

A CDP SERVICES BUYERS' GUIDE

How to drive more value from
your customer data platform

ACX IOM



MAXIMIZING VALUE FROM YOUR CDP INVESTMENT

Brands spend a lot on martech platforms and applications. In fact, according to [Gartner](#), the average CMO allocates just over a quarter of marketing resources to marketing technology – roughly equal to the proportion they spend on paid media.

But brands often overlook the importance of selecting the right service partner to embed and optimize these technologies.

This is particularly applicable to customer data platforms (CDPs). The CDP market has been growing rapidly, with its [predicted CAGR exceeding 32%](#) until 2027. As with any fast-growing marketing technology, few brands have the internal expertise to implement, configure, and maintain CDPs themselves.

Bringing on a service partner can significantly improve the performance and business outcomes of a CDP, helping brands achieve unified, accessible customer data to drive exceptional customer experience (CX).

To gain a brand perspective on martech service partnerships, Acxiom commissioned independent [research](#) from international strategy and research agency MTM. And we discovered that by far the most common reason brands bring on a martech service partner is to maximize the value of their investment in technologies such as CDPs.

62%

of brands bring on a martech service partner to maximize the value of their martech investment

You'll find further insights from that research throughout this guide.

SUPPORTING YOUR BRAND'S CDP JOURNEY

The vast majority of brands have already invested in CDP technology, with just 2% of those we surveyed not yet using or considering the technology.

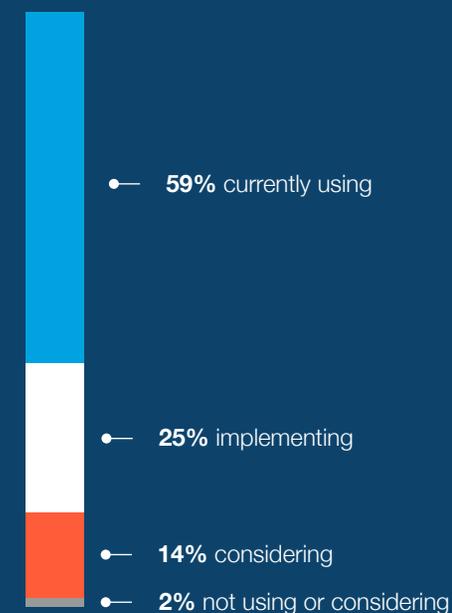
A CDP service partner can be brought in at multiple points on the journey, perhaps to help brands select the right solution for their needs, or to integrate a specific platform with the brand's existing tech stack.

A partner can also help brands optimize a solution they've already implemented to improve its performance, and can even operate a CDP on behalf of the brand. An effective service partner will have its own CDP toolkit to help achieve the best possible outcomes.

Common reasons a brand might work with a CDP service partner include:

- Configuring the CDP solution to support **data hygiene and standardization**
- Enhancing **audience segmentation** to improve personalization and CX
- Integrating identity solutions to **understand the individual** across all touchpoints
- Using analytics to **enable closed-loop insights** and maximize marketing effectiveness
- Ensuring the CDP complies with the necessary **data privacy and security** regulations
- Providing **end-to-end support** with design, integration, and optimization

Which of the following best describes your organization's use of CDPs?



FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER

CDP service partners come in all shapes and sizes, from large generalist consultancies to small agencies that specialize in certain solutions, and everything in between.

Each brand has different needs depending on their industry, their use cases, the CDP solution they want to implement, and their stage on the implementation journey.

However there are five key areas all brands should look at when choosing a CDP service partner:

- 1 Platform-specific expertise**
- 2 A deep understanding of data**
- 3 Experience combined with agility**
- 4 A smart and trusted advisor**
- 5 An existing relationship**

1

Platform-specific expertise

It might sound obvious but, assuming you've already decided which CDP to use, your service partner should have demonstrable experience of working with that platform.

This is probably the only time your company will implement this particular technology, and you may not have anyone internally that has done it before. So make sure your service partner has, so they can bring best practices from previous implementations.

48%
of brands bring in a service partner to leverage the best practices of other organizations

Checking technical certifications or credentials in the relevant technology is a good place to start. And CDP providers will often recommend partners they've worked with in the past. The larger platforms may have multiple platinum, gold, and silver partners for you to choose from.

85%
of brands said technical certifications or credentials were very important in selecting a martech service partner.

But remember you aren't obliged to go with a tech vendor's recommendation. If you're looking for impartial guidance it may even be beneficial to work with a partner whose revenue isn't dependent on the provider's referrals. That's assuming they can demonstrate the relevant platform-specific knowledge and experience of course.

If your service partner is part of the CDP selection process they should ideally be platform agnostic, with experience that spans a variety of solutions so they understand the strengths and weaknesses of each, and the use cases to which they are best suited.

And even if you're bringing them on at the implementation stage or later, it helps if they can play in any sandbox. This allows them to implement and optimize the technology and the data flowing through it in a way that makes sense within the broader ecosystem.

2

A deep understanding of data

The quality and integrity of the data coming into a CDP dictates the quality of the results coming out – for both the business and its customers. Working with a service partner who has the expertise to enable a data-first approach will greatly increase the value you can derive from your CDP investment.

This might mean helping you build an independent data and identity spine, so applications like CDPs can ultimately be swapped out without having to start identity from scratch. Or it could mean helping you manage data governance to ensure the measures you put in place are appropriate for your sector, use cases, and degree of data sensitivity.

Deep data expertise should also be supported by a wider understanding of the industry in which you operate, and the use cases that will drive your business outcomes. Most brands want CDP service partners to demonstrate previous experience in their industry, and will look at case studies, customer reviews, and industry ratings to validate this experience.

84%

of brands say demonstrating previous experience in their industry is very important

But cross-sector experience can also be important as industry lines begin to blur. For example, with the in-car experience becoming as important as the vehicle itself, and data increasingly used to inform insurance policies, media consumption choices, and point-of-interest recommendations, auto brands might want partners with experience in finance, entertainment, or travel.

3

Experience combined with agility

When brands choose a CDP service partner they sometimes gravitate towards larger management consultancies. This might be because technology vendors often have close relationships with these consultancies, or because they are seen as a safe pair of hands, with the right reputation and security credentials, particularly within the regulated industries.

Of course a large consultancy might well be the right choice for your brand. They will almost certainly have experience in both your industry and the CDP solution you are implementing, although their subject matter experts won't necessarily sit within your account team but will cycle in and out at different stages of the project. The downside of larger consultancies is that they may be constrained by specific tools, and often operate slowly, with many brands not realizing value from their CDP investment for many months or even the first year.

Smaller service partners, on the other hand, can be far more agile. They may not have the track record of their larger counterparts, but they can get CDPs up and running quickly, even if only for a handful of initial use cases, so brands can start working towards their ROI targets. They tend to have more flexibility in the complementary tools they use to get the most out of your CDP, and you're likely to have a more consistent account team for the duration of the partnership.

Experience and expertise will always be at the top of the wishlist when choosing a service partner, but balancing this with agility will help you to derive quicker value from your CDP investment. There are mid-sized organizations (and Acxiom is a great example) who can combine a strong reputation and security credentials with the agility your brand is seeking to ensure you get nimble work done by a company you trust.

What type of organization has your company considered for martech partners?

(Whether for implementation, optimization and/or managed ongoing services)



Large leading management consultancies



Companies who only specialize in our technology



Multi-agency marketing/data groups (including specific providers within a group)



Smaller consultancies focused only on martech

4

A smart and trusted advisor

True partnership is the key to a profitable CDP implementation or optimization. The right service partner shouldn't be just another vendor you need to manage. They should be a good fit with your company and a trusted advisor – someone you can be sure is always acting in the best interests of your brand.

The right partner will really get to know your business and will suggest customized solutions to solve your specific problems. They will be open and honest about any challenges that lie ahead, and find solutions to help you navigate through them. They will consider what you want to achieve in the future and solve today's problems with an eye towards tomorrow, rather than just focusing on getting the immediate job done.

Our survey respondents defined these essential outcomes for a successful martech partnership:

- The partner helps the brand determine their current marketing and data sophistication as well as future ambitions
- The brand is empowered with the appropriate skills to use once a partnership is over
- The brand feels more confident in their marketing decisions as a result of the partnership
- The partner helps the brand to ensure data and decisions are not siloed within an organization

The education piece is particularly important. A successful CDP implementation requires investment in change management, communications, and training across the organization. Running a quick train-the-trainer course and leaving attendees to pass the knowledge on simply won't cut it.

The right partner will work with all stakeholders and teams involved with the technology – from marketing ops to analytics and IT – to make sure the CDP is fully embedded and understood before they hand over the controls. They will empower teams with the skills they need to get maximum performance out of the solution once the partnership is over.

> 80%

of brands say finding a partner that is a good fit with company culture is very important

5

An existing relationship

Somewhat surprisingly, when we asked brands what criteria were important in selecting a martech service partner, ‘having an existing relationship’ came near the bottom of the list. (Although 66% did still say it was very important.) This result indicates brands are prioritizing choosing the right partner over just working with someone they already know, which does make perfect sense.

But imagine if you could have the best of both worlds. A partner you trust and who already knows your business, and who also has the capabilities you’re currently looking for. Given brands work with an average of three-to-four service partners at any one time, there’s a fair chance an existing partner will have the skills and experience you need to implement your CDP, even if you’re not yet aware of them.

And there can be significant benefits in expanding an existing relationship. The most common quality brands look for in a partner is the ability to ‘demonstrate an understanding of the company’s problems and solutions.’ Well, nobody understands a company’s problems better than its existing partners – sometimes not even the company itself.

64%

of brands look for a service partner that understands their problems and the solutions

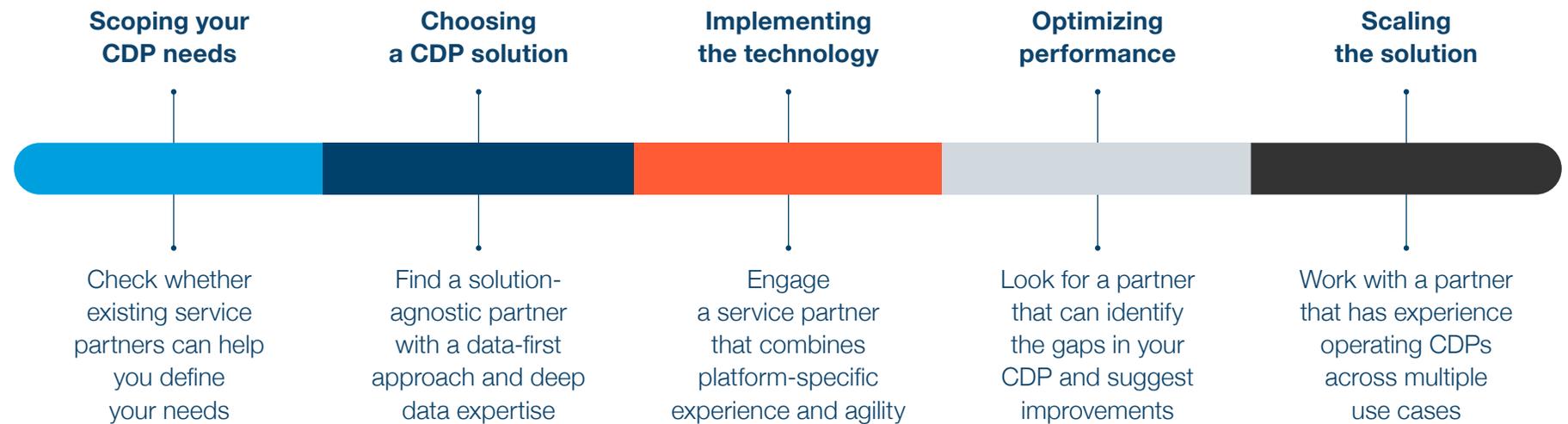
When you bring on a new partner that has no history with your data and processes, there is an inevitable learning phase when errors can easily be made. Over a quarter of brands report challenges with martech providers that include early mistakes in configuration, having to repeat steps or processes, and taking too long to implement the technology.

All of these issues can be mitigated (to some extent) by working with existing partners that already understand your customers, your processes, how data flows through your organization, and how your various systems interconnect. And, once again, working with an existing partner that knows your business and is close to your data often provides a quicker route to value than onboarding a new team.

Of course different service partners all have different areas of expertise, and it’s possible none of your current partners have the right skills. But it’s always worth asking the question.

NEXT STEPS TO A VALUABLE PARTNERSHIP

The next step to take in choosing a CDP service partner depends where you are on the implementation journey.



ABOUT ACXIOM MARTECH SERVICES

Acxiom partners with the world's leading brands to create customer intelligence, enabling data-driven marketing experiences that generate value for people and for brands. Our Martech Services Practice has accelerated return on investment and improved operational efficiency for many clients through our CDP implementation, optimization, and managed services for both cloud-enabled and on-premise solutions. We partner with leading CDP providers, including Salesforce, Adobe, Treasure Data, Sitecore, and more.

Contact us today to learn more about how we can simplify your experience and amplify the business value of your CDP technology investment. Find out more at [acxiom.com/martech-services](https://www.acxiom.com/martech-services)



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