

Why Customer Experience Matters

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We all know the feel of a Starbucks, right? Great smell, deep sofas to sink into in, hip baristas... Now visit the Starbucks website. Your experience seems to match that image, with a clean and welcoming design, and copy that talks about your “coffee experience.” But when you call the company, you encounter a generic IVR that talks about “The Starbucks Coffee Company Automated System” and asks you to “please listen carefully to the following list of options.” The application uses at least three different voices, none of which comes across as the voice of a company that has managed to turn coffee drinking into high art.

And they're not alone - call the Home Depot's IVR store locator and the helpful folks in orange aprons morph into a voice who tells you to go to the website, and then hangs up on you! Or, consider Apple Computer. Compare the sleek, spare look of Apple products, ads, website, and retail stores to the mundane and uninspiring IVR you reach when you call 800 MY APPLE.

Each of these companies - and many others - failed to think through the importance of a consistent customer experience across *all* channels. Many don't give much thought to the importance of having the contact center, retail locations, website, IVR, kiosks, advertising, written materials and correspondence match the overall company brand, image and values.

Customer experience is the next competitive battleground. Good service isn't enough anymore - companies need to truly differentiate themselves through clear strategy that drives the customer experience.

Break Down the Barriers

If you're like most companies, your customers encounter a hodgepodge of inconsistent messages and information across multiple interaction channels. Often, there is long term work going on to design and integrate CRM systems and databases so that consistent information is available regardless of channel. But there are things you can do today to make your customers experiences more satisfying.

A first step is eliminating your company's silos and turf battles across channels. Everyone's goal is to create a positive customer experience, so why are we so protective of the channels we control? Marketing can be a key facilitator to pull together different groups for the common purpose of improving the customer experience.

Next, understand what your customer experience looks like today - put yourself in your customer's shoes and try out the website, look at current advertising and collateral, call into the IVR, send an email, speak with a customer service representative, visit some of your retail stores. Does it seem like you're dealing with the same company across all channels? Gather customer data, including satisfaction rates and channel usage in order to understand what elements of the experience satisfy customers and where they encounter problems.

Create a Compelling, Consistent Customer Experience

Now it's time to roll up your sleeves and hammer out exactly what your customer experience should look like. This includes branding, persona, and language. Keep in mind that the profile you develop should...

- be consistent with your company's brand
- appeal to targeted customer segments
- be able to be translated across all channels.

So the web experience should feel the same as an IVR experience, which should match a retail store experience, a conversation with a customer service rep, and so on.

Try out the profile on customer focus groups to test acceptance before adopting it. You may decide to develop a few profiles to match specific customer segments or demographics – for example, you may have one profile for end customers, but another one for distributors or resellers.

Take a look at Motorola. The company website is very graphic, with pictures of cool looking people using cool products and “HelloMoto” icons. Call their 800 number, and a voice purrs “Hello Moto...” A good example of a consistent, seamless experience.

How do You Measure Success?

Cross-channel analytics are critical to measuring the effectiveness of your customer experience, yet the tools we have available today usually fall short. While some web analytics systems are robust, companies struggle to integrate them with other measures from the contact center, IVR, or retail sales. That integration is important to understand and measure the cross channel customer experience. A key challenge for vendors is to create open tools that enable users to integrate reports from many different sources.

For example, although a customer may not buy on the web, a positive web experience will lead her to make an in-store purchase. So one serious measurement challenge is to track that specific customer as she interacts with your company across various channels.

Often where improved customer experience really pays off is in customer satisfaction and word of mouth. Create a consistent and compelling experience and not only will your existing customers come back, they'll tell their friends and relatives about it!

So take a look at your organization - do customers encounter the same “company” regardless of how they contact you? Is that “company” consistent with what you want the overall image of your corporation to be? If not, take steps to make it so.

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