

Data dive - 3 areas of focus for digital companies

 By [Odette Faling](#)

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Three years ago, [The Economist](#) wrote: "The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data." The story presented big data as "the oil of the digital era" and drew parallels between the oil giants of the 20th century with the big tech companies of today - Facebook, Google and Apple among others.

In many ways, that story was an accurate precursor to several corporate data misuse scandals that followed its publication.



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Of these data-driven controversies, Cambridge Analytica had the most far-reaching consequences for society. It highlighted the real risk of data dark arts and ignited debates about privacy and regulation.

The way in which our personal information is collected, stored and used has been under intense scrutiny ever since. While the world unravelled around Cambridge Analytica, the revelations have made the connected population a bit more careful about what they share online.

Even though big tech companies and lawmakers are under due pressure to guard the masses against exploitative actors across the digital spectrum, most applications of customer data are well-intentioned. Big data can be a force for good and effective tool in every digital business.

1. Personalisation

As an online travel start-up, personalisation is one of the best ways we put data to work at Travelcheck. Whether it's a newsletter or ad, personalising the content we place in front of customers can greatly improve its chances of resonating with a prospect. Building a comprehensive single view of the customer helps us segment and focus engagement so that it's relevant to its recipient.

For businesses, personalisation is a crucial differentiator as it becomes progressively more challenging to cut through the

onslaught of noise people are subject to every day. Effective use of data sets in motion a continuous experience that is wholly personalised, clear and meaningful to customers.



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2. Automation

Utilising data to automate customer-facing operations is equally important as how it is used to computerise processes and decision-making behind the scenes. Automation accelerates service delivery and reduces blind spots so that businesses can remain a few steps ahead when resolving a customer's query or problem more efficiently.

In practice, automation can facilitate self-serve features and lessen the need for cumbersome human interventions that cost time and money. If you've ever spent too long in a call centre queue, then you'll appreciate the value automation brings to both businesses and customers.

3. Customer experience

At Travelcheck, for example, data strengthens continuity of the customer experience and informs us from one interaction and one device to the next. How do customers hear about our deals? How do they prefer to communicate with us? What steps did the customer take to book a deal? How did they pay for it and receive confirmation? Data is the crucial piece of the puzzle in the customer's journey and helps us optimise the experience so that it is intuitive, convenient and impressive.

In 2020, we will expand our platform and add verticals beyond flights, hotels, vehicle hire and holiday packages. As customers attach more products to the trips they create, I am interested to see the insights we generate as we work towards a single view of the customer. I believe the information we collect from our customers' travel behaviour will enrich the thoughtful and substantive connections we aim to have with our community.

ABOUT ODETTE FALING

Odette Faling is the CEO of South Africa's newest online travel agency, Travelcheck.co.za. After 12 years in ecommerce she has gained deep knowledge in developing partnerships and marketing strategies to help companies grow.

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