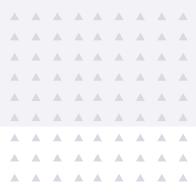# LISTRAK

10 KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER
A Marketing Platform Selection Supplement

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR

These are the months when many e-commerce and marketing executives set out on quests to upgrade their marketing technology. But we all know colleagues across the industry who have run a "comprehensive" selection process only to have their new "upgrade" vendor turn out to be a lateral move (or, even worse, a downgrade). This is not an ideal approach to achieving your stretch goals, keeping your boss happy, or advancing your career.

THE QUESTION IS, WHY?

The answer is too many "comprehensive" selections fail to ask the right questions. Almost every selection process is laden with lists of "must-have" features and functionality, questions about scalability, and other boilerplate RFP criteria... and yet somehow, smart marketers make poor selection decisions. Something must be missing.

SOME TIPS, ADVICE, AND QUESTIONS TO ASK

We see hundreds of evaluations every year and unfortunately witness some of the phenomena mentioned above. So, to help you avoid the same, we asked some of our clients and practitioners to provide their advice for making your next selection successful.

01 NIRVANA: POINT SOLUTION RESULTS VIA SINGLE, INTEGRATED PLATFORM

The lure of leveraging "point solution" providers is compelling — laser-focused on a target solution area and delivering great results. This is good for them but bad for you, because you must weave a gaggle of those point solutions together to get the results you need. It also means managing multiple vendors, paying too much for each, having your already busy team hold more status meetings and, of course, a myriad of competing attribution claims. But the biggest factor of multiple siloed vendors means you've created a Tower of Babel delivering uncoordinated interactions across a fragmented customer experience.

It is simply not possible to deliver broadcast emails, broadcast SMS, trigger emails, trigger SMS, app push, browser push, etc. all from different vendors and not have those interactions collide and overlap. Disjointed customer journeys degrade both deliverability and identity (which is a HUGE deal in a post-third-party cookie world).

The future of marketing is true cross-channel orchestration and for that, you need a single, integrated platform. You cannot trade-off performance and results, but if you pick the right vendor, you won't have to.

02 A COMMON LOGO DOESN'T MEAN "INTEGRATED"

Be wary of Cloud promises. A set of individual solution components that have been acquired and loosely cobbled together doesn't equate to being "integrated." If you pull back the curtain in most of these cases, you'll still find largely disconnected systems.

Even worse is that after that component company was acquired, all the expertise left the building within 12-24 months — which means that the solution hasn't kept pace with changing market needs.

A shared logo and invoice wrapped in fantastic marketing might sell extremely well and help tech titans buy new planes, islands and magazines — but it's not really an integrated platform and it won't help you get to where you want to go.

03 COMPETING FEATURES WITH IDENTICAL NAMES ARE NOT IDENTICAL

This is a really tough one because most members of any selection team are extremely busy with lots of plates spinning, putting them at a disadvantage because they don't have the time or bandwidth to sufficiently drill-down on some of the nuances and details during the evaluation. Your team assembled a checklist of required functionality, and all of the short-list vendors checked those boxes. But all solutions that are named the same aren't created equal.

One common example: Predictive Analytics

It's obviously a must-have "check the box feature" in today's environment — but be careful. For some vendors, "predictive analytics" is merely query-based segmentation dressed up in robot clothing — what you want is advanced machine learning and data science at work.

Another example: Product Recommendations

For some vendors, this is a "one-size-fits-all" black box that often generates recommendations that are simply just New Arrivals and Best Sellers. What you want is a more sophisticated AI/ML driven algorithm that can be adjusted based on specific criteria for your unique business (margin, category, etc.).

Bottom line: You don't want "check the box" — you want sophistication at scale. Superficial solutions will only take you so far, so the depth of solutions really does matter.

Our recommendation: Have use cases for features and functionality, ask how key features work, and ask for reference client data on actual results and impact.

04 DON'T GO THIS ALONE

Today's marketing teams are under enormous pressure and stretched incredibly thin while customer needs grow and interaction channels multiply. Unfortunately, most marketing teams aren't growing and multiplying at the same rate.

You may be the exception and have an ample team of omniscient utility players constantly abreast of the latest best practices. Still, most marketing leaders we know don't have that luxury. Thus, the need for actual expertise and support from your solution provider. One with active support and collaboration that helps you achieve your goals — is paramount. It's every bit as important as the technology you choose.

Questions to ask: What is the account manager to client ratio? (Maybe the first question should be, "Do you have dedicated account managers?") What is the provider's client NPS Score? What does support look like? Do you get to speak to a knowledgeable human when you have a problem or are you directed to a help article?

Lastly, premium "white glove" service should never mean "live chat."

05 PAY ATTENTION TO THE LAST MILE

Choose a provider that controls the last mile of each engagement channel. For email (and personalized trigger emails), this means a native send engine because deliverability and inbox placement are critical. Literally every percentage point equates to a significant impact on revenue.

When you're evaluating providers, make sure to ask about the send engine. Many providers tout a strong front-end but utilize a third-party send engine (e.g. SendGrid etc.) which means that the vendor has little control over the inbox placement and deliverability, and you have no support when issues arise.

The same applies to your SMS/Text Message Marketing provider. Your provider should be working with a Tier 1 aggregator (with direct connections to the carriers). Any other configuration causes a degradation in control, reliability, and ultimately, performance.

06 BEWARE OF "PAY TO PLAY" RANKINGS

Somehow, even in 2021, a segment of smart executives still believes that rankings from industry analysts are data-driven and objective. Analyst firms are not 501(c)(3) organizations and have revenue and profit goals just like the rest of us.

Is it a wonder that most ratings are dominated by large players (with flush marketing budgets to spend with these analyst firms) and smaller, well-funded start-ups (also with ample marketing budgets)?

Don't be pulled under by a wave of paid influence masquerading as objective analysis.

Don't believe it? Riddle me this: How does any 2020 analysis of B2C commerce suites from a major analyst firm omit Shopify, arguably one of the most dominant forces in e-commerce today?

07   DON'T BE FOOLED WITH "FEATURE BAIT"

A common ploy for some vendors is to highlight "differentiators" in the form of innovative features that sound amazingly compelling (but don't really impact results). If "shiny objects" will help you get ahead with your CEO, then go for it, but if you're like the rest of us and are primarily measured by results, you might want to ask a couple of probing questions.

Ask for reference clients who can substantiate the engagement and revenue impact that those features have provided. Ask for the specific use cases that those innovative features address, and then ask the other vendors how they address those use cases – you'll be surprised.

08   YOUR DATA: WHERE IS IT STORED AND WHERE IS IT SHARED?

Data privacy will continue to be an increasingly important issue for marketers in the coming weeks, months, and years. What was considered "acceptable" even last year won't fly for most brands going forward.

A couple of key questions to ask: Where is your customer data stored? Is my data being shared as part of a co-op or other inter-client exchange? Many times, this information is buried in the fine print and marketers are unaware. Other times, the marketers have looked the other way and rationalized it was a fair trade-off for getting results.

It might be time to reconsider.

09   EVERY MINUTE OF DOWNTIME COSTS YOU REVENUE

If you ask any interview candidate if they're reliable and trustworthy, would you expect anyone to ever answer anything other than "yes"? If so, then why would we expect any vendor, when asked if they are reliable and scalable, to not do the same? Not only will they say yes, but they will produce a slick boilerplate set of data points to convince you they are the Fort Knox of SaaS.

But this is a big deal for you, uptime literally equates to revenue dollars, especially during the holidays. Rather than asking the vendor the question, you should review actual uptime data across vendors at resources like StatusGator.com.

10 DON'T LET IT INFLUENCE THE EVALUATION

IT at every retailer and brand ranks right up there with Marketing — overworked, under-appreciated, and never enough budget to do what needs to be done. We love them and couldn't succeed without them (okay, maybe not love them, but we drink with them to get our projects prioritized, and they're good people). But the fact is that they have fundamentally different goals, objectives, and priorities — theirs are ease, simplicity, and status quo — yours are growth.

I have yet to see a CIO or VP of IT on the hot seat in a Monday morning executive team meeting because sales numbers were missed the previous week, month, or quarter. You own the numbers; make sure you're the one selecting the vendor to help you deliver those numbers successfully (and keep buying IT drinks).

A CLOSING THOUGHT: DON'T SETTLE FOR STATUS QUO, MAKE THE CHANGE

The points outlined above are in no way intended to dissuade you from making a change. In fact, make it, but choose wisely. It's perplexing when a company complains about results or dissatisfaction with their current provider and then stays. Instead, make a smart change, dig just a little deeper in some of the areas outlined above, and we're quite sure you will land in a better place.

In the meantime, we wish you all the best on your quest.

ABOUT LISTRAK

Integrated Cross-Channel Solutions
Best-in-class Email, SMS, Behavioral Marketing, Personalization, Identity Resolution, and Customer Analytics solutions — all together and optimized in a single platform

Exclusively Retail Focused
Purpose-built solutions developed exclusively for retailers that drive increased levels of customer engagement, retention, and revenue

Industry-Leading NPS Score
A testament to our focus on driving results, Listrak has earned an industry-leading 82 net promoter score from our clients

Continuous Innovation
Our product roadmap continuously evolves based on the changing needs of our retail clients and the challenges they face

An Extension of Your Team
Listrak clients gain more than just a technology platform, they gain a strategic partnership with a group of retail marketing experts who drive success together

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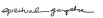
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