

James Robert Lay:

Today's episode is part of the New Clarity Call Series and I'm excited to answer a great question from Bradley Blue about personalization that will empower you and your financial brand to maximize your future digital growth potential.

James Robert Lay:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay and welcome to the 121st episode of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the Clarity Call Series and I'm excited to welcome Bradley Blue to the show. Brad is the vice president of digital marketing at Logix Federal Credit Union and he has a great question about personalization that we are going to talk through together. Welcome to the show, Brad. It's good to have you today.

Bradley Blue:

Great to be here, James Robert, thanks so much for having me.

James Robert Lay:

Before we get into your question, which is a really good one, it's an important one, I want to just start things off on a positive note of what you are excited about right now. What's giving you energy personally, professionally? Your pick, go.

Bradley Blue:

All right, I'm going to go with the personal one that kind of leads into professional and it's happening right now. During the pandemic, my two year old boy and especially my six year old girl, Sammy and Penny, have gotten super into podcasts and they've been asking if they can have their own podcast. And I think they'll think it's super cool that their dad is on one and saying their name and making them a little bit famous. Thanks again for having me on.

James Robert Lay:

Well, shout out to both of them and I think that is super cool. My kids have gotten really big into YouTube now and they're asking to do the same thing, a YouTube series. I think what an exciting time for our kids to be growing up and having experiences that, I was probably dabbling with the stuff back in, was it 95, 96 when the internet was in its major infancy of building connections and using the digital and the internet to communicate but never with this type of reach and expansion. It is neat. It is really neat. And you ask a really good question about where things are, where we can go to provide clarity to the dear listener who is now just for context, is in over one of 120 different countries around the world. And if you flash back from 95, 96 to where we're at today. Once again, there's that multiplying reach of digital to help educate, to help empower marketing teams, sales teams, leadership teams.

James Robert Lay:

And the question you ask is this, we all dream about personalizing our communications to recipients, gradually moving from one to many, to one to few, to one to one. And there's a lot of focus on the tools to help us get there but you want to talk more about the people that help us get there because a campaign designed to reach one million people takes the same amount of time to develop, execute, review and optimize as a campaign to reach 100 people. And the question you ask is, how do marketing teams and their supporting departments need to transform to have an infrastructure conducive to one to few communications? Can you set some context of this of where your thinking is and what might some of the roadblocks and challenges be here for you right now?

Bradley Blue:

Sure. And thanks so much for entertaining the question. What led to it is we have an initiative at Logix right now to bring on a personalization platform because we've seen with things like emails and personalized popups and online banking, how effective they are as compared to just a blast email. I think that's just face value. It's going to be more effective when you're talking to one person about something that's highly applicable to their lives and you're not spamming everybody else so when you do have something applicable to everyone else's lives, they're going to be more likely to open it and appreciate what you're sending them, hold your organization in higher regard. We got very big into that. Probably, I don't know, seven or eight years ago now and every single year since then, the amount of emails we've sent out has increased by at least 10%, sometimes by as much as a 100%.

Bradley Blue:

And also my favorite stat to share is that our open rates have gone up at the same rate because we're sending out more emails, we're sending out more personalized emails. And so we're just seeing a huge amount of value in personalizing these communications and really not just for us but I think for all credit unions and small financial brands that's if you're in a growth phase where you're sort of getting to feel like you're big, it's probably because you're really good at being the little guy. And having those personalized communications right there in the branch where you can learn something about somebody and find something that you've got to offer them that's right line with their needs. We started doing that, but the problem is again, we're sometimes doubling the amount of emails we're sending out and then we've got all these different touch points.

Bradley Blue:

Now within online banking we have two different personalized touch points. You've got a touch points increasing exponentially. You've got the messages themselves increasing exponentially. And as you rightly mentioned, it takes the exact same amount of time to develop an email for a million people as it does for really one person. And sometimes even more because you're trying to talk specifically to that person. And then there's the other elements of the marketing cycle, like the review process and going back in and optimizing it, finding out what happened. Because of that, we're finding eight years ago we had one person working email and now we have two people working email but we're sending out 10 times as many emails.

Bradley Blue:

Back in 2015, we had one person that was running all the personalized communications in online banking, plus a whole bunch of other stuff. And now we really had to just sort of put on the brakes with any of that because we just don't have enough people to develop it. With this personalization platform we're developing, we're trying to figure out how to staff for it because what we definitely don't want to do is bring on a fancy new tool and marketing cloud and then not have anyone that either knows how to operate it or has the actual time to operate it.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah, so let me ask you a follow up question because that's great context there and it really shows the power of personalization. And sounds like you've been piloting, you've been experimenting and you see the benefit but to then get the scalability that has potential of deploying this thinking. Content, content is going to be the fuel of this engine. And I can tell you dozens of times that I've worked with a financial brand and they have the technology, they have the automation platform and it doesn't matter what flavor it is. It could be HubSpot, Salesforce, Marketo. I'm not so interested in that. It's more of the infrastructure, the processes, the systems that are deployed behind the scenes to then leverage the technology, multiplying everything once again, as I mentioned before, kind of like for example, this podcast.

James Robert Lay:

When you think about your team managing email, what does the content infrastructure look like from say a production standpoint? Because if you're going to scale email or personalized communication, whether it's behind online banking, mobile banking, email, even the possibility of adding text, even direct mail, handwritten messages via AI, which is a whole interesting phenomenon in and of itself. It's kind of taking a step back of automating email but now we can automate handwritten messages. That's a whole new optimization for personalization. What does the content infrastructure look like as it stands today?

Bradley Blue:

Right now I would say that it probably is it's not keeping up with the needs on the technological side. When we bring in new people to help it mostly has to do with the tools we're using and the content is developed pretty much the same way it always has been and it adds a lot of stress to everybody involved. You've got your touch point leaders, so say the people on our payments team, just to use an example, one email. They're giving us a few bullet points, which we'll design the copy around but we at this time, don't have somebody to write that copy that is separate from the person to set up the email that's separate from the person to plug in the data, separate from the person to review it. It's all just kind of one person and now two people.

Bradley Blue:

We're using some of our touch point leads to do something that they're not super accustomed to, which is review marketing material. And we've got people who are experts with our email system who may not be experts in copywriting. Now fortunately for us, I think that the two people we've got doing that are quite talented when it comes to writing copy and we do have assistance from other areas of the department but as of this time, we don't have a specialist that's just in charge of writing that individualized copy and it is a big stressor for the whole department.

James Robert Lay:

Immediately class 10 from the Digital Growth University pops top of my mind because it really is around what I would call content operations. And there are four areas here to consider to systematize and operationalize and what is content marketing? Because it's a word that gets thrown around a lot. It's very similar to the definition of digital growth, well defined systems and processes to plan, produce and then promote content that helps first and sell second. Doesn't matter what the medium or the channel is but it's the operational side of planning, production and promotion. And so those are the three P's to consider from a talent standpoint.

James Robert Lay:

We need people to plan and so that is where, for example, your subject matter experts are going to come into play so there's a marketing and an SME alignment. Marketing can interview these because they might not have the confidence to be the copywriter. But if we can have that interview like approach internally, then it helps to build that confidence and transfer knowledge from their head into, we'll call it a database of sorts or a content repository. And I'm going to come back to that point here in a moment.

James Robert Lay:

Number two, we have the production side so that's going to be dependent, probably more on the channel or the type, the medium of content being produced and that can get split into a content

repository. And then we have the promotion side. That's going to be more channel specific, whether it's email, whether it's ad base, where are those ads being placed. And then we need to add a fourth P into this though. That's the performance. How is this performing? Coming back and pausing to review what is working well, what could be made even better? What do we need to do more of? What do we need to stop doing all together?

James Robert Lay:

And as you think through this, that's where the mind starts to go. That's a lot of content. And you're right, it is. And so the habit, if you will, of a business line coming to marketing, typically last minute saying, "Hey, we need to get this communication out." That has to transform in and of itself because that type of behavior is not scalable. It's always going to create and put a marketing team in a reactive state. Marketing needs to get ahead and be in a proactive state. And so when you think about content and communication, regardless once again of medium, coming back to the idea of a repository of sorts.

James Robert Lay:

Inventory, content inventory or content assets that are evergreen in nature, that are independent of the traditional campaign but can be pulled off of a shelf and then plug and play whenever you need to drive some type of top of funnel awareness, putting someone into a funnel, moving them down. Those assets and inventory are already available so that it's no longer reactionary, it's proaction and it takes time. And so where do you stand in regards to content assets that are evergreen for different product lines?

Bradley Blue:

You make such an interesting point and I don't want to divert too much from your main question but one thing we think about all the time is we do hear being proactive all the time is a great way to get ahead of as a marketing department and as an organization. But I think particularly for smaller financial institutions, our ability to be reactive, to respond within days or even hours to requests from internal stakeholders, is really what gives us a competitive advantage. We don't have this massive ship to move like one of the big four banks where somebody can't just reach out to the marketing person that they know by name and say, "Hey, I would love to send this out," and the marketing team can do it. And so one of the things that I really appreciate about our organization is we do place a high value on being reactive and just getting ahead of things that other organizations might not be able to get ahead of.

Bradley Blue:

But that said, if we're spending all of our time doing that, then you're spending none of your time being proactive. I really do like the idea of very much of having a repository like you mentioned, of content that you can reach into and grab from and maybe it's something that's proactive, maybe you're using that content in an automation that's evergreen. Or maybe it's just something where one of your internal stakeholders reaches out and says, "Hey, I need this to send out by tomorrow, can you do it?" But you're not reaching out to a designer, to a copywriter, et cetera and saying, "Hey, I need this brand new stuff." You've got a great big library of things you can use. I would say that we right now, when it comes to that are at probably when it comes to design elements, maybe a four out of 10. And when it comes to copy, really pretty much every piece is being uniquely written. And that's a place where we really could stand to invest a little bit of time and energy.

James Robert Lay:

Yes. And to your point of being reactionary and being able to react to market conditions, definitely creating capacity to have that time. I can think of two examples recently. One was Wells Fargo announced that they were going to do away with personal loans, great opportunity to go into the market and look, for example, pull data to see who might be because you're a credit union, who might be

members that have some type of automatic payment or relationship with Wells Fargo and then we can send them a specific direct message, quote unquote, email or placing it behind the pin in online banking, that taps into that particular pain point. And saying, "Hey, we're going to be here for you." That's a reactionary opportunity.

James Robert Lay:

Number two, I see, for example, like with Chime. There's a lot, Chime's in the headlines now that their digital only play is actually creating some conflict for account holders who need to get in touch with another human being. That's another opportunity to use kind of what's going on in the real world in real time. But having some of these assets in the background for what I would call the larger vertical product lines, checking, mortgage, credit card, personal loans, some of the small business, that's a great way. And it's a multi-year process.

James Robert Lay:

I can think of one organization who has spent the last five years building out assets and inventory that are now at this point, literally plug and play to where one created almost \$10 million in loan revenue and the time for marketing to kind of come in and dust off the asset, do a little bit of optimization, update some of the messaging but it was nominal compared to the behaviors that they were in before but it takes organizational and cultural buy in from all the different product lines internally to say, "Hey, we're not ignoring you. We need to collaborate and work together on this and here's the longterm value."

James Robert Lay:

I think the other interesting thing, and this has come from conversations I've had over the last three to six months with automation players in the space, MarTech and sales tech. If marketing can create an inventory or a repository of messages, now we can empower the business line, whether it be a manager or someone more boots on the ground, a loan officer, so that they can come and pull automatically approved or marketing approved communication and send that out now at a one to one level. It's not relying on the automation from marketing but it's more of sales enablement to where sales can say, "Okay, I just talked to someone about a personal loan." I go into my asset inventory library, I pull out the personal loan collateral electronically, boom, email, done.

James Robert Lay:

I literally don't have to do anything, it's automatically sent, ready to go because I do see there's a pain point from a lot of the diagnostic work that we're doing is sales sends something but the messaging is off, the tone, even the formatting of the email and the larger you get in the organization, the more complex that becomes. Now, it's you're empowering these sales team members, these lenders to give them the tools to continue to communicate that knowledge that we have internally but in a much more unified manner.

Bradley Blue:

Yeah. You know where we've seen that a lot, James Robert, is with our real estate loan officers and their social media pages. They want to have an active social media presence and they want to be providing content to the people that are going to benefit from it. But most of them didn't go into that business because they excel at copywriting for example and some of them are quite good, but for the most part I think what they really benefit from is having a lot of, and also compliance approved, which is something that we haven't covered here. Compliance approved branded content that they can send out there maybe with a little snippet with their own voice but something where they can just post it and go on with their day. And that's been requested of us multiple times. And it's just one of those things where there are so many different requests coming in for so many different things. We haven't been able to

supply them with that as much as we'd like to. And I suspect that a great many of your listeners are probably having similar problems.

James Robert Lay:

It's the next level up that I say is going to really drive marketing, it's the micro is going to beat the mass over the next three to five years. I really feel like with everything that's going on in the inbox and with digital ads and with privacy, we're going to have to start really empowering the sales team to be more of a marketing channel of one that then can influence their personal network. That's where personal branding and they don't have that experience. Well, who has experienced with branding? Marketing does. Marketing becomes the internal coach to build these personal brand channels of one, to go out and become a micro influencer. Maybe it's a 100, maybe it's a 1,000, maybe it's 10,000. I'm not talking about influencer on a level, on a scale of a million people.

James Robert Lay:

Although Jennifer Beeston, who was a guest on this show, mortgage lender, she's grown a YouTube audience of about 20,000 people. But in for three or four years, she has almost five million views on her individual, personal YouTube channel. Simply answering the questions that people have about buying a home. And it's propelled her to become a nation's top 1% lender. To me, that's kind of where the next level up is. We're still in round one, first inning but to me, with privacy, with data, who knows? The iOS 15 update coming out now where we're not going to get tracking of open rates in Apple Mail anymore. It's almost Apple Mail is going to become like what direct mail was 10 years ago, 20 years ago. We're not going to have that visibility.

James Robert Lay:

This has been a lot of fun. And I was like connecting people when we have these conversations and someone is listening, they're like, I'm working on what Brad's working on. I want to connect with Brad. What's the best way for someone to reach out and connect with you and say, "Hello, Brad."

Bradley Blue:

Oh please, go find me on LinkedIn. I'm the VP of digital marketing at Logix Federal Credit Union. You can also email me at bblue@lfcu.com. And I love to have these conversations. And once again, sure appreciate the opportunity to have it with you, James Robert.

James Robert Lay:

Absolutely. Thank you so much for joining me on another episode of Banking on Digital Growth, Brad. And if anyone is listening, they have a digital marketing, a sales leadership question, text me the question that you'd like to get some clarity on to (832) 549-5792 and I look forward to talking through it together with you on a future episode. Until then and as always, be well, do good and make your bed.