

The paradoxical age of

me

Jordi Diaz explains why we love personalisation
but fret about the technology that makes it possible



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“**P**ersonalisation” has become one of the principle keys to corporate success in a world of increasing consumer power. In times when the companies that go furthest are those who offer existing and potential clients access to previously exclusive products, it is interesting to note the increasing relevance of personalisation.

And it is not just millennials or centennials -- the newest consumer force to enter the market -- who seek out personalisation. It is something that more and more consumers require. They expect to have their needs anticipated across different platforms, receiving messages such as “customers who viewed this item also viewed...” or “recommendations for you (this “you” substituted by your name).

On the 23rd of October 2000, Google transformed the world of advertising by launching its Google Ads. A page in history today, it remains one of the main examples of personalisation in the digital era. Advertising became dynamic and users began to enjoy tailor-made responses to their specific needs, effectively side-lining generic classifieds and Yellow Pages.

While some people are put off by pop-up ads on their screens in response to the question they just wrote in a search engine, others think “fantastic! That’s just the ad I was looking for!”

To analyse a recent example, the interest in personalisation has even reached the world of alcoholic beverages, where beer has seen a 10% decline in consumption in favour of alternatives such as wine and liquors.

This decline could have been worse if it wasn’t for the rise in craft beers, which in the US have seen an increase of 500% over the last decade. The attraction here, again, is the sensation of personalisation that these new-style beers offer. It’s not just the flavours that hint at personalisation but also the knowledge that behind these brands there is usually a small team, maybe a family business, creating this product locally.

The doubt lies in what will happen when these small local producers fall in to the hands of big players in the industry. For now, most people prefer not to dwell on that and just celebrate the fact that they have their favourite beer available when they want it.

On the personal development scene, we find another good example of personalisation: Personal development doesn't get much more personalised than a one-to-one coaching programme. In this process, you, the client, are the protagonist and the coach, through a series of guided questions, will help you to reach your creative, professional or personal potential.

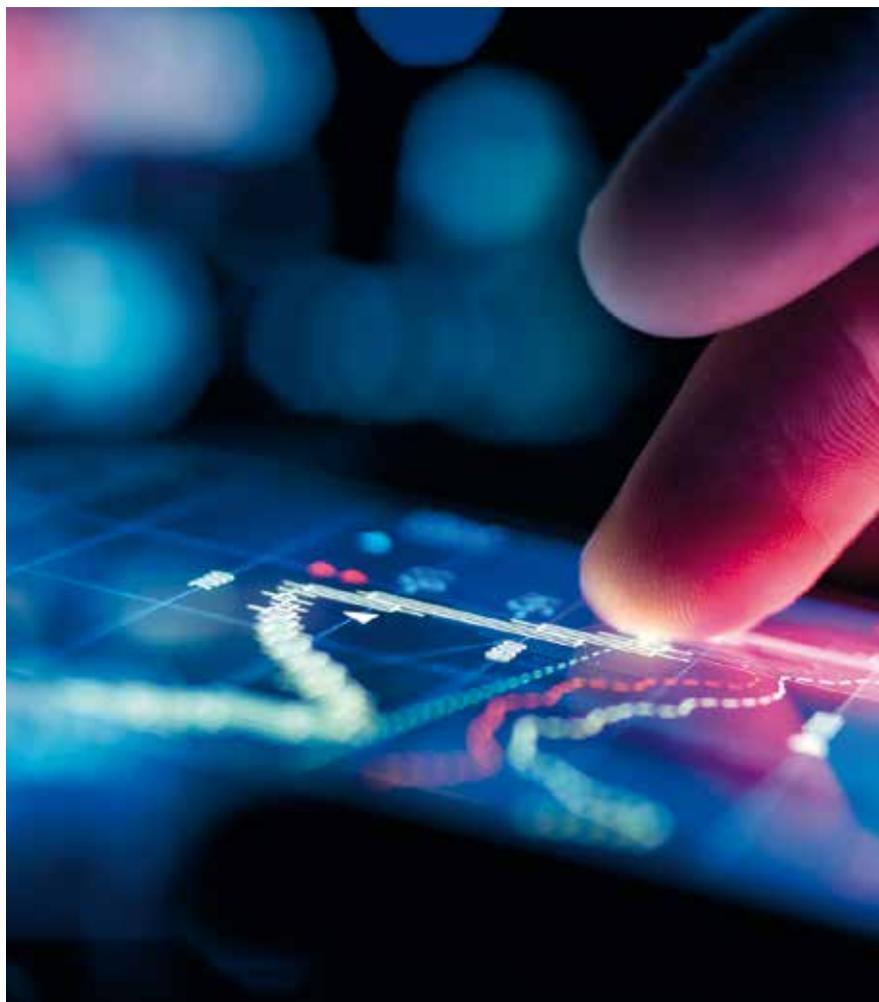
The coaching industry is firmly establishing itself. According to the regulating body, the International Coach Federation, there are more than 50,000 certified coaches and countless centres throughout the world busy preparing thousands of future professionals.

But coaching does not end in professional development; life-coaching, sports coaching, nutrition coaching, relationship coaching are just a few among many other alternatives. A coach for everyone!

In the world of education, Minerva University is leading the way with its proposals for a higher education with personalised elements. Almost five years ago, in San Francisco, Minerva put in place a model for groups of a maximum of 20 students to one professor. They are predestined for success in a sector where most university lecture halls have closer to 100 students than 20.

With just 20 students in a class, the professor knows all of them by name and can see if they are coming to class well prepared and motivated. If they are not, the professor can change the dynamics of the class and put in place any number of improvements that will be attractive to any candidate in search of personalisation. My university, where they know me best!

In an era of personalisation, could we see an academic institution that follows the student instead of the student attending the school? A school that – based on all your available data – approaches you with an academic system and an extracurricular programme that really meets your needs.



A place where you do not go as a candidate but a place that comes to you as the best alternative. A system in which each student has a life-long Artificial Intelligence (AI) companion to help them learn the skills they need at any given moment and to re-learn it as the world changes at accelerating speed. A tool that helps you to stay relevant and that is as easy to use as any of the wearables that we use today to track our sleep, steps or calories.

In the current complex environment, organisations globally train their people on average 35 hours per year. For some this time would probably be enough to keep them just current with their job demands but it will never be enough to prepare them for future projects. The fourth industrial revolution brings a new context in which professionals need to assume their own responsibility for their learning.

Microsoft leader Satya Nadella has transformed the organisation from a know-it-all





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We have to assume that learning is like physical sports and having healthy eating habits. We have to learn, unlearn and learn again. Long-lasting successful professionals will have to use the many options available, MOOCs, credentials, micro-masters, executive education programmes or the recently created SPOCs (small private online courses) from business schools or other academic sources

into learning-it-all culture. Leaders in today's environment will have to be curious, willing to learn constantly, and assume that they have to take responsibility and ownership of their own learning.

To explore the point a little deeper, let's take the example of physical exercise. Neuroscientists have demonstrated that practising sports three times a week for a minimum of 30 minutes is not only good for our body but is also good for our brain.

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However, this fever for personalisation comes at a cost or, better said, at a big cost. How are companies, organisations or even universities going to personalise what I want without getting, literally, under my skin?

My location, my questions to Google, my health records, my banking details and my social media posts are just some of the many points of information that I produce. A huge business, according to the Interactive Advertising Bureau, in which US companies alone are estimated to have spent over \$19 billion in 2018 acquiring and analysing consumer data.

Today, technology allows us unprecedented client insights. In turn, clients expect these insights to lead to a unique and personalised experience where a key word is "anticipation".

The paradox is that clients expect extreme personalisation but at the same time they are also expecting maximum respect. Companies and universities that do not find the right mix of personalisation without invasion are at risk of either being irrelevant or offensive.

Welcome to the paradoxical age of "me".



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About the Author

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