

Simplifying the complex landscape of at-scale Decisioning

DCS addresses the daunting task of crafting the right decisioning solution, underpinning large scale 1:1 customer engagements

AN OPINIONATED PERSPECTIVE
BORNE OUT OF OUR EXPERIENCE

Stephen Montgomery
VP Decisioning

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Deciding on a Decisioning Solution

Struggling to formulate the right 1:1 customer engagement solution to meet the needs of your millions of Customers? A solution that could be making billions of decisions? Is the task of deciding on a decisioning solution a bit of a Catch 22?!

As Customers, we seek engagements with our Brands that are relevant to us, simple to understand, consistent, and valuable to us.

For quite a few years, the accepted method of meeting these expectations for large Business-to-Customer brands is to implement a large-scale decisioning tool, enabling omni-channel personalised engagements, often via digital self-service, and harnessing real-time information where applicable.

Given the maturity of this favoured approach, there are now countless vendors vying for a prized central position, where the brain of decisions and heartbeat of omni-channel interactions combine.

In fact, there's such noise out there, that making the decision on how to construct a decisioning technical stack, an underlying data architecture and an agile organisation structure to drive continual decisioning making, requires careful decision making in itself, to find clarity and instil confidence.

If you're facing this dilemma in a key business or technical role, struggling under this burden of noise, think about the burden of noise that your solutions must deal with to make millions of streamlined decisions for each-and-every one of your customers every second of the day!

The problem that you're trying to solve for your customers is the very problem you yourself must solve upfront. And that's where the discipline of 'Decisioning' comes into play. If you're clear about how to make effective decisions, you're on the road to selecting and building the right decisioning tool for your customers and your business .

At Decision Consultant Solutions (DCS), 'Decision' is in our name for a reason. We understand how vital it is as a discipline, and how there must be a rigour in executing it effectively. We are experts in the field, not just experienced.

"A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention."

— Herbert A. Simon

The Process of Decisioning

When it comes to personal decision making, we've all made some great ones, and probably a lot of bad ones too! For large scale automated decision making, we need to trust a formula that certainly works more times than not.

First of all, it's a given that any decision, or string of decisions, that seek Customer-related outcomes, can never be truly proved to be the 'best'. This is courtesy of the countless degrees of freedom that shape the problem, and constant shift in state. It is imperative to focus on 'desired outcomes', but we first need to rely on the 'process' of decisioning, of which outcome evaluation, and re-evaluation, is a component.

Creating a process, and in fact a wider 'environment' of decisioning, will allow that up-scaling of personal decisions to company-wide decisions that in turn make those millions of customer decisions and interactions for optimised outcomes.

Decision making at its core looks at presenting (and even discovering) a set of problems (or opportunities) and working out the optimal course of action. The 'optimal' will be informed by a utility function, or comparison score card, related to the desired outcome. Candidate actions (including no action), will be assembled and measured using the utility function, so that the best available action, or actions, are selected.

In a controlled outcome, this is all well and good. We've all sat in meetings, listing problems and options, and made things happen. But when dealing with millions of customers, billions of data signals, and all the constant uncertainty around it, it takes more than a few post-its and whiteboards to make the right decisions. We can't just throw more meetings and manual deliberation at the problem to solve it. We need an automated decisioning tool and supporting operating model that follows decisioning disciplines.

What are these decisioning disciplines?

"Leaders need to consider the importance of process in their decision-making—not just outcomes."

— Max H. Bazerman

Key Features of Decisioning

Decisioning is a discipline that can be codified when executing at scale in dynamic environments. This codification requires a structure which is consistent yet flexible.

Speed and Recency

One core expectation is speed of decisioning. We have to act fast, and the given expectation in a digital self-serve reactive world is certainly not more than a few seconds - more like fractions of a second.

We then want to make sure that our decisions are informed with the most up-to-date information to help with our utility function for those desired outcomes. In self-service scenarios, with ever richer experiences, it's more than likely that we'll be utilising information in-session, combining new and old data, all against over-arching identities that represent the given customer. Getting that right takes expertise in handling functionals with non-functionals.

Handling multiple Utility Functions

On top of that, we may have a few utility functions given that we're trying to optimise across a number of performance outcomes, like 'satisfaction', 'simplicity', 'short-term margin' etc. These could be in conflict such that one optimisation is at the expense of others. So how do we tackle this? Do we compromise, by reducing our actions down to one/a few? Do we consider more parallel decisioning, harnessing the multiple interaction points on a customer touchpoint?

Quantitative with Qualitative

Without coming up with an exhaustive list of characteristics of an effective decisioning tool here, for now consider one more pertinent factor: qualitative information versus quantitative information.

In our day-to-day business tasks, we're nearly always balancing quantitative evidence with colleagues', and our own, qualitative inputs, with the latter focusing on trust of experience, expertise and the artificial weighting provided by many cognitive biases – one of the weightiest being the Confirmation Bias, where colleagues often stick with pre-existing beliefs such that new evidence is ignored, whether intentionally or not, compromising effective decisioning.

Qualitative decisioning has been called out here because when we make speedy decisions, with the most up-to-date information, dealing with conflicting desired outcomes, we have to understand how we factor it into the automation. That is, we have to follow a supervised pattern of decisioning that we can trust is doing the right thing. That pattern should take on board the 'qualitative' information as well as the 'quantitative'. We need to deal with both, and we need to be smart in how we combine these as both values and rules (or, in essence, filters of simplification) in the face of ever-changing information.

***"Algorithms are opinions
embedded in code."***

— Cathy O'Neill

Making it Happen

Trust your decisioning pattern and make it happen by ensuring you have collaborative business practices that align with the key decisioning inputs and outputs

What is the key message so far?

Formulate a pattern for decision making that deals with speed, insight up to real time, multiple business objectives, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Implementing a Decisioning pattern

Formulating a common decisioning pattern is a great starting point for your business, helping nurture collaboration across business units as well as defining clear separations of concerns for acute skill and resource optimisation. This is courtesy of contributions of each unit towards the optimisation of the utility functions, harnessing measures that directly relate to each unit's key objectives.

Embrace data science, especially a pattern to garner 'evidence', evolving data from a mass of noise to clear predictors of outcomes. Include a process that deals with no evidence (called "cold starts") to initiate the changes that help prime new understandings and subsequent actions.

Ensure there's a lexicon of decisioning terminology that allows a mirroring of organisational intra- and inter-organisation decisioning with online automated decisioning, providing the confidence that business success and customer are intertwined.

Given the constant flux of new information to inform decisioning, there must be agility to ensure changes are both swift and easily blended into existing practice. This covers data, decisioning and communication devops cycles.

Talk to DCS

You'll be making your own decisions, confronting doubts, biases, and a great deal of noise, but a collective decisioning approach will lead to collective success.

DCS would love to be part of your collaborative journey, and we can help you evolve your decisioning via automated tools that scale, as well as streamline your organisation to maximise decisioning benefits offline and online.

DCS is a 1:1 Customer Engagement specialist that partners with some of the world's leading brands. We help businesses leverage the power of AI, GenAI and Decisioning to deliver compelling customer experiences, at scale.

For more information on this article, please contact Stephen on smontgomery@wearedcs.com , or simply visit us at www.wearedcs.com

"The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas."

— Linus Pauling