The DTC Collective is a community that brings together influential, global voices to realize the potential of digital retail. The group was founded in response to three force majeures that occurred in rapid succession: First was the onset of GDPR in Europe, which sent retailers who sell or market on digital channels scrambling to update their communications to comply with guidelines that weren’t designed in response to companies like theirs. Second was the slow and still ongoing elimination of third-party cookies by companies like Mozilla’s Firefox, Apple, and soon, Google. And third was the onset of coronavirus, which expedited what many analysts had previously predicted would be a three-year journey to a 50-50 online/offline shift in retail. The founding members saw a need for a community coming together to do things differently in order to move into an all direct-to-consumer world and help actively shape the trajectory of the retail industry.

In April, Ascena Retail Group’s former Chief Customer Officer, Justin MacFarlane moderated a conversation with the Collective about what it means to be customer centric, which we have summarized below.

**MEMBERS OF THE COLLECTIVE STATED**

In order to put the customer at the center of everything, we had to break down well-known paradigms of organizational structure...and when you own digital, marketing, and technology, you can combine strategy and execution for what’s really going on to drive value for the business.

Most CMOs are brand-builders and are very good at creative...when paired with an eComm or Performance Marketing leader, who has insights on what’s working and what isn’t, that becomes a powerful combination.

**eCommerce is becoming the driver for the overall customer experience, requiring a new level of collaboration between eCommerce and Brand leaders.**

Traditional retailers with Brand at the center were set up with a focus on stores, direct mail, and email, given eCommerce was a support function driving a small portion of revenue. The massive shift to eCommerce completely changed these priorities, uncovering necessary organizational changes within brands to create a more customer-centric experience for consumers online. This has led to the rise of new roles like Chief Customer Officers, who oversee everything from stores to analytics and digital marketing, giving Brand leaders complete focus on core competencies like merchandise and creative, instead of eCommerce.
Being data-driven does not dilute your brand. Data is how you move at the speed of the consumer in a digital-first world, where the customer is dictating their experience. It’s not about broadcast messages or audience segments, but about using high-fidelity behavioral and transactional data with AI where it matters, in order to intelligently modulate between the brand creative that a customer sees. Scaling creative is key to personalization, requiring analytics and creative stakeholders to work together and rethink manual workflows that don’t scale in a digital-first world. This delivers customer experiences that achieve a healthy balance of what customers want while preserving brand equity.

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“The tension between your technology and analytics with your creative team is a good thing. An analytics person can come to the table with ideas and insights for better ways to do things, which can inform the creative.”

“We move faster and with better results when we move together.”

AI-powered personalization can drive the experience your customer’s crave — as long as it’s being fed the right data.

Customer-centric retailers become so not just by implementing an organizational structure that focuses on it, but also a technology stack that supports it. This requires marrying shopper data with product data, surfacing product recommendations for each shopper on a 1:1 basis, based on category preferences, and constantly testing and iterating accordingly. It’s not about having the best model, it’s about how thoughtful it can be with the data given and how quickly it can be deployed to create relevant experiences for things like product recommendations, category preferences, or even messaging frequency across touchpoints.

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“With AI, we were able to find the second and third item that you should buy, and the proof is in the numbers. [The AI] changed our creative approach and the way we use analytics, and now we’re looking to expand that intelligence across channels.”

“Modeling is not really that hard. Once a model is built, you can use it over and over and fine tune over time. It’s more about making sure you have the right data in the right place to move fast.”

FOR INQUIRIES RELATED TO THE DTC COLLECTIVE AND BECOMING A MEMBER, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE.