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GDPR: 5 reasons why B2B marketers should embrace it

B2B Marketing

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Introduction

The GDPR is the apocalypse. It will be to marketers what the Chicxulub asteroid was to the dinosaurs – neutering life as it's known.

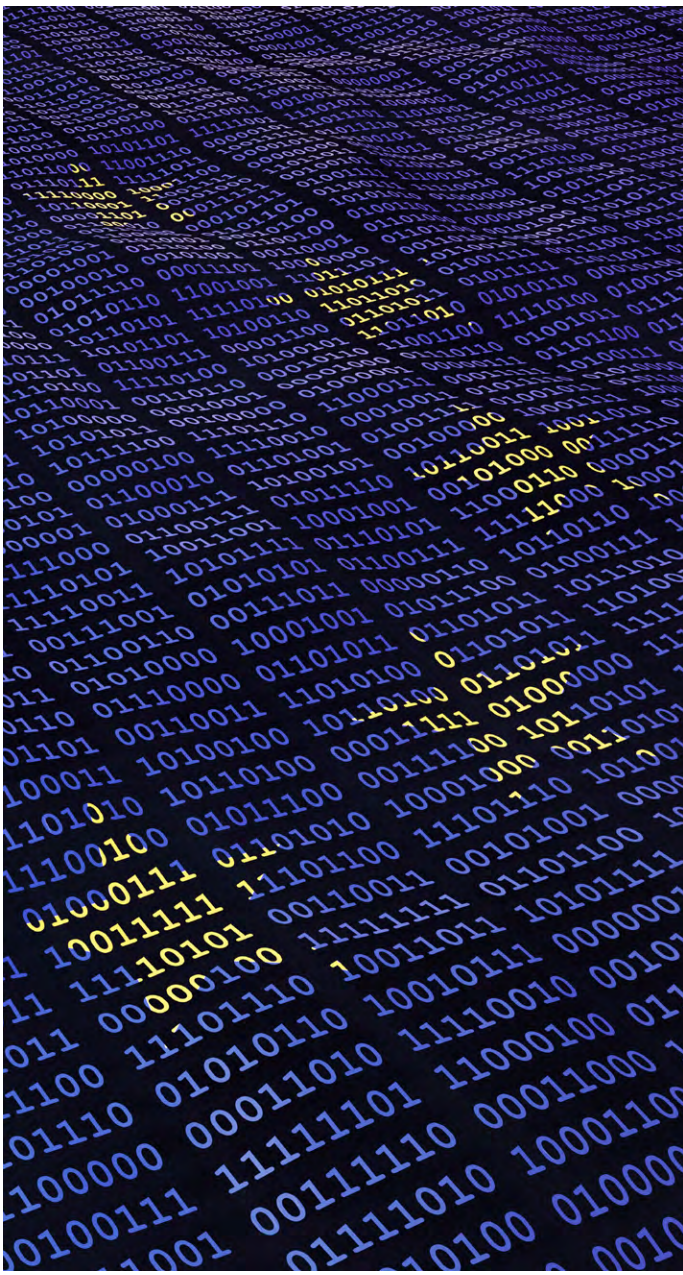
Well, that's what the doom-mongers and those eager to sell their compliance solutions would have you believe.

The reality is that life after 25 May 2018 – when GDPR comes into force across the EU – will probably be pretty similar to what went before. Even the information commissioner, the GDPR regulator in the UK, says it's meant to be "evolution not revolution", and if you comply with the Data Protection Act, you'll be in a great position to meet the regulatory challenge of GDPR.

One of the outcomes the ICO wants from the introduction of GDPR is for organisations to move beyond compliance in their approach to data privacy and, in the words of regulator Elizabeth Denham, "to work on a framework that can be used to build a culture of privacy that pervades an entire organisation".

B2B Marketing contends that, far from signaling the end of marketing, GDPR should be seen as an opportunity to apply the same thought process to your marketing, boosting your profile, rethinking your approach, driving better results and giving your business a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Read on and we'll tell you how.



43%

Marketers feel negative towards how GDPR will affect them *(DMA)*

70%

B2B marketers are worried by changes to opt-in laws *(DMA)*

4/10 Start-ups' average state of readiness *(Mailjet)*

72%

Marketers feel prepared for the new data protection legislation *(DMA)*

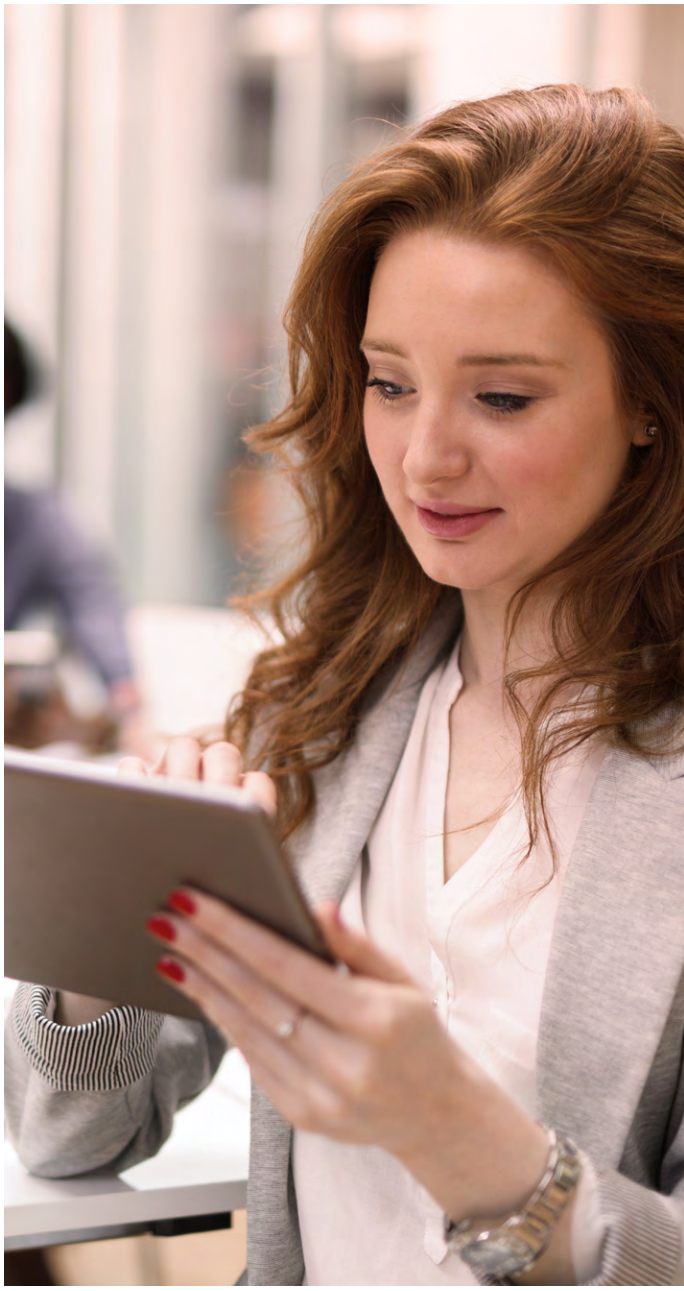
68%

Marketers believe it will stifle creativity *(Ensighten)*

59%

Marketers yet to receive any GDPR training *(IDM)*

£8000 Average fees spent on external GDPR guidance and consultancy by SMEs *(The Data Compliance Doctors)*



1. It'll raise the profile of marketing within the organisation

You don't need us to tell you marketing can sometimes have a bit of an image problem internally. In many unenlightened B2B firms, questions are still raised about the value the marketing function adds to the business.

If that's the situation you find yourself in, GDPR can help.

"Core to what we're trying to do as marketers is to drive the experience for customers and prospects – to communicate with them when, where and how they want to be communicated with," says Holly Rollo, CMO at RSA Security. "GDPR is inconvenient in the short-term, but is great for us in the long-term because it will help us to achieve that goal."

But to do that, says Rollo, you need to take the lead. "We're going to have to lead that charge. There's an opportunity if we lean into GDPR and the changes that need to happen. From a process standpoint, systems, training and understanding, we can really get to where we want to get to, which is that full omni-channel experience for our customers."

But it's difficult to lean in, when you're standing outside.

The worst that can happen is for marketing to be left alone and ignored. Yet this is what many marketers tell us is happening. When it comes to GDPR, marketing is a blindspot for many organisations. It's being ignored as businesses concentrate on their data sources and cyber security, forgetting that, as one marketing director puts it, "marketing has the potential to mess this up quicker and with more damage than any other part of the business."

Not being involved in the conversation might mean you end up on the wrong end of some policies and processes that look great from a legal point of view, but leave you unable to execute any marketing.

> "Marketing has the potential to mess this up quicker and with more damage than any other part of the business."



"There's a real tendency for the marketing department to be overlooked in the conversation about GDPR, to be forced upon some really rigid rules that aren't going to work. The medicine feels like it's going to kill – not cure – the patient," says Dan Sullivan, head of marketing capabilities at KPMG. "So let's have a broader dialogue about how we use that data. Starting to elevate the discussion before you lose people in double opt-ins and consent. That is not a conversation to have with senior leaders because they glaze over quickly."

At KPMG, they have a mantra: "Clients in control of their data." This has changed people's approach from simply ticking boxes to focusing on the company's aspirations, including what they want to achieve and how to manage their client relationships.

Remember the axiom 'never let a good crisis go to waste'? This is that crisis, don't waste it.

Action points

- **Find a buddy:** GDPR isn't just a marketing challenge, it affects the whole business. Other functions in the organisation will be trying to work out what GDPR means to them too. Find a friendly face to team up with and tackle the task together.
- **Talk to people about what it means for them:** Talking about GDPR in the abstract usually means little – and makes people switch off. Highlight how it will affect them, and their customers.
- **Turn the conversation away from marketing:** Focus on your customers – they are meant to be at the centre of GDPR, after all.

2. It's an opportunity to stop emailing, and start doing something better

Do you feel lashed to the wheel of email marketing? As it continues to turn, you're not emailing your prospects because you've got something important to tell them or they really want to hear from you, but just because it's what you always do.

The sheer volume of comms prospects receive has rendered their effectiveness useless. And that's just the marketing emails. Many senior marketers have come across emails sent by senior execs, partners and sales professionals that are newsletters and communications in all but name.

This isn't a GDPR-specific problem. It's come about because marketers have been flogging mass-marketing to death.

No matter which legal ground you've selected to underpin your marketing in the new regime, be it consent or legitimate interest, it's likely you'll be using a vastly reduced database to reach your audience (which may not be a disaster in itself).

GDPR is a great opportunity (and pretence) to re-evaluate your marketing strategy. Is email marketing even appropriate for you in the first place? Last summer, pub chain JD Wetherspoon decided it wasn't the right channel, and deleted all of its customers' email addresses.

You'll need something to fill the void, of course. Many suggest direct mail – as a channel that doesn't necessarily need personal data or sets a lower threshold for consent – will make a comeback as an effective channel.

No matter which legal ground you've selected it's likely you'll be using a vastly reduced database



But a move away from email will have implications for the team, and its skills base. There are many junior and younger marketers who know little other than email marketing. And some are often very process-driven – more focused on getting the emails out than their effectiveness. They'll need time to adapt, as well as training and support. Now, rather than on 26 May, is the time to start weaning them off email and encouraging them to consider other options.

Perhaps that new approach will be account-based marketing (ABM)? Our recent research found 80% of B2B marketers expect their focus on ABM to increase in the next 12 months. ABM provides a more targeted approach to customers and prospects, in addition to benefits such as greater sales and marketing alignment and higher ROI.

Creative opportunity

A survey by the DMA found 71% of marketers believe the implementation of GDPR represents a unique opportunity to formulate more creative campaigns. But more than half of those polled (53%) were concerned about the lack of skills to survive in this new era.

Rachel Aldighieri, MD at the DMA, said: "GDPR, in particular, is a unique opportunity for business transformation and to forge new relationships with customers based on trust. Organisations that put creativity at the heart of a customer-centric approach, not simply viewing the new laws as a legal issue, will thrive in this new environment."

Action points

- **Take a step back:** Re-evaluate your marketing strategy and work out whether your current tactics are still relevant and valuable to your audience.
- **Establish the implications for staff:** For the vast majority, going cold turkey on email marketing won't be necessary, but marketers may need extra training and support for any new approach you decide on.
- **Consider ABM:** If you've been struggling to get an ABM programme off the ground, the onset of GDPR provides the opportunity to attempt this more targeted approach.

3. Better data, and more effective targeting, will give you better results

According to a survey by software provider Veritas, some 92% of marketers think their organisation will benefit from better data 'hygiene' enforced by the regulation, and more than two-thirds reckon compliance with GDPR will improve the data insight they have about their business.

Almost half (45%) expect to reduce costs, increase revenue or market share with better data management.

Sounds like a no-brainer doesn't it? It may be hard to let go of those contacts and databases you've spent months and years building and curating. But ask yourself, if a significant proportion of those on that database never respond, what value is it actually bringing to you?

Holly Harding, EMEA marketing programmes manager at Hitachi Ventura, says: "It's more about what insight you can gain from your data that can add value back into your business. What intelligence can you get and how can you approach marketing from that new angle?"

Improving your data management is also about minimising your risk to the organisation. This is a tenet behind GDPR, to create an onus on companies to understand the risks they create for others, and to mitigate them. Holding data that doesn't add any value is just multiplying the risk to your business.

You need to let that data go. Under GDPR, individuals need to understand how their data is being processed, which also includes how long you intend to store it. Keeping it forever 'just in case' is no longer an option.

If you report success on the basis of open or click-through rates, you'll be quids in, as these are all likely to rise with smaller more targeted data sets. Even if you don't, targeting a more focused audience is likely to result in more engagement and interest in your communications, which in turn leads to improved ROI. Some 75% of marketers think GDPR will improve their approach to customer interaction and engagement.

Holding data that doesn't add any value is just multiplying the risk to your business

Action points

- **Understand what 'engagement' looks like:** B2B sales cycles might mean you only contact prospects or customers once or twice a year. Establish what an 'engaged' customer really looks like to you.
- **Exorcise the unengaged:** Delete those contacts who are not engaged, under your definition. It may be painful, but they may be more trouble than they're worth.

4. Data privacy can be your competitive advantage

How can you drive competitive advantage from a piece of legislation that is mandatory for all organisations?

The opportunity is two-fold. First – and this has been pointed out by the ICO – individuals will be more willing to provide their personal data if they believe organisations will handle it fairly, securely and responsibly. Those organisations living up to these high standards will gain a march on their rivals.

The second is while every business will be expected to comply with the provisions of the regulation, few will have given much consideration to how they can market it. This is what will set organisations apart from the competition. Don't just comply with the rule, use it to market more effectively. This is where marketing has a big role to play in raising its own profile and delivering additional value to the business.

GDPR is not a sexy subject, and there'll be competition to make your marketing stand out. Some brands, including Microsoft and Dotmailer, have set up 'trust centres' on their websites, which essentially act as microsites dedicated to the organisation's approach to data security and privacy. Your brand might not need to provide as much detail as these technology businesses, but it's a great starting point. Others, including LinkedIn and *The Guardian* have produced simple explainer videos on their approach to privacy and their policies.



Action points

1. **Walk the walk:** If you want to drive competitive advantage through GDPR, you need to be able to back it up through your action. Nothing is more likely to break trust than failing to live up to your billing.

2. **Talk the talk:** Once you've done the hard work to comply, you then need to let your customers and prospects know. Work out how this new approach to privacy can be highlighted in existing campaigns, and what your messaging around GDPR will be.

5. If you don't take this opportunity, you might not get another

Taking responsibility, especially for a topic as complex and serious as GDPR, takes courage.

But opportunities that place marketing in the spotlight to demonstrate its worth to the organisation – beyond what's traditionally expected of it – are few and far between. They are not like buses – who know when the next opportunity might come along.

The issues are thorny, and trying to comply with GDPR often creates more questions than answers. But shrinking away from the challenge in the hope it'll preserve the status quo is not the solution to any of them.

GDPR presents the chance to raise marketing's profile as the voice of the customer. As Holly Rollo says: "We are in a position where we can advocate for them, for their privacy, and for responsibility – because ultimately, marketing has to manage the brand reputation. If we don't lean into that and help drive that change, it would really be a lost opportunity."

"We're chief repeating officers, chief customer insight officers and, in lots of ways, chief collaborating officers – that's core to our job as marketing professionals, and what we're good at. If we can turn the job from providing customer insight into responsibility for the customer's data as well, it's an easy pivot. Everyone wants the customer insight, but what goes along with that is responsibility. That's where we can really lean in," she adds.

"People are paying attention, because 4% of revenue is a really big risk. But we have to be proactive and vocal – and that comes from marketing teams first understanding this isn't an IT problem, this is a business risk problem."

> "People are paying attention, because 4% of revenue is a really big risk. But we have to be proactive and vocal."



About B2B Marketing

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