

# Do ~~Not~~ Reply:

Connecting with customers  
in the age of AI





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## Executive Summary

In an increasingly complex digital landscape, businesses face the challenge of unifying marketing, digital, and customer service functions to deliver a personalised and consistent customer experience. There is a real threat that consumers will go directly to AI “brands” for personalised recommendations, before ultimately buying from them.

This collaborative effort between Deloitte and Salesforce explores the critical shift from transactional, channel-based communications to relationship-driven, omnichannel engagement, which is growing more crucial in the era of AI. We examine the need to move beyond ‘do not reply’ interactions, leveraging emerging technologies like AI and Data Cloud to better connect with customers and help organisations navigate this transformative journey.

“When AI and data come together in a connected ecosystem, brands stop talking at customers and start creating experiences customers truly want to be part of.”

**Paul Stevenson**  
CxO Advisor, Salesforce





# 01

## The Shifting Landscape of Customer Communication

“It’s time to move beyond siloed, one-way interactions and start embracing genuine two-way dialogue. Customers expect seamless, personalised experiences, and only by embracing AI, data cloud and other emerging technologies can organisations truly differentiate.”

**Miguel Leonne**

Partner, Deloitte



Marketing and digital teams often operate in silos, focusing on channel-specific campaigns and metrics. However, this has led to a fragmented customer experience. Interactions often vary depending on the internal channel owner, leading to confusion and even contradictions. Customers want and expect context to be known and understood on every channel. Digital channels (email, SMS, WhatsApp) and the increasing expectation for immediate, two-way dialogue has further exposed the limitations of traditional approaches.

The ‘do not reply’ email address, once a common practice for efficiency, is now a symbol of this disconnect, signalling to customers that their feedback is not welcome nor actionable. For a long time, it was a balancing act and a necessary evil for marketers who needed to get a message out but couldn’t afford it coming from a staffed email address. Over time, this exception became the rule, as the resources required to track and respond to every communication became prohibitively expensive.

However, this strategy only resulted in extra costs for retailers. As companies sent out more ‘do not reply’ emails, customers chose to pick up the phone instead. This additional workload for call centres created large overheads for Chief Customer Officers (CCOs) while simultaneously disconnecting messaging channels, creating inconsistency and poor customer experience.

Customers want dialogue and personalisation, where brands can create an emotionally powerful two-way connection that ultimately boosts conversion and engagement. The ‘do not reply’ era doesn’t allow this, highlighting the disconnect between consumer wants and needs, and what organisations are delivering. So, how can companies consider both business priorities and customer expectations?

# 02

## The Business Imperative: Bridging the Divide

Organisations are recognising the urgent need to bridge the gap between marketing, digital, the acquisition funnel and ongoing customer service. This integration is not just an operational challenge: it's a strategic imperative. It directly impacts customer retention, churn reduction and cross-selling opportunities. CCOs are prioritising call centre deflection as a key business driver, recognising the significant costs associated with traditional customer support models.

However, this shift presents significant challenges:

- **Political and Process Difficulties:**

Internal organisational structures and processes often hinder seamless collaboration between departments with different KPIs and communication capabilities.

- **Siloed Data and Technology:**

Fragmented technology ecosystems prevent a unified view of the customer and impede omnichannel personalisation. Many companies continue to choose older marketing cloud solutions over newer, more advanced ones due to their perceived lack of enterprise readiness.

“Interactions should connect across every touchpoint. By integrating technology with the operating model, organisations can improve efficiency, drive performance and retain happier, more satisfied customers. It's not just an operational change – it's a strategic imperative in today's market.”

**Angelo Paonne**

Partner, Deloitte



- **Disjointed Experience:**

Fragmentation between organisational structures, KPIs, data and technology means customers often get a disjointed experience. The messages they receive and the ways they connect with the business can feel unconnected and inconsistent.

- **Connecting Sales and Service:**

Combining these creates an opportunity to empower and upskill workforces, and to deliver the best customer service through both internal and external interactions enhanced by AI.



# 03

## The Role of Technology: Enabling Relationship-Driven Engagement

Alongside agentic AI, advanced technologies such as Salesforce's Marketing Cloud Next and Data Cloud can transform customer interactions. These powerful tools integrate seamlessly with an organisation's existing solutions, creating a unified technical and data ecosystem. This means valuable data residing in platforms like Google BigQuery or Snowflake can be easily leveraged to enhance customer engagement.

- **From Transactions to Relationships:** AI-enabled platforms allow businesses to move beyond simple transactions to build genuine relationships at scale. Every message, whether email or SMS, becomes an opportunity for dialogue, fostering deeper engagement.

- **Centralised Decisioning and Personalisation:** Data Cloud provides businesses with an accessible, actionable and unified view of their customers. It connects data from sales, services, marketing, commerce and other systems, so decisions can be made in one place and applied consistently across all channels. This way, customers get personalised experiences based on their behaviours and preferences. Data is shared across the organisation, and so ownership discussions shift towards shared responsibility.

- **Agentforce for Marketing:** Agentic AI capabilities empower efficient and effective marketing campaigns. They also support the shift towards a more responsive and interactive customer journey. The emphasis is on proactive engagement and anticipating customer needs, rather than reactive, one-way communication.

- **Operational Model Transformation:** To leverage these technologies, organisational structures and operating models must be reorientated. Breaking down silos and fostering collaboration across departments (marketing, digital, and customer service) is crucial for maximising the benefits of a connected technology ecosystem.
- **Lifecycle Engagement – Connecting Every Customer Interaction:** Customer engagement with brands is complex and non-linear, and effective engagement requires unified and coordinated data and insights. Salesforce Marketing Cloud Next brings these elements together by tightly integrating unified data, workflow and AI. This enables real-time synchronisation of customer interactions, so that what happens in one channel is immediately reflected in another and drives seamless, personalised engagement at every stage.

“AI is redefining how we interact with customers. By exchanging ‘do not reply’ with personalised, real-time engagement, brands can seamlessly interact with customers, anticipate their needs and meaningfully connect at scale.”

**Robert Colborne**

CX Solutions Director, Salesforce



# 04

## A Roadmap for Connected Customer Experiences

To achieve this transformation, organisations should consider a strategic roadmap that prioritises business outcomes and customer expectations:

**1. Create a Vision – Define Business and Customer Outcomes:** Begin by clearly outlining the desired business outcomes (e.g. reduced call centre volume, increased customer lifetime value) and the enhanced customer experiences (e.g. seamless omni-channel interactions, personalised communication) that the technology should enable.

**2. Assess Current State and Identify Gaps:** Evaluate existing technology stacks and operational models to identify fragmentation, data silos, and areas where current capabilities fall short of enabling true multi-channel personalisation. This includes understanding why newer solutions might not yet be fully adopted.

**3. Develop a Phased Technology Adoption Strategy:** For solutions like Marketing Cloud Next, create a roadmap that addresses current capability gaps and outlines how your organisation can gradually move to the latest Salesforce innovations. This allows for early adoption and preparation for future advancements.

**4. Prioritise Organisational Alignment and Process Re-engineering:** Implement strategies to foster collaboration between marketing, digital and customer service teams. This may involve internal restructures, new governance models, and re-engineered processes to ensure customer-centricity across all touchpoints.

**5. Build Customer Data Foundations for Customer Experience:** To drive consistent and meaningful customer experience outcomes, organisations should build a foundational data layer, unifying fragmented customer data from operational systems. This creates a complete, real-time view of the customer. With modern data virtualisation, you don't need to copy data. Instead, you can access it directly, getting insights faster and more securely.

“Australian banks are competing for enduring relationships based on trust and relevance, formed in every interaction. The market leaders will be the ones that embrace technology, empathy and thoughtful design.”

**Meredith Wheelhouse**

Banking Sector Growth  
Lead Partner, Deloitte



**6. Centralised Segmentation with**

**Data Cloud:** Data Cloud centralises your customer data, working seamlessly with existing technologies (regardless of vendor) to unlock greater value. This enables consistent, personalised experiences across all customer touchpoints, as unified audiences can be leveraged and their engagement tracked across every channel.

**7. Embrace AI for Enhanced Engagement:**

Explore and integrate AI capabilities, including agentic AI, to automate responses, provide proactive support, and personalise communications at scale, moving beyond the ‘do not reply’ paradigm.

**8. Strategic Measurement and Iteration:**

Continuously monitor the impact of these changes on both business outcomes and customer experience. Use data and insights to iterate and refine strategies, ensuring ongoing improvement.

**9. Privacy, Consent, and Compliance:**

These factors are paramount for building trust and a connected customer experience. The increasing concern over data exposure, cited by 41% of CMOs\*, underscores the need to treat privacy not as an afterthought but as a foundational principle. A privacy-by-design approach is essential, ensuring that data protection is baked into the very fabric of your technology, processes, and operational thinking from the outset. With changes to Australia’s Privacy Act already enacted and more to come, adaptability is crucial. By embracing this approach, you can build customer experiences that are not only seamless and personalised but also secure and respectful of individual data rights, thereby mitigating risk and safeguarding the trust you’re working to build.

\*9th Edition State of Marketing Report, Salesforce (2024).



# 05

## The Future of Customer Engagement: Beyond the 'Do Not Reply' Era

### The 'do not reply' era is over.

Modern consumers expect and demand two-way dialogue, personalised interactions, and seamless experiences across all channels. Organisations that strategically embrace integrated technology and operating models, prioritising both business efficiency and customer satisfaction, will be well-positioned to thrive in this evolving landscape. The partnership between Deloitte and Salesforce offers a unique opportunity to guide businesses through this transformation, leveraging deep market insights and cutting-edge technological solutions to build stronger, more meaningful customer relationships.

The journey towards a truly connected customer experience is multifaceted. It requires technological innovation, organisational alignment and a fundamental mindset shift. By focusing on customer outcomes, embracing AI-driven capabilities, and breaking down traditional silos, businesses can move beyond the limitations of 'do not reply' to unlock the full potential of personalised, relationship-driven engagement.

"Customers now measure telcos and media against the best experience they've ever had – not just in content or connectivity, but in every interaction. A seamless stream, an instant connection, or a personalised recommendation all set the bar. To compete, providers must deliver experiences that are simple, personal, and trusted at every touchpoint."

#### **Bec McConnochie**

National Industry, Sectors and Tech  
Alliance Lead Partner, Deloitte







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