



The challenges of data privacy and security are obviously critical to the future of customer-brand relationships. Consumers and brands want and deserve relationships that are valuable to both. As I've often said, loyalty should be a two-way street.

But today I'm not going to focus on specific relationship marketing challenges and solutions. I want to introduce you to someone you may not be familiar with, but who was deeply engaged in the issues of digital freedom, privacy and sovereignty, and was in fact one of the very first to identify those issues and advocate for what he felt was best for every player in cyberspace: the late John Perry Barlow.

Barlow, who passed away at age 70 a couple years ago, was a really fascinating, prescient guy. He was a cattle rancher, poet, lyricist, activist, essayist and advocate. His friends included Dick Cheney, Jackie Kennedy, JFK Jr., and Bob Weir, among many and very diverse others. Raised on a cattle ranch in Wyoming, where his family was active in Republican politics, he was a troublemaker as a teen, and was sent to a private school for wealthy, intelligent, rebellious boys. There he met fellow delinquent Bob Weir; they were friends for the rest of their lives, and collaborated together on more than 30 Grateful Dead songs, Weir writing the music and Barlow the lyrics. Really, really beautiful songs, by the way.

Way back in 1990, Barlow co-founded the Electronic Freedom Foundation, with Mitch Kapor of Lotus and John Gilmore of Sun Microsystems. In 1996 he published [The Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#).

Years ahead of his time, he advocated for a digital world where commercial actors and customers would create "a mutually beneficial environment in which customized content, advertising, and curated interactions would benefit both." Of course, it hasn't quite turned out that way, hence the challenges we face today in building customer relationships.

In fact, Barlow said that data collected by marketers, publishers and platforms should “provide equivalent value back to users.”

If this little thumbnail treatment of Barlow interests you, I highly recommend his memoir, *Mother American Night: My Life in Crazy Times*. As always, I would love to hear **your thoughts** – about digital privacy, the Grateful Dead or anything else on your mind.

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