How Uber Eats and Chobani Leverage Real-Time Data to Inform Business Decisions

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Marketers have had to be nimble as they navigate these uncertain times. Real-time data and feedback have helped many companies stay on top of their marketing operations and reach consumers with relevant content amid the pandemic.

We recently spoke with Steven Wengrovitz, head of research at Uber Eats, and Maria Voronina, strategic planning manager for Australia at Chobani, about how they work with their teams cross-functionally to better understand what consumers want, as well as how they're leveraging those insights to create more personalized experiences.

How have you leveraged real-time feedback to inform your business decisions amid the pandemic?

Wengrovitz: At Uber Eats, we look at things from a consumer perspective and from a restaurant [partner] perspective. We've done diary studies to understand how people's attitudes or behaviors have changed. What was their experience like, what was new about it, and was there something we could've done to make it better?

Overall, a lot of companies are trying to get more reach and get new customers. That's precisely what restaurants and other merchants have been trying to do throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. People who had

never ordered delivery before through an app, and restaurants that had never participated in delivery, now want to be part of it.

We've done lots of foundational research on how restaurants think about driving new demand. So, how do we give restaurants insights about the people who visit them, so that they can make better, more informed, and actionable decisions?

Voronina: We're in a slightly different situation. Obviously, we play in the retail and grocery spaces. And while the Australian market and the US market are quite different in the makeup, certain things hold true across both markets. We have a longer lead time for the new things we do, which is a bit of a luxury in comparison with Uber Eats. But [there are, nonetheless, times when] we have to act quickly.

What have you learned these past few months based on the data and insights you've collected?

Voronina: In an era when there is no shortage of information, there is such a thing as too much information. We have learned to tune out the noise.

We have to constantly re-evaluate. We can't just conduct research and sit on it for months. We have to review a lot of data from all aspects— from the aspect of consumers, competitors, channels, and so on.

Wengrovitz: On the consumer side, a big thing that we have been focused on is understanding how to make it easy to search for and discover restaurants. It sounds really simple, but especially with lots of new restaurants coming in and lots of new people joining the platform, we want to make sure that that new experience is one that helps people, whether it's with discovering new restaurants or finding offers that make it cost-effective for people to order delivery.

Data is certainly crucial in delivering more personalized experiences. What does the future of personalization look like?

Wengrovitz: I was at a business dinner many years ago in New York. This was my first time at the restaurant, though I'd been to its sister restaurants. When I sat down with a colleague, the waiter came over and said, "I'm sorry, I don't know which one of you is the vegetarian." It

was me—the waiter already had the vegetarian menu ready. And a regular menu for my colleague.

I was just blown away. Somehow, through the reservation system or its sister restaurants' records of past visits where I ordered a vegetarian dish or told them I was vegetarian, the restaurant was able to—from the very first interaction I had with a waiter there—make it a really delightful experience. I felt as though the restaurant already knew who I was, even though I'd never been to that location before.

A digital experience between diners and restaurants unlocks the opportunity … for restaurants and merchants to understand how they can offer dishes that customers actually want, or how they can create the discovery experience or tell customers more about what is in the dish. There are so many more opportunities to use digital technology and digital platforms to help produce the type of amazing personal experience that I had years ago in person.

Voronina: I think we went [through] an interesting decade. When marketers first unlocked digital channels, we saw a massive shift toward pushing a lot of content on everyone, without any personal element. Over the years, we were able to gather data and start learning about our customers. And then we began tailoring a few aspects of our marketing to our customers. Fast forward 15 to 20 years from now, the brands we interact with will know us as well as our family and friends do.

And that will be norm. It's borderline creepy in a way. But when you compare customers across generations, they're completely different in how they react to providing information about what they want.

What's next for Chobani and Uber Eats?

Voronina: We're at an interesting stage where we are hungry. The market is hungry for some innovation, and even though we postponed some of our plans this year, we have a lot of exciting stuff planned for 2021.

Wengrovitz: There are two roadmaps in terms of what's coming next to the platform. We're working on many improvements to the current

experience, from all sides of the market. And we have a lot to do to make it a better experience.

Then there's going to be a bunch of new things that you can do on Uber Eats and new experiences that we're just starting to test. We're going to invest in research to understand how we can be really helpful to different types of merchants as they're trying to sell on Uber Eats, and how to make sure people will continue to find a lot of value in our experience—even when we are allowed to leave our homes and get back to normal a little bit.