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Omnichannel marketing has evolved tremendously from its early days as a strategy to align email and direct mail. This evolution is and will continue to be driven by three factors: the proliferation of channels and interaction points that comprise the true omnichannel experience, the explosion of customer data that is collected during each interaction, and the increasing customer expectation for personalization.

The early days of omnichannel marketing meant direct mail and email. But omnichannel now also encompasses websites, display ads, SMS, mobile apps, SEO, loyalty programs, social media, and more. While the ability to cover this many channels often necessitates a division of responsibility, it can result in siloed channel management that gives customers a less-than-integrated experience. To avoid that, it is imperative to align strategy across all channels and to create distinct yet complementary roles for each channel to play.

Big data will present new challenges in the future of omnichannel marketing. Most companies are now facing a data deluge rather than a shortage. Their new struggle is how to turn it into

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something manageable. There are many specific techniques to manage big data, but going forward they will boil down to the general principles of organization and simplification.

Big data is only unmanageable when it is unstructured, disintegrated, and unnecessarily detailed or complex. It becomes useful once it is distilled into its most important components, and where tons of individual data points are analyzed and synthesized into meaningful patterns and serviceable models.

Finally, personalization is now a customer expectation. However, the number of individual interactions and the volume of data captured at each interaction multiply into an unreasonable quantity of personalization options. The trick will be to know when to get personal. Having 1:1 communications all the time is neither a necessary nor a realistic goal. Mass communication will sometimes make sense (when everyone needs to know the same thing, for instance); at other times a heavily personalized experience is required (when a customer is close to purchasing). A strong testing approach can help find the right mix of personalization for each interaction. ■