

Creating a Global Footprint: CarltonOne's Perspectives on Building Holistic Customer Loyalty with Technology and Strategic Partnerships

MARK JOHNSON, LOYALTY360 MAY 31, 2023
CARLTONONE ENGAGEMENT



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from advertising to technology development when it created the first online customer engagement platform in the Canadian market. With its background in marketing and communications, the company continues to focus on developing new and innovative technologies in the customer loyalty and engagement industry.

Through the CarltonOne Reward Management Platform, the company provides its clients with a robust network of vendor partnerships featuring over 650 vendors in 185 countries. Leveraging a simple API connector, CarltonOne clients get up and running quickly and access 10 million products across all different rewards spectrums: merchandise, gift cards, prepaid cards, travel, experiences, mobile top-up, and even charitable donations.

As a leader in customer loyalty technology, CarltonOne has experience helping its clients stay relevant and engaged by navigating trends in customer loyalty. By creating richer, more personalized experiences for loyalty members, CarltonOne boosts interactions with the program.

Mark Johnson, CEO of Loyalty360, spoke with Rob Purdy, Founder and CEO of CarltonOne, about the company's insights into the current state of customer loyalty, what trends brands should follow or invest in, and how to create holistic, global loyalty programs.



Celebrating Brands: Creating Engagement Outside of Transactions

CarltonOne's platforms use artificial intelligence (AI) to collect and act on customer data, enabling CarltonOne to personalize the member experience more effectively, boosting redemptions and program engagement.

The machine learning element allows the platform to improve the overall experience as it learns more about which rewards users engage with the most. The goal of gathering this data is to better understand each member and then provide them with the products they want.

"We look at loyalty as the ability to reach out and connect with an individual member to make sure we can access and provide what they're looking for," says Purdy.

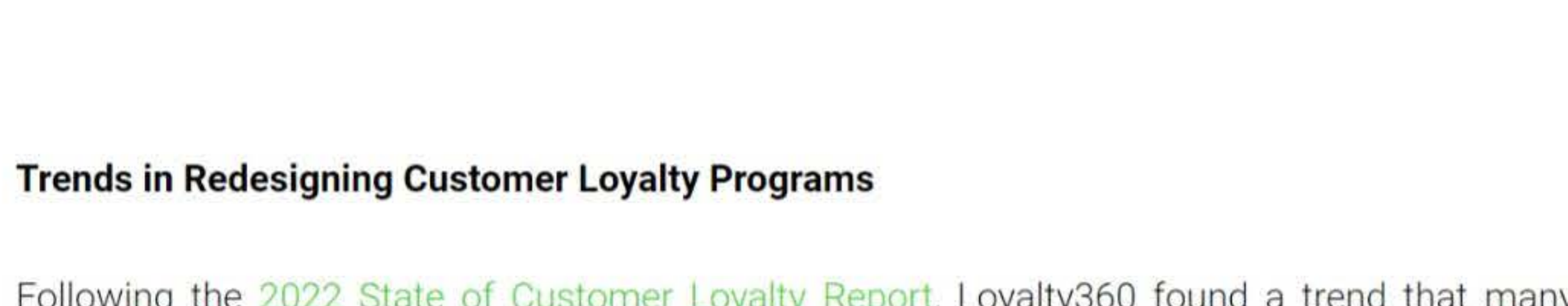
Using customer data, CarltonOne builds unique programs for its clients that help drive brand loyalty beyond just a discount or transactional reward. The platforms help drive meaningful customer engagement by presenting unique brand storefronts, like the Apple Rewards Store, which delivers a curated shopping experience that is entirely designed to look and work like a native Apple store, from product selection, configuration right through to checkout. As a result, CarltonOne has seen significant growth in the merchandise stores it builds for clients.

"Our sites are all about celebrating the brand and bringing a much richer look and feel around the brand than simply offering a \$50 card," says Purdy. "The brand creates more excitement and makes the site more interesting than the card, which helps build engagement with people."

These brand celebrations help build emotional loyalty with consumers, as they feel more connected with the brand beyond its products and services. One of CarltonOne's services is Kart – a shopping storefront that enables members to save on everyday merchandise, gift cards and travel. It features its own cooking shows, cookbooks, and health and fitness shows... developing more ways for members to experience the brand products on sale.

While brands can customize and fully curate the content they offer in CarltonOne rewards programs, they typically allow the platform to curate itself. Using AI, the platform listens to customer interactions and behaviors and automatically determines which rewards to show. The goal of this AI curation is to drive experiential engagement with the brand, helping personalize the member's experience.

"We like the notion that we're creating experiences for people," says Purdy. "That seems to be what resonates with members."



Trends in Redesigning Customer Loyalty Programs

Following the [2022 State of Customer Loyalty Report](#), Loyalty360 found a trend that many brands were looking to either completely redo or add new features to their loyalty programs in 2023. Purdy has also seen this trend among the CarltonOne customer base. Specifically, CarltonOne has experienced a significant increase in net new clients looking for a refresh or rebuild of their programs. These clients are looking to generate a new look for their loyalty programs, with dynamic and engaging content.

As other technology suppliers look to engage with this trend, Purdy recommends ensuring their platforms do not require large or complex builds to make changes. The CarltonOne platform provides its clients with modular widgets where they can easily drag and drop to add or remove features, brands or product categories, allowing for swift and simple changes to their loyalty programs.

"In the process of making changes or giving suggestions, it shouldn't be a massively painful process," says Purdy.

One reason brands are looking to make changes to their programs is to avoid falling into a "Sea of Sameness." The Sea of Sameness concept is the idea that many loyalty programs look, feel, and function the same, making them less engaging to their members.

For Purdy, the most effective way to avoid falling into the Sea of Sameness is to build a unique platform based on customer data. Every CarltonOne client dashboard is built specifically for them and relies on data from customer engagement. As a result, loyalty programs continue to drive engagement because they highlight features, brands or reward categories that their members want and use.

"We can create a customized dashboard for every client. Think of it like a blank page. Whatever they want to do in terms of speaking to their audience, we can design that from the ground up," says Purdy. "No two dashboards should or need to look the same. Program managers can add incentive leaderboards, recognition modules, surveys, and social newsfeeds to boost team communication and engagement."

Additionally, CarltonOne allows its clients to design campaigns in advance and schedule them out for an entire year. It's an instant refresh, like how the advertising world functions. This allows companies to design and implement seasonal marketing campaigns that keep the program fresh and engaging.

Building a Holistic, Meaningful Loyalty Experience

As companies investigate building holistic, global loyalty programs, the first step is to consider the impact of AI within their designs. The CarltonOne Platform uses machine learning to collect customer data, curate the catalog of rewards, and more. While AI still has significant growth potential, companies should be using what is available now to automate processes and accelerate data collection and action.

"Gathering data, building out, and using that data wisely going forward has massive implications for loyalty on any level," says Purdy. "Anyone who is not playing in that spectrum of designing AI into their platforms needs to start."

Next, CarltonOne is launching a Platform-as-a-Service play to change how they – and the loyalty industry holistically – bring products to market and how users engage with that product in the market. The PaaS concept is about differentiating programs and platforms to create unique customer experiences.

"For us, that's a big game changer, because it opens the platform up for development across a multitude of different ways, building on the platform through apps and different suppliers, and uniting technology in the way that other industries have," says Purdy.

While leveraging emerging technologies is vital for brands looking to stay current and engaging, the start of building a meaningful and holistic program starts with research. Brands must understand their audiences, what they need, what they want, and how they engage. Often, brands start at the end of the development process and work back to the end user. Instead, they need to focus on their members first and design around that data.

"Brands need to begin by understanding their members and their members' pain points," says Purdy. "What does the journey look like, to go from someone who sees your product for the first time to completing a transaction?"

From a technology standpoint, new loyalty initiatives won't succeed if the customer experience is bad. This is where research, new loyalty initiatives won't succeed if the customer experience is bad. This is where research, new loyalty initiatives won't succeed if the customer experience is bad. This is where research, new loyalty initiatives won't succeed if the customer experience is bad.

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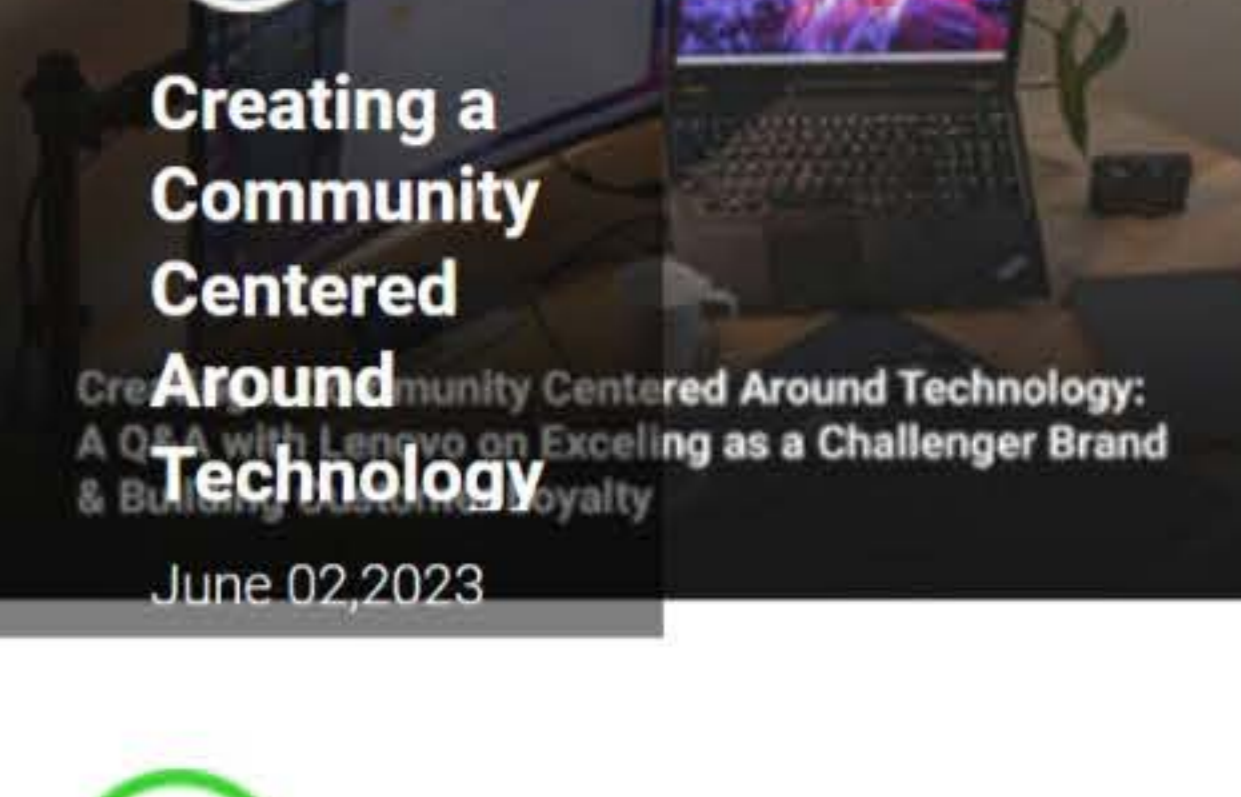
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