



NMBS: finding the best ways to inspire repeat purchases

Repeat customers are happy customers that generate more value in the long term, and even have the potential to become ambassadors for your business. But just because you convinced somebody to buy a product once doesn't mean you can easily persuade them again. In partnership with delaware.ai, rail service organization NMBS Europe set out to discover the best moments to reach out to the most promising customers in order to secure repeat purchases – and foster valuable, long-term customer relationships.

Handling international railway traffic between Belgium and destinations in neighboring countries, NMBS Europe is headquartered in Brussels. The company already consistently sells tickets for a first trip, but wanted to inspire customers to buy tickets again and again.

Step one: find out who is buying what, why, and when

The first step in this customer intelligence project was to perform a segmentation exercise, enabling NMBS to understand who buys which tickets, when, and for what purpose.

“With Microsoft's powerful Azure Machine Learning platform, we combined customer purchasing data with data collected by the NMBS Europe call center, ending up with eight different purchasing segments,” explains delaware.ai data scientist Inez Van Laer. “These differed by purchasing channel, travel moment and whether they also made reservations for other services like lodging and taxis at the same time.”

Step two: choose your target segments and zero in

The team easily spotted the business travelers, as well as customers who only travel to attend specific events like sports tournaments.

“These are examples of segments that aren't particularly difficult to target and tend to purchase the same products in a consistent way,” Inez goes on to say. “Including the call center data was crucial in understanding each customer's purchasing triggers and added an entirely new level of intelligence to our insights.”

Such purchasing triggers – e.g. specific holiday periods – serve as a strong basis for NMBS to determine the best moment to approach each customer segment with what kind of message via which channel – phone, website, app, etc.

Step three: spend less on marketing, deliver higher sales figures

The customer preference insights revealed by the exercise empower NMBS to take a much more intelligent, focused approach to their Google and social media ad spend. “Their campaigns can be crafted to align with the needs and preferences of the specific customer segments we identified,” adds Sven Arnauts, manager of the delaware.ai team. “Thanks to this project, customer behavior, purchasing triggers and demographic data points are being integrated in a comprehensive customer intelligence model that NMBS can activate through their business strategy. As a result, NMBS can achieve a bigger impact with lower marketing costs.”