multichannel experience a reality.

## Data quality: The key to unlocking multichannel success

A multichannel strategy ensures that you reach the right customers, at the right time, using the right channels and the right messages. It ensures that you focus marketing efforts, engage customers more effectively, and achieve better return on investment for your efforts.

It's hardly surprising that so much emphasis is placed on multichannel initiatives, given that our global research studies have indicated that companies now use at least three channels to collect customer contact information.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of organizations have adopted multichannel strategies, reflecting a significant shift in the ways that customers engage businesses. The website, for example, is the most likely channel to be integrated into these multichannel initiatives at 62 percent, followed by social at 60 percent, and email at 55 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Chart 1  
Most popular channels used in multichannel initiatives:



Source: 2016 Global Data Management Benchmark Report

But there are also significant barriers to realizing multichannel returns. Multiple channels bring new forms of engagement, but also demand new ways of dealing with data. While offering fresh opportunities, multichannel complexities are presenting new challenges.

Close to a third of companies identify multiple channels as a cause of duplicated contact entries. This is leading to a crisis of confidence in customer information: Inaccurate data is undermining a business's ability to provide an excellent customer service. Incomplete or missing data (60%), outdated information (54%), and duplicate data (51%) are the biggest data quality problems for organizations.<sup>3</sup>

Businesses now acknowledge that data quality is essential in achieving deep customer insight, and ultimately a single customer view (SCV). This is particularly prevalent in industries such as retail, finance, and leisure. As one multichannel director of a retail organization said in a recent Retail Week report,<sup>4</sup> "The most important thing last year was mobile and this year it is having a single view of our customer." Indeed, having a single customer view and getting to a holistic customer journey are increasingly areas for optimization in a multichannel world.

It's encouraging to see that almost all companies surveyed, 99 percent, have now initiated data quality strategies.<sup>5</sup> With robust a data quality strategy that can deal with the complexity of multiple channels, organizations can now turn the customer messaging model on its head. In the old days, we deployed mass communications to engage with a few individuals. Today, multichannel approaches allow us to identify, understand, and target communications to individuals and engage effectively with millions.

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Close to a third of companies identify multiple channels as a cause of duplicated contact entries in their database.

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### Why data quality counts

Today, companies need to take a holistic approach to their customers, looking at the entire customer journey and not just the point of sale. Messages need to reach audiences before, during, and after sales and be delivered through relevant channels. And of course, the reward for getting this messaging right is transforming a customer into a loyal and long-term one.

Just 20 years ago, this level of engagement would have been impossible—interaction was confined to a few advertising channels that simply broadcast messages. Businesses may have approached 1,000 people, but appealed to only 10. Now, we have the opportunity to learn far more about a customer. But we can only do this if we can 'see' them across channels.

Let's use an example of an ideal consumer and call him Jimmy Emails. In sending out 1,000 messages, we now appeal to 1,000 people just like Jimmy. We need to identify Jimmy in various guises: at home, on his landline, using his smartphone, on email, and surfing the web. By capturing, storing, and managing the data we know about Jimmy through those different interactions, we can now send out 1,000 messages and appeal to 1,000 other customers like Jimmy.

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Data quality turns addresses into individuals

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To offer Jimmy, and other customers like him, what they want, we as businesses need to know that behind each screen is an individual, such as his:

- Home address
- Multiple personal and work email addresses
- Mobile phone number(s)
- Online identity to understand searching behavior

### Turning multiple channels into a single view

With a well-planned data quality strategy, we can accurately capture and link Jimmy's multiple engagement points into one identity. It gives us a single customer view into his multichannel activity. Having this SCV means that when Jimmy tells us he doesn't want to be called on his landline, but doesn't mind mobile calls, texts, or emails, we can contact him in a way that's convenient and more likely to generate a positive response.

The SCV is an identity that can be shared across an organization, so there is cohesive understanding of the customer and the ability to create campaigns and communications that work for, rather than against, each other.

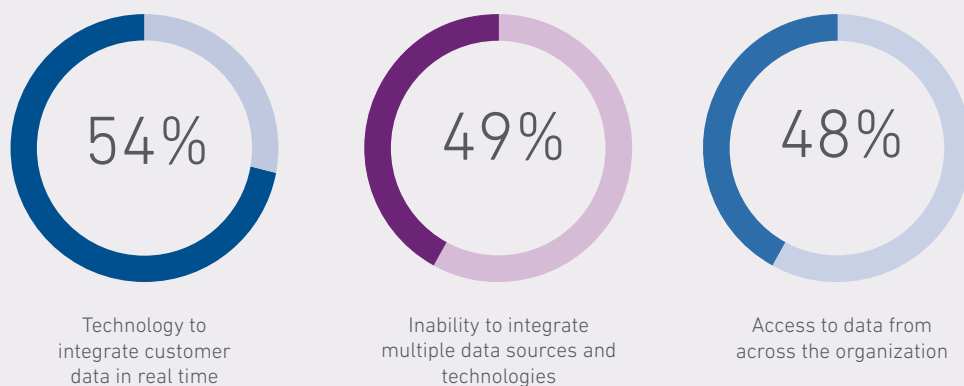
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### The data quality key

When used with high quality data, multichannel strategies unlock:

- Greater reach and impact
  - Content that resonates with individuals through their preferred channels
  - Higher conversion rates by marketing products and services that customers really want
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Chart 2  
Top challenges to creating a single customer view:



Source: 2016 Global Data Management Benchmark Report

An SCV and good quality multichannel data can make all the difference to your customer experience while inaccurate data can let you down. Let's consider some examples:

#### Good quality data

Contact customers when it suits them. By capturing and storing accurate information about when customers prefer to interact with you, they'll be far more receptive.

Be more relevant. With a consolidated view of your customers' likes, you can text relevant offers if you have correct mobile numbers.

Be more timely. Connect what you know customers are interested in with their in-store activity and it's possible to send relevant offers by SMS when they pass your store.

#### Poor quality data

Miss your customers. Key insight into what customers are searching for online goes wasted if you haven't got the correct email address to send them relevant offers.

Annoy potential customers. If you can't tell exactly what customers are looking for, then bombarding them with potentially irrelevant communications could turn them against you.

Damage your reputation. If you can't match customers' multichannel activity to a single identity, there's a high chance you'll mail them multiple times and that they'll turn to a competitor.

## The cost of poor data quality

The glittering prizes of effective multichannel strategies depend on high quality data. The ability to link a customer on a website with the person who is on the phone or in-store is critical to success. Not being able to do so is almost always the fault of poor data quality management, such as inaccuracies in customer name, address, telephone, and email address.

And it's worth noting that, as we move further into a multichannel world, this attention to detail will only become more important. Failure to focus on the accuracy of your data not only squanders the benefits, but also magnifies the negatives.

**Dissatisfied customers** – As customers come to expect seamless channel interactions, companies that don't make the grade will become increasingly exposed. Jimmy and millions like him will always shop at companies that engage at the right times, use the right channels, with the content and customer service they prefer. Poor quality data leads to an incomplete picture, which in turn leads to poor decision making and strategies. It also carries a substantial hit in terms of brand reputation damage and lost customers.

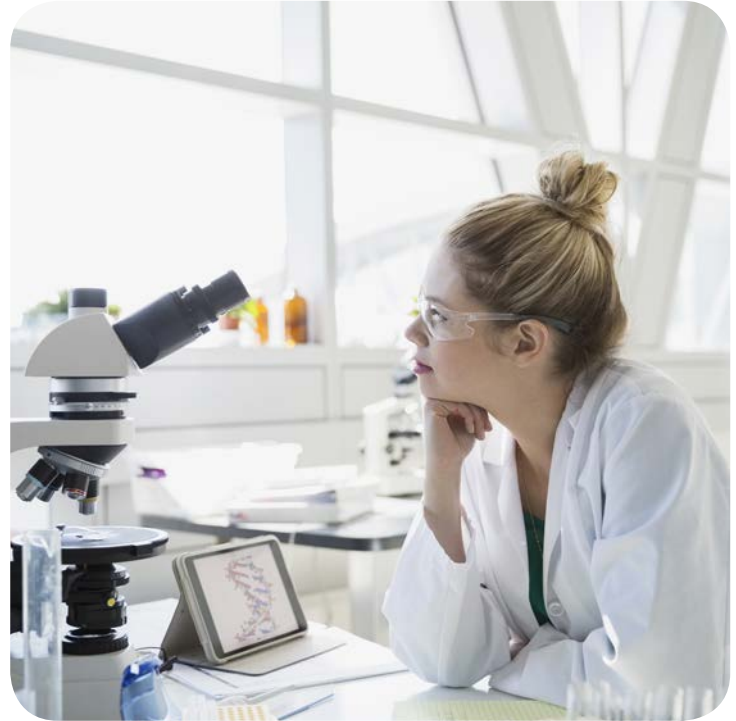
**Increasing costs** – An unhappy customer is an expensive customer, one that incurs additional costs, as a company must invest time and effort in sorting through customer challenges. Also, with no data linkage, every time the customer interacts using a different channel, employees must go through the process of re-registering them, time and time again. Indirect costs include: staff time and effort wasted in manually re-validating customer data, inefficiencies in customer data entry, developing additional time-consuming procedures to counter data quality issues, and in extreme circumstances, paying fines due to non-compliance.

Businesses believe 23 percent of their customer or prospect data to be inaccurate.<sup>6</sup> However, with 84 percent of companies having a loyalty or customer engagement program in place, this particular stat represents a thorny issue. The unfortunate reality is that 74 percent of companies have encountered problems with these programs, and that 12 percent of revenue is believed to be wasted as a result. For users working with data for business intelligence and analytics, poor data quality stands in their way. For marketers trying to communicate through



email, direct mail, and SMS campaigns, poor data quality means an inability in increasing new customers while continuing to appeal to loyal customers.

Think of data quality as preventative medicine for a costly and entirely avoidable illness. What is an initial investment will only help your organization in the long run as it alleviates many downstream consequences.



### Having high quality data pays

Data quality is essential to successful multichannel strategies, so focusing on data is a good investment. Put measures in place that govern the data quality monitoring processes, where data quality issues are proactively detected across channels.

- Invest in profiling technologies to identify data quality issues that can lead to dissatisfied customers or increased costs, and where necessary, perform root cause analysis to identify the source of these issues
- Invest in automation to correct typical data quality issues, and allocate resources to tackle unknown problems
- Invest in robust reference data to make the process of validating customer channel data easier for employees and systems
- Determine which channel data (e.g. website, mobile, etc.) impacts the customer journey the most and identify priority areas so that employees can focus on what's most important

## The data quality checklist

Making the multichannel journey requires some careful planning and this three-point checklist will help you to create a data quality foundation on which to build a future-proof multichannel operation.

1.

### Analyze

Identify data quality issues through profiling your data and investigating root cause

2.

### Improve

Manage data quality through real-time validation, prevent degradation through cleansing, improve efficiencies in channel management through a single customer view, and generate insight from data by enriching it

3.

### Control

Prevent poor data from creeping into your systems by proactively monitoring for known high priority data quality issues

## The three-point data quality checklist

### 1. Analyze – Data profiling and root cause analysis

The very first step is to identify two factors:

- The channels that are critical to each part of your customers' journeys
- The data that is critical for the success of the channels you have identified

This understanding allows you to prioritize precisely what data you need and to manage multichannel data quality. Assess your data using audits and data profiling to identify issues, find the root cause, and put in place a prioritized plan to tackle them.

### 2. Improve – Validate, cleanse, integrate, and enrich

**Real time validation** – poor data should be tackled by taking a proactive approach to verification at the moment of capture. Proactivity here means incorporating address, email, and mobile validation into online and internal system forms. By doing everything you can to validate at point of entry, you will be able to stop bad data from creeping into the business.



## The three-point data quality checklist

You can also use the point of capture to gain additional information, such as communication preferences. These preferences can be continually updated during subsequent interactions, so that the business has an ongoing understanding of how best to engage with individual customers.

**Data cleansing** – no matter how well verified data is at the moment of capture, data accuracy will degrade over time. Databases should be cleansed regularly to ensure that customer information remains relevant and accurate. Cleansing options should ideally cover all possible channels. For example, while a strong focus is placed on address accuracy, the same should be applied to email and mobile channels as well.

**Creating a single customer view** – accurate data brings you the foundation you need to create a single customer view. The first step is to link customers to their multichannel identities. In essence, an SCV brings the business a collection of past interactions, purchases, and preferences, which can then inform present and future engagement. Building an SCV creates a single customer record that links all channel engagements during the customer journey.

**Additional insight through enrichment** – to gain real multichannel understanding of your customers, you should consider appending additional data. As an example, combining your data with demographic information can broaden and deepen customer insight. Knowing a customer's home address, for example, can reveal likely lifestyle interests, his or her financial status, and preferences. But once again, this will only be possible if you've got the data quality basics right in the first place.

### 3. Control – Proactive monitoring

While analyzing data to identify quality issues and putting measures in place to tackle them are imperative, an ongoing monitoring program will ensure that unforeseen quality challenges are identified before they become a problem.

Implementing monitoring also reduces the work for your data quality teams, with resources spent more efficiently looking for the outliers rather than known problems with data. Putting in place measures such as regular assessments to proactively check the accuracy of your channel and segmentation data should reduce the costs related to data quality over time.

## Multichannel data quality in practice

### P&O Ferries and a lesson in reaching a single customer view

P&O Ferries, a transportation company that operates ferries from the United Kingdom to Continental Europe and Ireland, realized that its data offered far greater customer and business benefits than it was then able to leverage.

With data collected across multiple channels including call centers, at ports, and over the phone, there was no system in place to verify that information, link it to various customer identities, or share it across the business. It was a manual process that dealt with data that was at least 10 days old before it was available and therefore was vulnerable to inaccuracy and error.

Today, P&O Ferries has redesigned its operations. Focusing on all of their booking, customer relationship, and customer management information systems, the aim was to support the creation of a single customer view across channels. The company has introduced a range of data quality solutions to ensure that it could be confident in its data:

1. Real-time validation: They installed point-of-capture software that lets staff enter address data and correct errors in real time, as well as an online web form that captures additional information, such as which communication channel the customer prefers.
2. Database management and maintenance software: This software ensures that existing information sources are continually cleansed and constantly updated, thus removing duplicate and obsolete entries.

3. Software to identify and link individuals across channels: Data matching and linkage software helped P&O Ferries pull together, for example, a customer who had previously engaged via the web, the call center, and at a port into a single and accurate customer record.

With a single customer view in place, P&O Ferries can now access customer data within 24 hours of capture, ensuring that business decisions are informed in near real time.

In realizing an SCV, P&O Ferries achieved:

- Reduced costs – getting information right at the first attempt and maintaining it
- Efficiency – data is now shared across the business for greater insight
- Time savings – much more efficient and automated data management
- Greater customer satisfaction – faster form filling at contact points
- Greater marketing impact – targeted messages at individuals, based on in-depth knowledge of past and present interactions
- Increased customer loyalty

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“We have **better visibility** into individual customers and can deliver increasingly **targeted messaging.**” – Rani Tarumarajan, P&O Ferries

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## The next step: From multichannel to omnichannel

Demonstrating the speed with which the business world is changing, the step beyond multichannel is already emerging. Known as omnichannel, it acknowledges that for customers, channel distinctions are becoming irrelevant. This is because customers move seamlessly between channels and so expect businesses to follow suit. What omnichannel will mean for the shopping experience is that:

Customers can browse physical products and scan the barcode with their smartphones to gain more information. This could include video of the product in use and access to independent customer reviews.

If they choose to buy, they add the product to a virtual basket in a mobile app and move on.

- By the time they come to pay, their products are waiting for them at the collection point, payment is made via their mobile device, and an electronic receipt sent to the phone.
- Any products that aren't in stock will be marked for later delivery to the customer's home address, at a time that's convenient to them.
- The ability to write and share product reviews through social media platforms will also be available through a smartphone app.

Realizing this vision of the future demands the integration of complex processes, data, and technologies. But all ultimately depends upon businesses creating the robust data quality strategy and single customer view that is needed for multichannel marketing.

## Data quality that maximizes channel opportunities

Consumers now move seamlessly across channels and to meet this demand, high quality data is critical to unlock the potential of your business. Customers won't engage with you if you don't take the time to understand and engage with them in the ways they prefer.

The first step is to invest in a solid data quality foundation and Experian offers you the expertise, technologies, and processes to make multichannel a reality. Our consultants have the know-how to assess your data quality and processes to allow you to transform your data, embedding quality at the heart of your multichannel strategy, and tailoring it to your specific business structure and processes. To get you started, here are our top three tips for multichannel success:

- 1. Assess where you are** – start by auditing the true quality of your data, revisit the processes in place to manage it, and evaluate the value it provides to your organization. Without a true picture of where you stand, it's impossible to understand how to implement improvements that will support your long-term multichannel ambitions.
- 2. Validate and clean all of your data** – an integrated multichannel strategy relies on correct data for every channel you use. If, for example, you're only capturing and cleansing postal addresses, but you also send emails, then email validation is a quick and effective way to fix this.
- 3. Stay on track** – as you consider how to develop your multichannel strategy, it's important to monitor and plan for how your data will support it. Multichannel innovation is moving at a fast pace, so consistent monitoring of your data quality means you can have the confidence in your data before implementing new tactics that may become available.

## Conclusion

The key to unlocking multichannel success lies in the data you harbor and use. Without investing in a solid foundation, all resulting decisions you make off that data can have extremely harmful consequences.

The utilization of data across organizations has shifted. It no longer belongs solely to the IT users. Business users are now taking ownership of the data they collect to be able to make informed decisions. Shifting data responsibility around the organization is no longer a viable solution to maintain good data.

To ensure data is fit for purpose, organizations need to take steps to ensure its accuracy, accessibility, and completeness. Data management best practices should be implemented to standardize data, better consolidate it into a single record for each client, and append additional datasets when required

These practices need to be managed centrally across an organization to consolidate resources and ensure all information receives similar validation and standardization. Data quality is the foundation for any data-driven effort, and as such, it is the foundation for data-driven success.

Not only is data quality the key to unlocking multichannel success, it is the key to maintaining success.

Talk to our team of data quality experts to see how our products and services will get you the best results from your customer data, no matter where you collect it.

[Contact us](#)

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