WEBSITE PERSONALIZATION
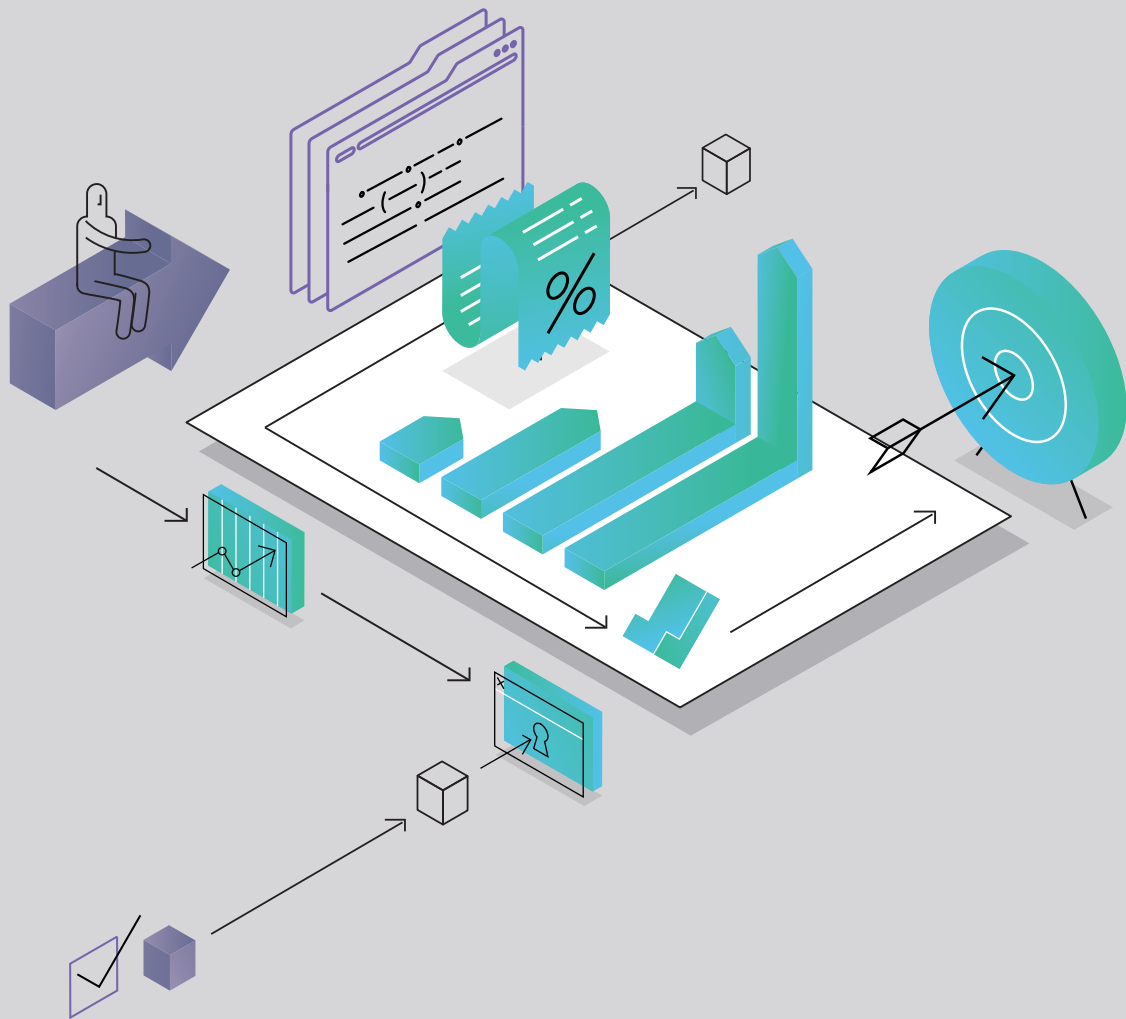
Seven Tips to Avoid a Cookie-Cutter Online Presence

Contents

"94% [of business owners] agree that personalization is "critical to their current and future success."

Introduction

Today we're experiencing a new era of personalization. Members of a generation steeped in Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media expect to find what they are looking for right away – wherever they are at the time and whatever device they are using.

To keep up with these rapidly evolving expectations of the online experience, best-in-class organizations are moving beyond the static cookie-cutter approach found on many of today's websites. Instead they are proactively managing the user experience based on specific profiles and online behaviors.

The advantages of a more personalized approach are clear. Rather than asking visitors to wade through mountains of information to find what they want and need, the most relevant pages, products and offers are filtered and displayed to improve the user experience and move individuals along the path towards a purchase decision or other action.

Companies are getting the message that personalization pays off. In a survey conducted by the global publisher Econsultancy[1], 94% agree that personalization is "critical to their current and future success." Two out of three say an improved business performance and improved customer experience are the main drivers. Those who have already adopted personalization report an average 19 percent uptick in sales, which "translates into hundreds of millions of dollars" of additional online revenue.

A similar study conducted by Marketing Sherpa[2] validated the value of personalization, showing that a personalized website experience leads to lower abandonment rates and to higher conversion rates.

This paper takes a close look at personalization, how it works and the tools you need to tailor and deliver personalized content to your website visitors.

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[1] The Realities of Online Personalisation. April, 2013. Econsultancy.
[2] Landing Page Best Practices Benchmark Study. 2012. Marketing Sherpa.

A Primer for Personalization

What does it mean to personalize content? Amazon.com offers a great example. When you visit this global online retailer, you most likely are greeted by name and offered suggestions relevant to the interests you expressed during previous visits. Each time you search, select and order products, the company learns more about you and your preferences and further tailors a response.

When you bring this same model into your own company's online presence, you can filter information on your site to meet the needs of individuals or segments of visitors. Text, banners, images and other digital media are displayed based on what you know about your visitors, how they are interacting with your site and how they arrived there in the first place. You might recommend relevant articles on retirement for Susie in Singapore based on her age and recent searches for financial planning resources. James in Germany might see information on biking tours that marry his expressed interests in both travel and fitness.

Most experts agree there are two broad categories of personalization. To get maximum bang for your buck, you'll want to understand and use both.

How Website Personalizaton Works

Display's a different image based on user's hobby

Personalized website for user's interest

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Profile-based, prescriptive personalization focuses on specific segments of users. Profiles or "personas" are built based on groups of characteristics and information found in your customer and prospect database. Perhaps an individual filled out a form and provided information about an address and interests before receiving a newsletter or downloading a coupon or a paper. That gives you data you can use to your benefit by establishing business rules for the delivery of certain types of content. If a visitor recently browsed your online product catalog, you might want to highlight new product features, new offers, support services or other details that might further the dialogue down the path toward a purchase.

Behavior-based, adaptive personalization can be used to target new visitors who do not come to you with expressed preferences or fit into an established profile. By tracking how these visitors arrived at your site and their behavior and click-through patterns as they navigate, you can again use business rules to respond appropriately. Each choice made on the website helps you filter what comes next. To begin to build a future profile-based response for these behavior-based targets, you might offer them an opportunity to answer a few questions that can help you narrow down their preferences – perhaps by brand, price, physical attributes, style, interests or other parameters
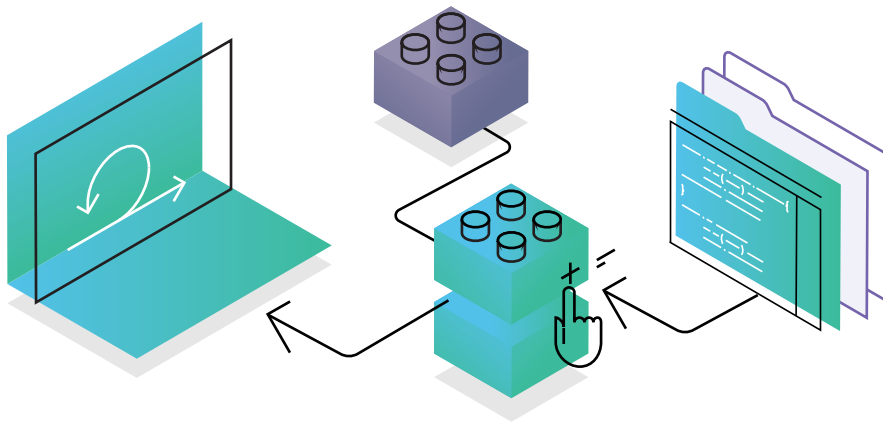
Personalization in Action:

Beyond Web Traffic, Landing Pages and Microsites

Despite advances in personalization, far too many businesses still measure online success by the amount of traffic they drive to their website. They devote substantial budgets to improving their search engine ranking and exposing their site to new visitors. personalization by adopting landing pages or microsites. But both techniques are a "bridging" tactic at best. Landing pages, for example, are limited in scope. Once an individual navigates away from the optimized page, the content becomes more general. You lose the ability to target specific needs, respond to specific stages in the buying cycle or further the relationship with your company.

Microsites heavily optimized to match a user's search parameters can help. But they too have limitations. They can be costly to launch and to maintain and tend to focus narrowly on a particular topic. They also are limiting from an SEO perspective. Google is now placing a higher emphasis on domain authority when ranking websites, making it harder for a new microsite domain to achieve a high-ranking position in a search. Google also will penalize you for duplicate content, which makes it more time-consuming and costly to create an optimized microsite.

To benefit your bottom line and deliver a real and continuous return on investment, you need to reach the right audience at the right time with the right message–and that means personalization. Focusing on "traffic," landing pages and microsites is simply not enough.

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Understanding the Customer Journey

One of the keys to making personalization work for your organization is to understand the customer journey. Visitors will interact with your website in different ways at different stages in the decision-making process and as their relationship with your organization evolves.

Let's say Steve conducts a Web search for a "two-seater sports car." He is likely early in his buying journey and not yet ready to narrow his search and write a check. If you are an auto dealer, you might want relevant messaging about the initial search term to be placed strategically on your website when Steve lands there. Perhaps you share general information on sports car models and enticing fun features he might enjoy. If, though, the search is for a "BMW two-seater sports coupe with chrome finish," Steve is obviously further down the purchase path obviously further down the purchase path by having identified a brand, style and trim. You might want to display information on special deals, buying incentives and directions to a nearby local showroom.

To make things even easier for Steve and to enrich his offline customer experience as well, you might offer the opportunity for him to book a test drive online – capturing his name, his interests and letting the local staff know when to expect him. When Steve arrives at the dealership, the sales team will know who he is and that he's looking for a BMW Coupe so they can tailor their interaction to his needs. After the test drive, they can log Steve's feedback into your CRM database. If he didn't like the ride of the two-seater sports car and decided to explore BMW sedans instead, you can add him to a segment of customers who prefer sedans. By doing so, sedan-related information will be displayed front and center the next time he visits your website.

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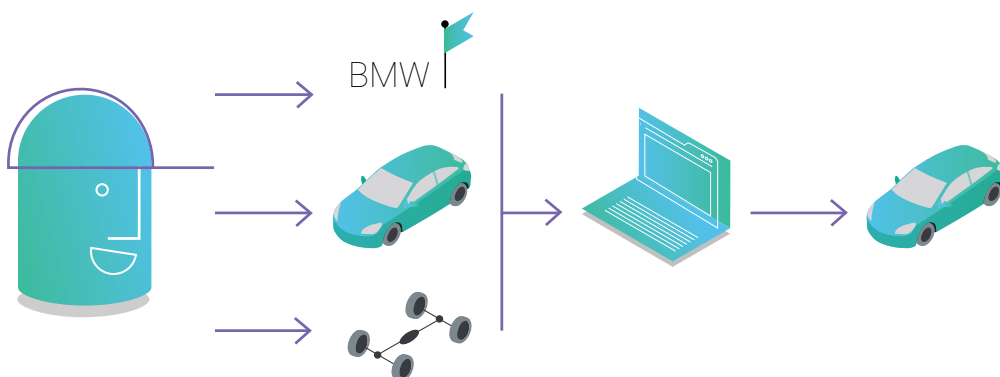
Developing Your Personalization Strategy

The best personalization programs are grounded in a clear strategy and make the most of what you know about your business, its customers and their preferences. Typically, information on preferences is gathered through multiple customer touch points, including online, email, social media, in-person contact, phone calls and more. The more you know, the better you can personalize all types of interactions across multiple communication channels.

By monitoring results and tracking performance over time, you can see what works, what doesn't and fine-tune your approach to make it more relevant and impactful. Ultimately you will be able to ensure you are delivering the right message to the right customer at the right point in the process and will have new insights into how your marketing campaigns perform.

When you are deciding how to personalize content, the choices are virtually limitless. As a result, it's important to stay focused on the strategic outcomes you want to drive and the steps along the way. Do you need to build support for a cause and solicit donations? Sell products? Promote customer retention? You can vary content based on profiles, industries, location and more in order to keep visitors engaged and move them further down the path towards a specific action or outcome.
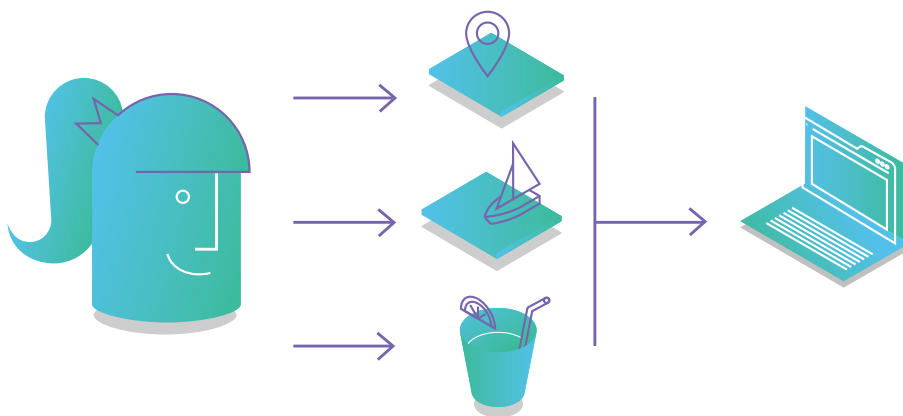
Remember Mobile Devices Matter

The most effective personalization programs also extend to the device level – tailored to whether a visitor is using a desktop or laptop PC, smartphone, tablet device or a kiosk at a local mall. But Econsultancy's survey on personalization trends found that companies have a desktop bias. Less than 15 percent of respondents say they deliver personalized experiences to tablets or mobile phones.

There may be a price for that shortsightedness. ABI Research says the smartphone market is growing at more than 40 percent a year and predicts there will be 1.4 billion smartphones in use by the end of 2013[3]. Cisco forecasts a 70 percent annual growth in mobile Internet use. Smart marketers will not want to miss the boat[4].
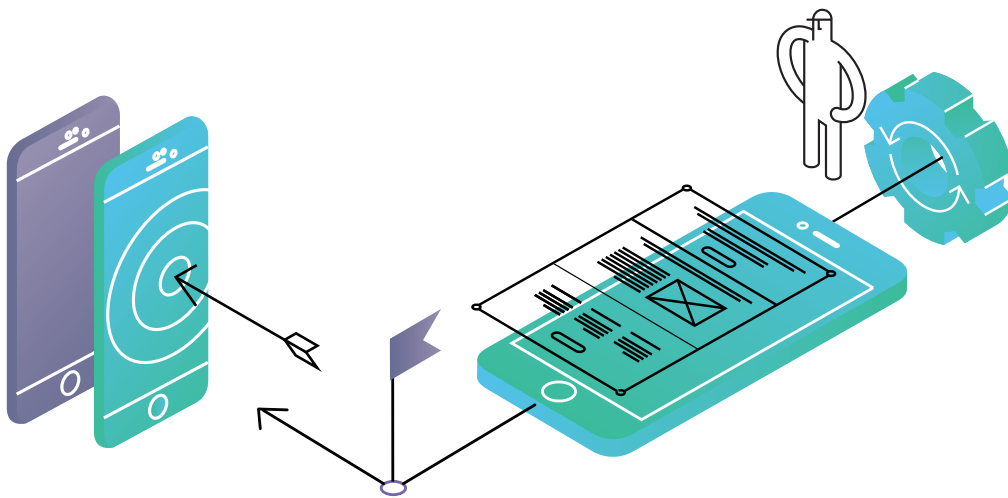

[3] ABI Research study. February 2013. As reported by Venture Beat.
[4] Cisco Visual Networking Index (VNI) Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast Update, 2012-2017.

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Turbo-Charge Your Personalization Strategy with CRM

Integrate your customer relationship management (CRM) and web content management (WCM) platforms and you can take personalization to the next level. You can access information on users already in your CRM database to help you further personalize their interaction with your site.

The process also works well in reverse. As "anonymous" individuals interact with your website and share information on who they are and their preferences, you can gather details, add them to your database and match the individual against the personas you've built. The result is a more precise matching that helps your personalization program work better and harder than before. If Steve fills out our form and says he is browsing for a BMW Coupe, you won't pitch other models or brands when he calls or visits the local showroom. Instead I will be poised to offer relevant information and a test drive of the precise car he has in mind.
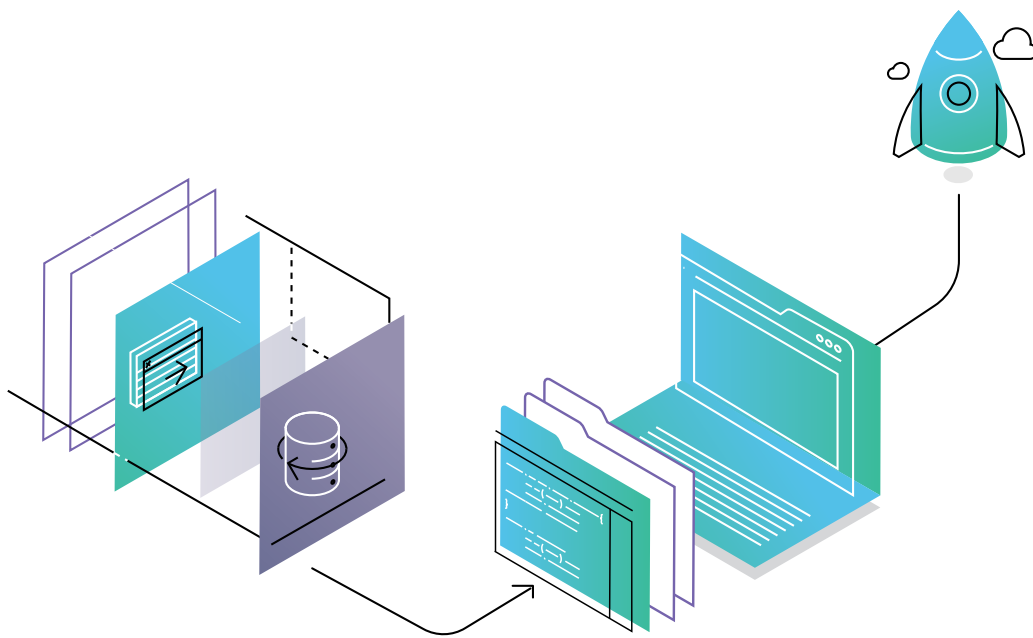
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More than 70% percent of respondents say they understand the importance of personalization, but they don't know how to accomplish it.
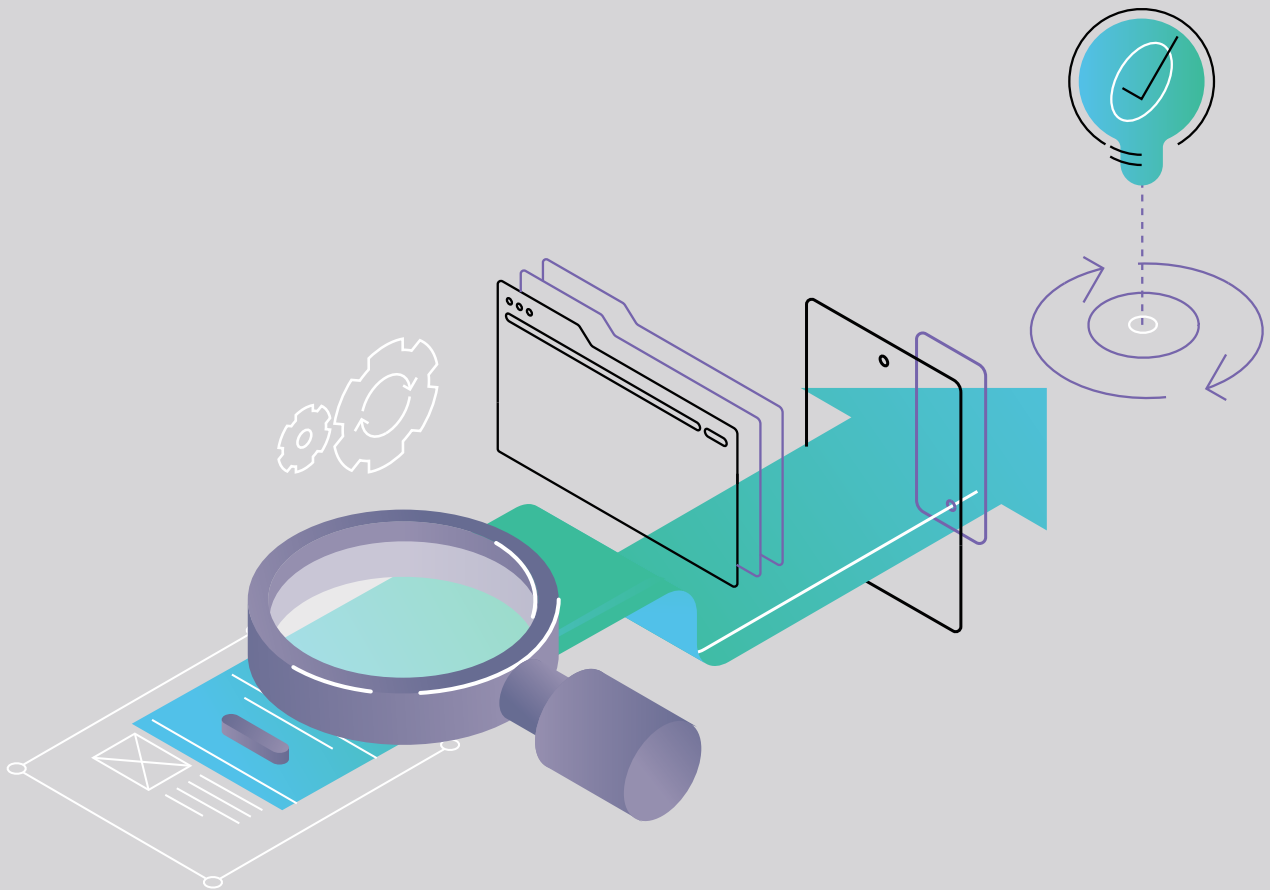
Seven Things to Look for in a WCM Solution that Help You Avoid a Cookie-Cutter Web Presence

Econsultancy's survey highlights an unfortunate dilemma. More than 70 percent of respondents say they understand the importance of personalization, but they don't know how to accomplish it. Nearly half say legacy technology and IT roadblocks are major barriers.

With the right web content management solution, you can easily overcome "how to" hurdles and technology roadblocks and incorporate impactful personalization techniques into your marketing programs. Simply look for a best-in-class solution that delivers these seven important features and capabilities:
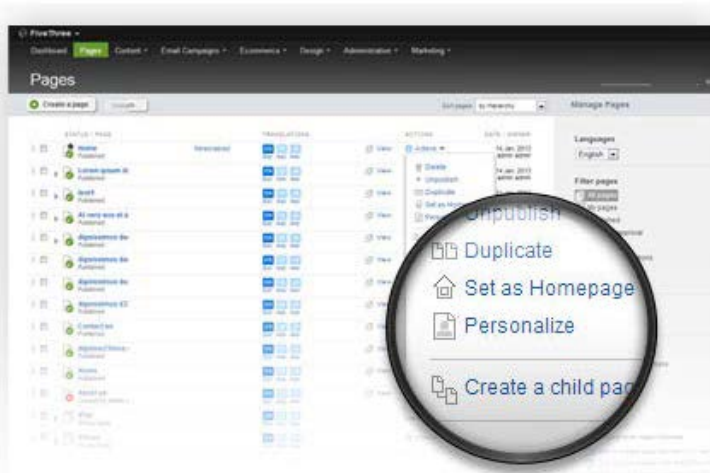
1. Segment Visitors

A fundamental first step in personalizing the customer experience is to create personalization segments or "personas." Look for a WCM solution that lets you easily define segments using a variety of criteria, including both information we know immediately and what we learn through and online behavior. You will want to be able to tailor content based on how visitors arrived at your site, what they searched for, duration of their visit, geolocation or reverse IP lookup data and more. You should have the freedom to use predefined characteristics or to add your own custom criteria. Ultimately, you should have the ability to add as much detail as needed to define and rank-order the characteristics of each audience segment.
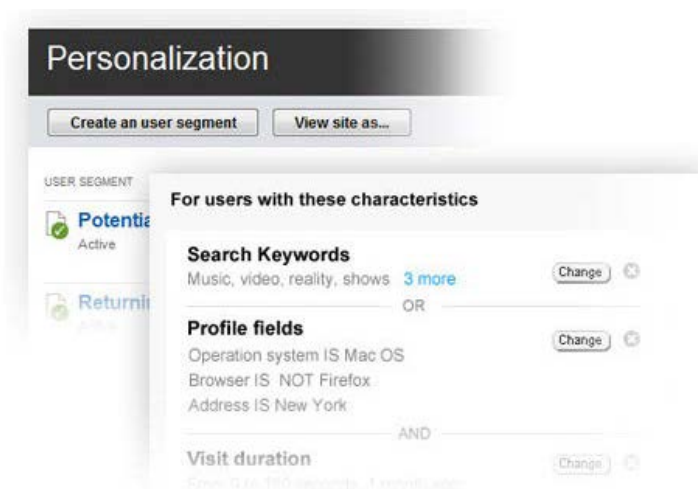
2. Personalize Content

Once you've segmented your audience, you need to be able to go through your website and personalize specific pages and content relevant to the roles, interests and online behaviors that got an individual to your website. The car dealer working with Steve might provide sports car enthusiasts with details on the BMW Coupe's transmission, engine performance and speed. But soccer moms and dads might see information on BMW Sports Activity Vehicles with ample storage space and great safety features. Look for a WCM platform that lets you add and modify pages easily and create variations that are presented to users based on the characteristics you defined. Your software also should keep track of which widgets have been altered and should synchronize your custom versions when any changes are made to the content of the original page.

3. Test the User Experience

After you've defined your segments and targeted relevant content for each visitor profile, you will want to simulate the user experience to make certain you've made the proper selections. You should be able to impersonate any segment and any grouping of characteristics. Insist on a solution with intuitive, easy-to-use mobile device emulators so you can preview the customer experience on smartphones, tablets and PCs as well–even if you are a marketer with little or no technical background.
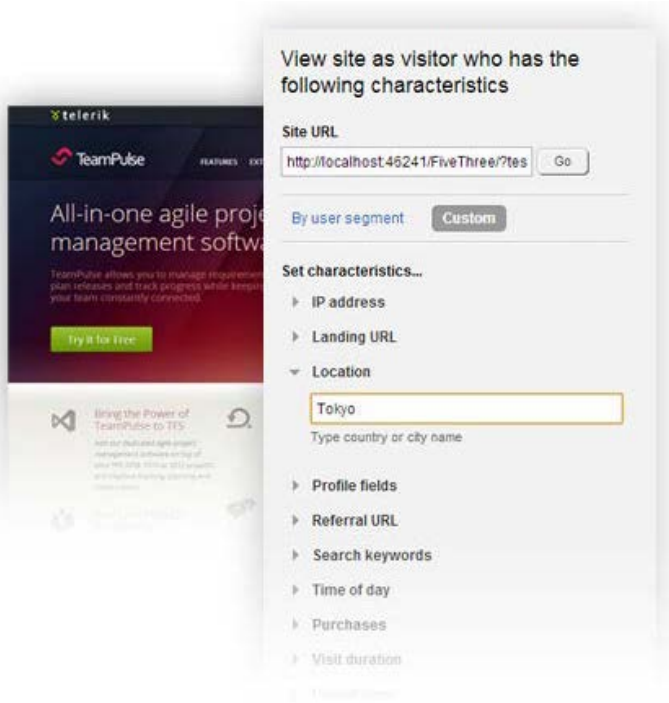
4. Measure the Results

The WCM platform you use for personalizing your site should have built-in reports and metrics to help you measure your conversion rate and other key performance indicators. Armed with data, you will be able to track the impact of your personalization efforts and marketing programs and can further fine-tune what content is delivered and to whom.

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5. Mobility Ready

Look for a solution that allows you to personalize and manage your entire online presence from a single, device-agnostic platform, including the content you deliver to smartphones and other mobile devices. You should be able to benefit from the latest in Responsive Design features so you don't have to create a separate mobile version of your site.

## 6. CRM and Marketing Automation Compatible

Your WCM solution should integrate seamlessly with your CRM and marketing automation platforms and your ecosystem of adjacent technologies. You should be able to use data from these systems to build and segment personas for personalization, as well as to use the information you gather online to further enrich your customer database.
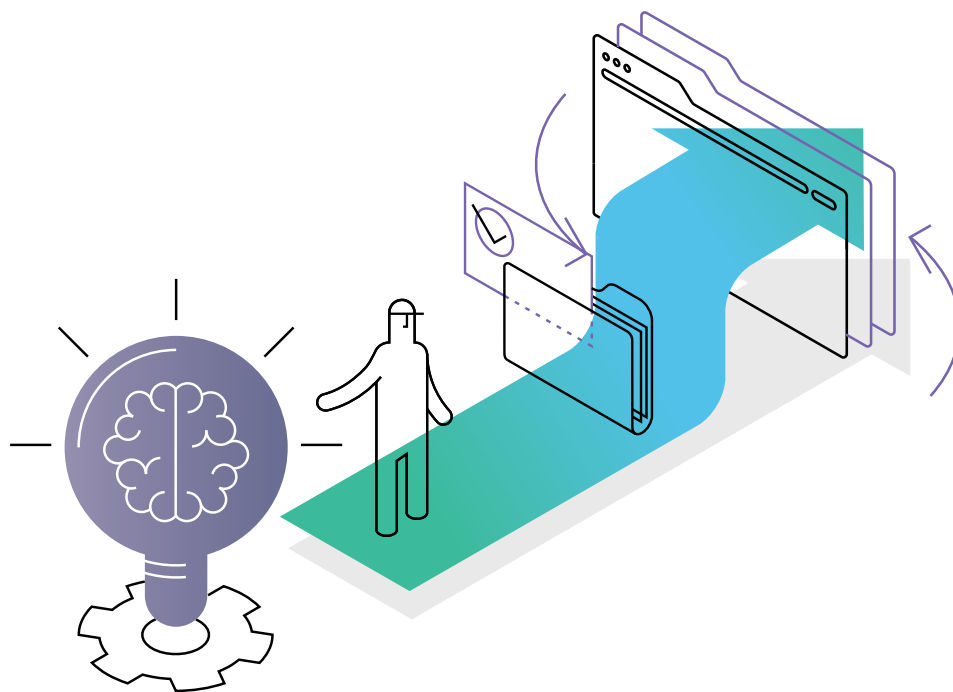
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7. Features for Both Techies and Marketers

Look for a platform that works well across all functional layers of your organization. Developers should find features to support easy customization and extensibility. IT managers should find support for Active Directory, site sync, scalability and ready connectivity with other enterprise systems. Marketers should find an easy-to-use interface that allows them to accomplish tasks on their own, without technical support. They should be able to generate content for web, email, social and mobile channels and to optimize it for improved results.

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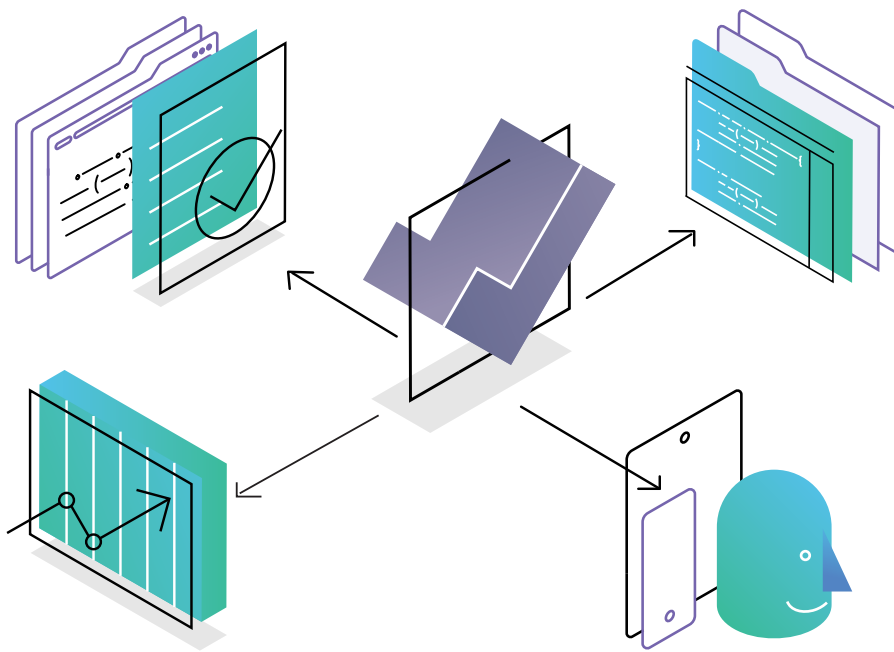
A Web Strategy as Unique as Your Customers

Don't treat your customers to an old-school, cookie-cutter online experience. It's time to embrace a personalized response that gets the right information to the right prospect at the right time. Visitors to your site will have a better experience and you will be on the fast-track towards meeting your strategic objectives. You will be able to cross-sell, upsell and build loyalty by delivering relevant information that can keep an audience engaged and coming back for more. The key is to select personalization tools that can integrate seamlessly with your corporate systems and put powerful capabilities at the fingers of your marketing team.

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About Sitefinity

Progress® Sitefinity® is a modern CMS platform designed to help organizations pursue their online goals. Today the system powers over 11,000 websites worldwide across various industries–from Financial and Government Services to Communications, Retail and Entertainment. Thanks to the platform's flexible architecture and scalability, you can create successful commercial websites, community portals or intranets. Sitefinity offers a revolutionary easy-to-use interface, simplicity, scalability and unmatched performance–everything you need, beautifully crafted in one product.

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