



It's that time of year when prognosticators come out of the woodwork with predictions about what will matter this year in customer loyalty.

So many answers!

One piece proclaims, "Loyalty is not about points and rewards." Another cites research suggesting that "Two-thirds of customers say earning points and rewards is an important part of the experience." Yet another asserts that cashback programs are a "must-have."

If only I had been more certain about the One Answer to Loyalty, I probably would have made more money over the years. But I doubt I would have made more loyal customers.

When a client or prospect asks, "What's the answer to customer loyalty," we often respond with a joke about how the answer all consultants give to any question is always, "It depends." That's what passes for humor among consultants.

It may not be that funny, but it is the right approach.

It's ironic that loyalty experts who know that one size does not fit all when it comes to fostering customer loyalty, and who preach the importance of data-based customization of offers, messages, and experiences, often suggest one-size-fits-all solutions to clients.

Cashback may be a must-have for a retailer whose top priority is building a base of proprietary credit card holders. Points and rewards can be a critical component for a retailer with a short, repetitive purchase cycle. Experience-first could be the right solution for an innovative brand seeking differentiation in a commoditized category. And for many brands, the solution is a hybrid program incorporating diverse elements and enabling choice and customization for individual customers.

H.L. Mencken, whose caustic observations in the early 20th Century you may have run across, is credited with saying, "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong."

Of course, the simple answer isn't necessarily wrong. But thinking there is a simple answer to something as complex as customer loyalty is. *Your thoughts?*

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