

Central makes it personal

Using data to create unique experiences for each shopper





Call for change

The case for next-generation buying experience

Whether you're shopping for basic groceries in Bangkok, a new pair of pants in Phuket or a digital camera in Chiang Mai, it's likely that you're buying from an entity owned by Central Group, the largest retail company in Thailand. Central Group owns more than 3,500 locations, spanning retail, department and grocery stores, and also runs malls, hotels and restaurants.

Central Group long ago claimed a major wallet share in Thailand. The company knew that it's one thing to be everywhere; having a big footprint matters. But it's another thing entirely to meet each individual customer's specific needs at precisely the right times and places.

Think of it this way. Let's say you're a middle-aged businessman who bought a gingham dress shirt in a Bangkok mall. Wouldn't it be nice if Central Group could let you know, two weeks later when you're a block or two from another store, that a matching tie is on sale? Or what if you're a mother who bought diapers at a store across town? Shouldn't the company be able to alert you about a promotion on baby clothes that correspond to your child's diaper size?

Central Group already had real consumer data—who bought what, where and when. But it wasn't able to use that information to surprise and delight customers with anytime, anywhere rewards and product offers. From a business standpoint, Central Group wanted to find a way to connect the dots between what customers already purchased and what they want or need next, and provide a truly personalized experience to every individual.

Fortunately, Central Group knew where to start. The company had a loyalty program, called The 1, in which customers could earn and redeem points. The 1 already had millions of customers enrolled, but it had limited capabilities. There was a huge opportunity to rethink loyalty as a living service, beyond points, to create meaningful experiences and interactions with members on a daily basis.

Dr. Ton Chirathivat, President of The 1 Central, saw that The 1 could be instrumental in providing a superior, always-on customer experience. The key, Chirathivat believed, would be delivering a personalized experience by building The 1's data capability and, ultimately, accelerating an enterprise-wide customer-centric transformation that would make customers happier, as well as fuel the company's next phase of growth.

When tech meets human ingenuity

Integrate and orchestrate to redesign and relaunch

The discussion and collaboration with Accenture commenced with one question: How can the customer experience be elevated to meet human needs? Better yet, how could The 1 be transformed from a legacy points system to an enterprise-wide program that wows by delivering relevance and value to individual customers? More specifically, they wanted The 1 to be less a loyalty program and more what they envisioned as a “Central of Life” platform that people interact and engage with every day. With this goal in mind, a three-phase program got underway.

The first phase, the strategy and roadmapping element, looked at what customers would experience after such a transformation, as well as what it means to create that desired experience by using consumption data—not *intent* data, as Facebook and Google have. In other words, the idea was to use data on who purchased what, when and where, then offer products and promotions that those specific customers want and need—even if they don’t know it yet.

Phase two focused on how to deliver on this vision. To match customers’ shopping habits with their likely wants and needs, the team

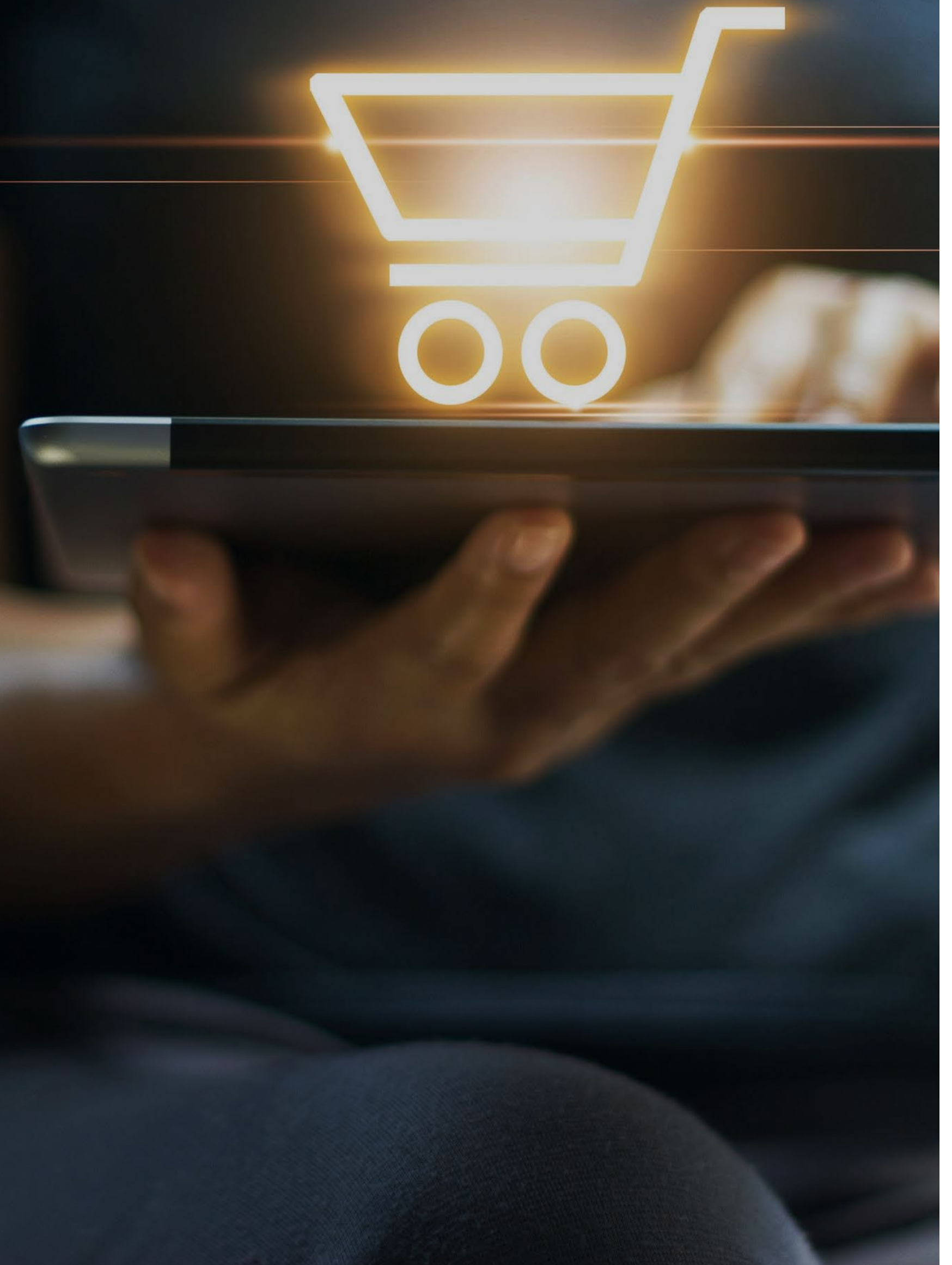
developed and implemented a multilayered system with Adobe Experience Cloud at its core, orchestrating all its data and content. The full Adobe stack includes advanced marketing technology for microtargeting customer segments, as well as a new loyalty engine. This would be essential to the evolution of The 1 from a standard points-based loyalty program to the main driver of a holistic, personalized experience in which it’s easy to alert the proverbial businessman about the tie to match his new shirt or offer the new mom a promotion on baby clothes.

To achieve this, the team had to speak to customers in new and better ways, such as providing appropriate offers and content via email or The 1 app—both of which were redesigned and relaunched. In addition, the team had to integrate and orchestrate the new Adobe technologies so that data from the legacy CRM, POS and loyalty systems could flow seamlessly in and out of the new system. In other words, The 1’s marketing team needed to be sure the data would help them speak to the right customers in the right ways at the right times.

They also added gamification and content to make the app feel more like a companion to daily life. Mothers who buy a few different

brands of diapers might earn a “Mission: Super Mom” badge in the app, for example, but might also receive content about parenting advice. Another content enhancement provides daily horoscopes, indicating the day’s lucky color in which one should dress. In addition, a new member tier was launched to reward high-value members with special benefits such as access to a mall’s exclusive parking area and lounge.

In other words, the project had to be more about people than data. That’s why, for the third phase of the project, Accenture and The 1 agreed that their marketing and product-development groups had to be integrated—Accenture employees would sit alongside Head of Marketing and Head of Product, and on down the line, for every development or change in technology, so it could proceed in harmony. This would also facilitate faster adoption of agile ways of working, including implementing an experimental, test-and-learn culture. This mindset would help everyone pivot quickly in response to data indicating changes in customer habits in certain segments or geographies, but also make a richer, more relevant experience always available to cohorts and individuals alike.



A valuable difference

Wiring data to delight

The partnership is now well into its third phase, focused on carrying out hyper-personalized marketing initiatives at scale, in both quantity and quality. In the past, The 1 marketing team could run hundreds of campaigns per month, with limited targeting capabilities. Now the company can push thousands of targeted campaigns per month, delivering relevant surprise-and-delight experiences to every customer, wherever they are—and even predict what individual customers want to see or buy.

The 1's new app and customer-experience program were launched after implementing the first two phases of the project—including the road mapping, full Adobe stack installation and configuration, and development of the new agile way of working.

This all proved critical, as the COVID-19 crisis closed the doors of Central Group's retail stores right when the new experience had launched. Because the project's vision, technology and agile way of working were already in place, the team was able to help quickly transition campaigns from brick-and-mortar retail to online-only channels. For example, they held targeted Facebook Live shopping experiences, with Central Group staffers showcasing products in stores and customers purchasing from their homes.

Essentially, this initiative has rewired the company's entire approach to the customer experience, across all its business units. That's why, moving forward, the partnership is looking at ways to create even better experiences throughout the Central Group ecosystem, including offers with the company's hotel and restaurant groups, as well as the ability to redeem discount rewards and pay the remaining balance within The 1 app. Members will also receive offers from external partners that want to reach the specific customers through The 1 experience. All of this will further cement the idea of The 1 as the "Central of Life" platform.

By the end of the partnership's third phase, The 1 is looking to have 20 million members. It's all possible thanks to the vision that makes better, smarter use of data to an extent that's personal. The insights are so rich, and the marketing team is able to move so quickly, that at each touchpoint, customers feel as if they're treated more like individual people with unique needs and interests, and less like data points.

Put simply, that new mom will receive an offer for new baby clothes right when she needs it, not a promotion for a tie. And that Bangkok businessman will receive an offer for a tie to match his new shirt, never a promotion for a onesie—unless he starts doing the diaper shopping, too.



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