

# **From Data-Driven to People-Based Marketing**

Successful Digital Marketing Strategies  
in a Privacy-First Era

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*“Half the money I spend on advertising  
is wasted; the trouble is I don't know  
which half.”*

*John Wanamaker*

## Introduction

If you wonder how marketing campaigns have worked for decades, and often still do, it looks something like this in exaggerated form: Creative agencies come up with the most outstandingly ingenious ideas on how to garner clients' attention. Directors or HiPPOs – an acronym for “Highest Paid Person's Opinion” – select the best of these based on their oh-so-infallible experience. The most suitable advertising channels – or perhaps those where the media agency receives the maximum margin – are selected, budgets are allocated, and media plans are broken down to the timeline. And then the operational marketing machinery rattles along for a while until the budget is used up – without regard for wastage or pertinence of the message to the recipient.

The statement that half of advertising expenditure is money thrown out the window has therefore remained valid to this day. Of course, there are brilliant advertising campaigns whose ideas inspire and impress – but do they really have such a positive impact on business success?

To prove success and support decisions, agencies are nowadays using the term “data-driven” in an inflationary manner. But far too often, they only mean that clicks or, in the best case, conversions of individual ads are measured and displayed on colorful dashboards. The underlying principle, however, remains the same: Thinking in terms of campaigns that are targeted toward a broad audience – coupled with the view that their ingenuity and creativity will influence and ultimately convince recipients. The fact that they may not have a need for the advertised product or service is part of the calculated loss.

People-based marketing is based on virtually contradictory approaches. The data consolidated on a single person form the foundation of the considerations. Communication is based on a profound understanding of the individual user, following the principles of customer centricity. People-based marketing relies on playing the right message, tailored to the recipient's particular situation.

Even if this has perhaps not become a reality in the sense of one-to-one marketing, the advantage of an individual approach is fairly conspicuous even in its rudimentary use. Brand messages are only used to attract the attention of people who do not yet know a company, for example. People who are interested in a product are provided with incentives to buy it. Existing customers, in turn, are offered suitable content so that they remain loyal to the brand for longer or are persuaded to buy again.

Even such a trivial segmentation – a formation of groups of people with similar behavior or motivation – can markedly reduce wastage in the measures. With significantly less money, the same can be achieved. To put it another way, half the money thrown out the window can be kept to a large extent.



The aim of this book is to provide the reader with the concepts and tools to benefit from this new and efficient form of digital marketing. This includes a profound understanding of the contexts and ways of thinking on which people-based marketing is predicated.

The first part of the book, therefore, meticulously examines the theme of people-based marketing from the perspective of customer experience and customer centricity. Thinking in this perspective is the fundamental prerequisite for being able to act “people-based” at all – anything else would be a sham.

The second part then looks at data in detail. This includes, in particular, how data about a user is amassed and built up along his or her journey – but also what it ultimately enables and where the technical difficulties and limitations lie. The data protection requirements that have increased in recent years also play more than just a secondary role here. Since data are at the core of modern marketing, a well-founded examination of people-based marketing from a data perspective is correspondingly crucial.

The third part of this book brings a technology perspective to the topic. Both data and the delivery of user experiences require appropriate tools that work in harmony with each other. Of the thousands of MarTech tools, an abbreviation for “marketing technology,” only certain ones consistently support people-based marketing. The selection of suitable systems is therefore also a vital component for the development of people-based marketing.

Finally, the fourth and last part of this book integrates the above-mentioned perspectives and presents the approaches and concepts to easily use people-based marketing. The design of people-based campaigns and the corresponding personalized activation of users thus unlocks the potential created by the customer-centric approach, data, and technology. Practical tips and advice on the necessary marketing organization or suitable performance measurement round off this part.

With this content, this book is then aimed toward those who aspire to benefit from the modern marketing mindset and gain a competitive edge in marketing using data and technology. This includes, for example:

- Marketing executives who desire to get more out of their marketing budgets. They will be able to use this book to initiate the appropriate data-driven strategies needed for people-based marketing
- Marketing professionals who want to generate more leads through digital channels. By reading this book, they will benefit from concrete data- and technology-driven approaches to set up and plan people-based measures
- Content managers who want to create a better customer experience with content. They will be helped by the segments of this book that

explain how good content can be delivered to the right channel at the right time

- Data- and tech-savvy people who have always wanted to understand in more detail what and how data can be used. They will learn about data flows, prerequisites, and limitations of data-driven marketing
- Practical all-rounders will benefit from feasible and useful tips and examples that can help them start with people-based marketing themselves and try out the benefits right away.

Those who are still beginners in digital marketing will be guided step by step to the customer journey, data collection, and marketing automation. Those who already have plenty of experience in digital marketing will be able to use this book as a reference for specific questions and any white spots on the data-driven marketing map. For those who want to get a quick overview, there is a summary at the end of each chapter with practical instructions for application in their own company.

Parts of this book, especially those on data collection and technology, have a strong technical perspective. However, they are explained in detail in each case so that no prior technical understanding is necessary. Other parts of this book have a business focus, but one does not need a degree in business to understand them either. The only prerequisite for understanding this book is ultimately only the interest and the desire to become more data-driven and successful in digital marketing.

# 1 Introduction to People-Based Marketing

Digital marketing has always had an extremely channel-centric view. It wasn't that long ago, for example, that display ads were optimized for clicks – instead of being measured against the subsequent, more business-relevant steps on a website. Even though “conversion” has now become accepted as a much more meaningful and pertinent metric, the view still mostly remains in the silo of the ad channel. Likewise, other channels have evolved and specialized greatly but have remained in their channel-specific mindset. E-mail marketing is another example, search engine optimization (SEO), website, app, or social media seamlessly continue the series of silos. While cross-channel analysis and considerations of attribution of channels to conversion have opened up the view, this has mostly not changed the fact that marketing departments continue to organize themselves according to channels and internal divisions and plan campaigns accordingly.

People-based marketing heralds a paradigm shift. It is no longer channels but people who are the focus of attention and marketing measures.

The genesis of this concept can be traced back to around 2013. Facebook was one of the first companies to coin the term. When it introduced its “Custom Audience” solution in 2014, people-based marketing was the promise to marketers to provide a less complicated mechanism for reaching the right users with the right content. This mechanism was intended to enable – and still enables today – targeting of individual Facebook users according to their interests, characteristics, and preferences. A precursor to what is now understood as people-based marketing.

## 1.1 What is “people-based marketing”?

As this topic is still in its incipient stage despite the fast pace of life on the Internet, there is still no universally valid definition of what people-based marketing is. Rather, it is product vendors or consulting firms that shape the understanding of the term. The market research company Forrester, for example, interprets people-based marketing as follows (Forrester Research 2018):

*“The ability to execute targeting and evaluation at the level of real individuals. This is based on bringing together consumer identity across digital and brick-and-mortar channels.”*

A central element is therefore – as the name suggests – the individual person. Customer centricity, an approach that places the customer and his or her needs at the center instead of the product, is reflected in this. This has already become immensely prevalent over the past few

years – not only in marketing but also from website design to product design.

People-based marketing most assuredly doesn't stop at a concept; it also requires identifying the individual person as per data points – not just at a single touchpoint but across channels. This is primarily a data- and technology-driven challenge, which means that people-based marketing also has a powerful data and technology component. Nevertheless, this component is the central difference to the already better-known “omnichannel marketing”: This approach is also based on a cross-channel approach. However, it still remains with channel silos, which are not connected with the appropriate technology and related to the user.

Finally, marketing measures are used to address the respective person in a targeted manner, which can be summarized by the term “hyper-personalization.” This kind of personalization entails a high degree of automation, which means that marketing automation and artificial intelligence are also vital components of people-based marketing. Both are no longer novelties today. However, the focus of marketing automation is often on sales generation and contacts whose details or e-mail addresses are known. Marketing to potential customers who are not known by name, on the other hand, is often left out of the equation. Artificial intelligence also has found only local use cases in marketing today.

The groundbreaking attribute of people-based marketing is that three changes in marketing that are already trend-setting in their own right are now merging into a new whole: customer centricity, data-based user profiles, and automation technology. This is what allows them to really unfold their effect or even multiply it. One could also call this “marketing on steroids.”

In this book, then, the term “people-based marketing” refers to the fusion of these three components, or expressed in one sentence:

*People-based marketing is an approach to marketing that puts the user at the center of consideration, brings together their cross-channel and cross-device interactions into a user profile, and thus enables companies to design a seamless, personalized customer experience across different journey touchpoints and allows marketing targeting on a one-to-one basis.*

The notion of reaching people one-to-one is nothing new in marketing *per se*. Even mom-and-pop-stores practiced this with their customers. However, for reasons of efficiency, very few business models actually allow this to be done on a large scale from person to person. Technology support in the form of automation and artificial intelligence is, therefore, a key enabler for this. Another evolutionary step in technology is identifying and reaching individual people, rather than devices

or cookies. The list would go on for different technology areas – as the importance of technology in marketing has increased remarkably.

For people-based marketing, technology – and especially its advanced maturity in the area of data and automation – is the enabler. Through technology, marketing merges with data and becomes a game changer. Marketing becomes much more relevant for the recipient and notably more effective and efficient for the operating company. In a study authored by The Boston Consulting Group (2018), the use of one-to-one marketing is expected to increase revenue by up to 20% and save up to 30% in costs. Danielle Lee, a senior executive at Spotify, even describes people-based marketing as the “gold standard for marketing” (Forbes 2017).

Critical voices may complain that a stronger need for data protection since the introduction of the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) means the end of personal marketing. Heretofore, this has not been confirmed. On the contrary, the success factor of modern marketing is built on a relationship with the user that is shaped by freedom of choice, consent, and trust. All this is in consonance with the fundamental idea of people-based marketing. The privacy-first era we have just entered, therefore, strengthens people-based marketing and the first-party data it creates for companies. It rightly weakens, on the other hand, the data streams executed behind the user's back, cookies set unknowingly, and actions taken unintentionally by the user.

Those who quickly and confidently master the new rules of the new game can gain strong competitive advantages in this new era of marketing. Those who want to continue playing the old game will be hooked sooner or later. It is therefore time to get involved.

## **1.2 What people-based marketing feels like**

The overwhelming potential that lies in people-based marketing can best be understood through examples. Let's imagine a day in the life of Carl, a man in his early 30s with a good office job, no family, and a cycling enthusiast. Carl feels at his best when things go according to plan and agreements can be relied upon.

People like Carl are among the desired customers of the car manufacturer AMH. This segment is not only affluent but also fits in well with the positioning of the new car models that AMH has launched specifically for a younger customer group.

During one of his morning visits to his favorite news portal, an ad featuring a sleek car from AMH catches Carl's eye. He pauses for a moment and gives in to the idea of taking a quick look at the sporty car. But then his common sense kicks in, pointing out to him, as the owner of a car that is only four years old, the superfluousness of buying a new car. “Besides, AMH has a rather stuffy image anyway,” he says, confirming his rational decision.



Figure 1.1: News portal with a display ad

However, reason didn't win over Carl that quickly either. During a short break at work, he clicks on the ad and lands on the AMH homepage.

The story could now be finished here. After all, the AMH homepage usually greets the visitor with the main sales model, but this is more associated with backwardness among the younger target group. Carl would see himself confirmed by his image of AMH at the point and return to his work.

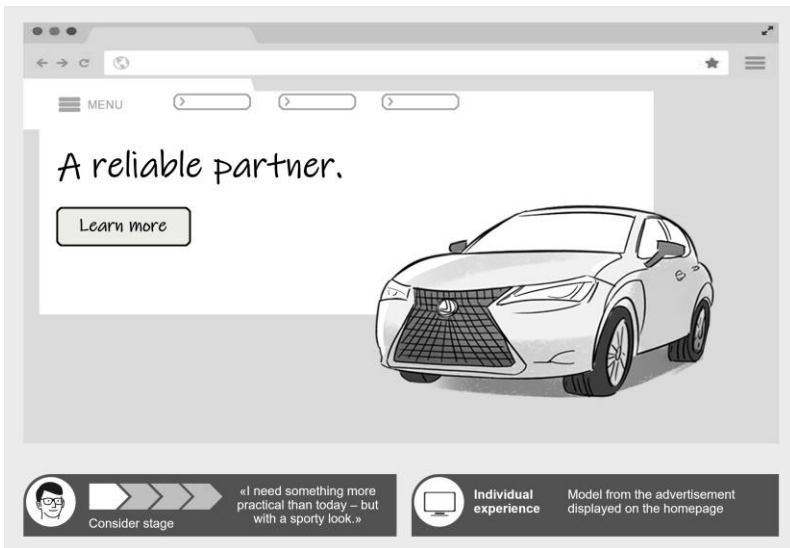


Figure 1.2: Website homepage with resumption of the ad subject

However, Carl is not presented with the main sales model on the homepage but rather the one he had just seen in the advertisement and which appealed to him so much. After one click, he is already in the 360° view of the car and is fascinated by the beautifully designed details of the interior.

Carl, enchanted, immediately starts playing with the configuration options. A different color, the addition of the sports package and alloy rims make the car look much appealing to him. He can easily save his individual configuration to his e-mail address to share it with his friends. “Driving should be a lot more fun with such a setup,” he thinks to himself – and almost overhears the question from his boss, who is now standing next to him at the desk and wants to understand some details about his latest report. Carl immediately falls out of his day-dreams and is back at work.

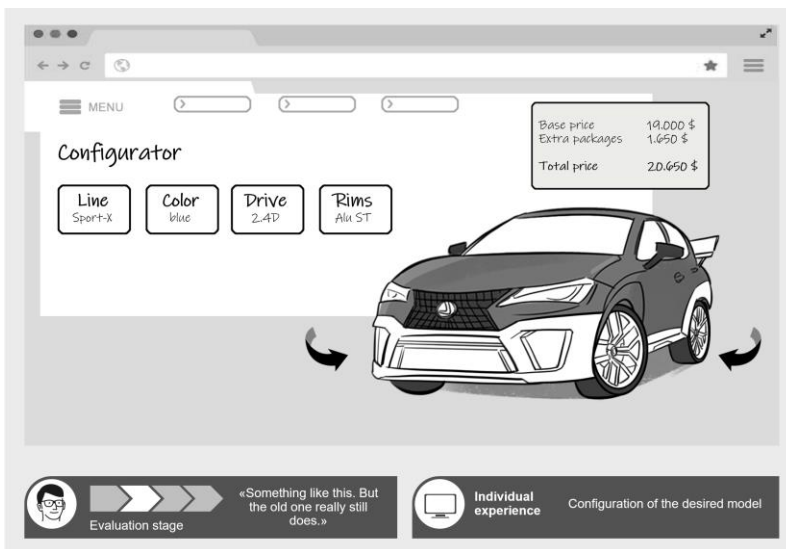


Figure 1.3: Car configurator with the option to save to an e-mail address

Caught up in day-to-day business and private pursuits, the thought of a new car eventually fades from Carl's mind. It's not that important after all, and the old one is still running smoothly. In addition, the vacations now have priority in his private budget planning. For some time now, he has been considering a stay of several weeks in Japan – flight, hotel, and leisure programs are not exactly cheap.

One morning, the Japan vacation has not yet been booked, he is once again caught by an ad on his favorite news portal. There it is again, that sleek model from AMH that he liked. “Exactly in the color and sports version as I would take it,” Carl murmurs to himself.

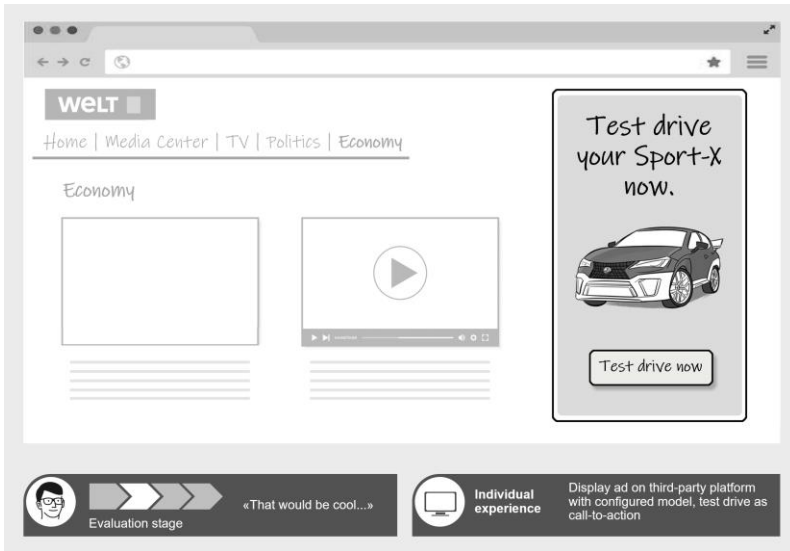


Figure 1.4: Retargeting ad on a third-party portal

A gut-feeling click takes him back to the AMH homepage, where he is now greeted directly by the sports version in the color of his choice and in large size. A test drive directly in his vicinity is offered to him in a prominent place on the page. “I wonder if I should stop by there on Saturday with my girlfriend Mary,” he ruminates. He then begins to look at the various engine versions and other option packages that he can configure.

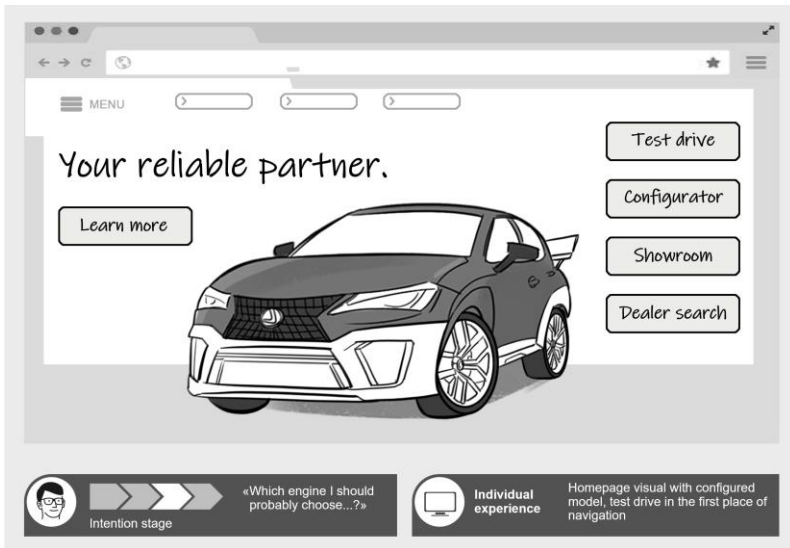


Figure 1.5: Website home page with navigation and hero visual personalization



However, the price display for his model increases fairly linearly with the added options. “If I want to make a success of my vacation in Japan, I’ll have to deal with one or two extraordinary features less,” he contemplates.

After almost half an hour of selecting and deselecting options and packages, he believes that he has found the right equipment in an acceptable price range. “But before I test drive it, I have to ask Mary for her opinion,” Carl remembers.

Finding the perfect opportunity to talk to Mary about his thoughts on buying a car is not so easy. Particularly when this calls into question their vacation in Japan, it requires some tactics to prepare for the right way – Carl reflects. Therefore, he purposefully sprinkles a few introductory remarks on a walk through the city and on other occasions. But Mary seems not to notice or even to ignore them. Thus, his resolution comes to a standstill again and gets into the background on the daily list of priorities.

One evening a few days later, both have just made themselves comfortable on the couch in the living room, Carl receives an e-mail from AMH. Shining and sparkling, his configured favorite model beams at him in the e-mail. Finally, Carl musters courage to talk to Mary about it.

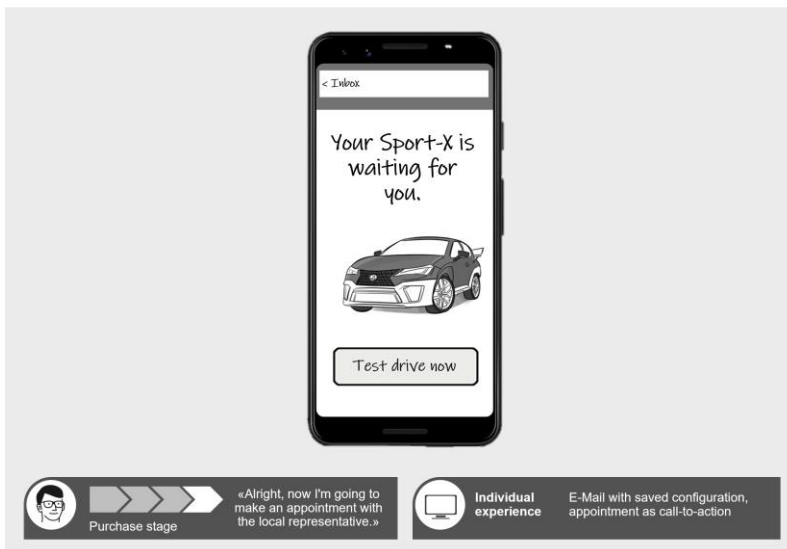


Figure 1.6: Personalized follow-up e-mail

It was a pleasant conversation. The very next morning before work, Carl sets about booking a test drive. After just one click on the AMH website, he finds the dealers in his immediate vicinity. Now the appointment is chosen, and the driving pleasure is about to come!



Figure 1.7: Website with dealer finder based on user geo-location

Of course, this story could be continued by telling how Carl buys the car and how he receives useful tips for use during the waiting time until delivery, which increase his anticipation even more; how he is suggested further useful accessories after taking delivery of the car, or is reminded of the first maintenance service after a year; and so on.

The difference between this story and a usual car purchase is that Carl is subtly played with personal marketing messages at different stages of his journey toward purchase. In accordance with his behavior and demonstrated interests, Carl is shown specific offers, initially the new car type on the homepage, for example, and later his preferred model on third-party websites, on the website or in the e-mail. Not only the content but also the triggers of the message are related to his behavior: The customized ads are displayed to him immediately after his website visit, and the e-mail is sent a few days after his specific configuration is completed and due to the absence of any further interaction. The messages tailored to his individual situation always lead him back to the buying process and nudge him one step forward. Generic messages would likely have bounced him off and probably not have led to a conclusion. Most of these actions take place in a situation where Carl is not yet showing any concrete interest in buying, but he is making key decisions in his customer journey. They, therefore, fall into the classic area of marketing and addressing new customers – and not into the sales process or existing customer management.

Of course, Carl's story is fictitious. Likewise, there would be thousands of other motivations, situations, and courses of events, how people inform themselves before buying a car and can be individually

convinced. Constructing every single story and coming up with individual messages is therefore not an effectual way. The approach described in this book, therefore, shows models of how this diversity can be abstracted. In this way, many individual experiences can be generated with a manageable number of variants and efficiently triggered with automation mechanisms. Since this triggering is completely individualized to a single user, it results in an effective one-to-one relationship. For the design of the interaction, however, the view from the customer's perspective remains indispensable. Because only the view through Carl's glasses reveals those problems, triggers, and motivations that would otherwise remain hidden.

### 1.3 How to approach people-based marketing

The technical and conceptual prerequisites for introducing individualized digital marketing are basically in place today. In summary, the following points form the basis for people-based marketing:

- The in-depth understanding of customer needs, abstracted into personas and customer journeys
- The cross-channel aggregation of behavioral data from anonymous and known individuals into user profiles
- The automated playout of experiences across digital touchpoints through the use of data-driven marketing automation software and artificial intelligence

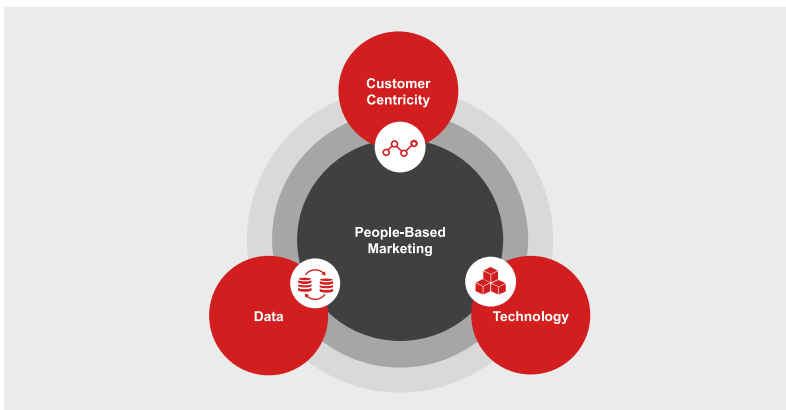


Figure 1.8: The three building blocks of people-based marketing

How these prerequisites are created and brought together to form people-based marketing is explained in this book in three sections: customer centricity, data, and technology. In addition to the multifarious challenges that arise at the content level and are overcome step by step, the first significant impediment is of a cultural nature: A brand that wants to use people-based marketing successfully requires a culture that bases decisions more on data than on opinions.

This does not have to be a pure data-driven culture at its best, or as W. Edwards Deming, an American physicist and statistician, demands:

*“In God we trust. All others must bring data.”*

However, it requires a change in the organization that leads away from the gut feeling of chief marketing officers, managers, and creative directors to facts backed up by data. In companies where the degree of reflection on their own actions is high or which have committed themselves to the principles of the learning organization according to Peter M. Senge (2006), for example, the breeding ground for a data-driven culture is high. Here, it is important to look in the mirror and realistically evaluate one's own culture. If this culture is exactly the opposite of “data-driven,” then it will take a – possibly lengthy – organizational transformation to even create the basis for the acceptance of people-based marketing. If, on the other hand, the will to create such a culture exists, then the arguments for people-based marketing will fall on fertile ground.

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