



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

“Ensuring the foundations are in place ”

Quite a few companies are still smarting from poorly implemented CRM systems, seeing little overall return from their investment. What has happened to all the talk about Customer Management and CRM? It hasn't gone away, businesses have made significant improvements in the way they manage their customers. Information Technology now provides the foundation that enables the development of customer experience. Extensive investment into CRM technology has led to efficient management of relationships, but it can feel a little mechanical and sterile, further more some customers just don't want to be managed and others just don't fit into a predefined segment or box.

The downside of CRM technology is that it still does some stupid things - My cable provider asks me to enter my home telephone number when I call them presumably to route me to the local service centre - when I get to the local service centre I need to tell them the number again. If I get transferred to technical support I need to give them the number a third time. Our work in call/ contact centres has also highlighted real issues with customer management technology and systems. The pervasiveness and availability of these technologies has led managers to focus on the measures readily recorded by them. These tend to be about the quantity of demand, activity and output. Unfortunately, these mechanistic measures overly focus on the quantity of tasks been delivered and forget the quality of the customer interaction that lies behind them.

Others have embarked on substantial change projects to become customer centred organisations to then flounder on the sheer scale of the task, length of time the project is taking or the internal collapse as internal politics take over. Many are still on the journey!

If you are: -

- Still on the customer journey
- Committed to being customer focused
- Interested in being around in the foreseeable future
- Struggling to differentiate in a price sensitive / commoditising market

THEN LISTEN UP!!

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The customer experience equation (CEE) delivers this.

1. **Quality and Consistency of customer engagement, drives improved customer experiences.**
2. **Improved customer experience drive higher customer satisfaction.**
3. **Higher customer satisfaction delivers greater long-term customer value.**
4. **Greater long-term customer value means enhanced long-term returns.**

Furthermore, if through our customer experience we differentiate ourselves and create competitive advantage then this goes some way to deflect the price focus and slide toward commoditisation. Delivering consistent quality customer experience will develop high levels of loyalty with customers willing to trust you with more and more of their business. The Nationwide Building Society is a good example of this: - providing a portfolio approach to finances and extending the product holding as trust develops within the relationship and over time they introduce new products or services. Often these new services will have a loyalty bonus. They also bend the rules (loans, mortgages) if you have a membership history with them. The relationship is cross channel and consistent in the quality, tone and pitch of its delivery.

The message and real delivery of products or services, providing existing customers with the same offers and deals, as those designed to recruit new members is CM philosophy in action. Businesses have been told that keeping existing customers is cheaper and more sustainable than getting new ones by CM gurus for years - turning it around into a customer proposition surely makes perfect sense. It is here we start the development of Customer Intimacy, but that's for another day.

*The sensory & emotional elements of the total experience have far more influence than the tangible attribute of a product or service.

*(Dr Gerald Zaltman)

So What!! - It is back to the old adage of all features & no customer benefits. However, in this context they need to be experiences. We need to be clear about the consumer decision-making process and the role the customer experience plays within the decision.

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How do we do it?

We start by finding out the type of experience our customers are expecting and what are the key influences. Using CxP we look in detail at the company's proposition, the industry logic and any existing customer research to develop an expectation rating.



This covers the total spectrum of your customer's channels and groups; we develop an overall, channel and sub-group view of the required customer experience. At the same time, the current experience you are delivering is established, once again across all channels and specific customer groups. This should highlight CE gaps that could be quick wins for your organisation.

CHECK STEP! Given that, not all customers are created equal do we deliver the same CE to each customer? Should some customers receive an enhanced experience based on their current / potential value and our ability to realise that value? - YES

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Certainly all customers should receive a great basic experience from our company, getting it right first time, being consistent and ensuring everything works to deliver what the customer needs. Once this is in place we can start to enhance the experience for customers in similar groups. However, before we run off and try to develop great customer experiences for all, let's just stop and look inside our own organisation to determine the art of the possible. Using a Springboard Customer Experience 'Readiness Assessment' we establish your current CE ability and art of the possible.

What is it?

All organisations, teams and individuals have a customer experience process, even if implicit. The CxP 'Readiness assessment' provides a question based process that enables you to identify where you are on your own customer experience development journey. The benefit of using a framework like the CxP 'Readiness Assessment' is that it enables you to identify the internal 'individual &/or team view' of your customer experience. It also provides you with a framework against which to check the development of your customer experience. So..... If you are clear about the customer experience you want to deliver then this could be a sense check, or if it's the experience delivery that is nagging at the back of your mind, then this could highlight the pinch point. This ensures everyone knows where they are on the journey. This makes sure the organisation is joined up regarding its customer experience thinking, leading to improved team working, decision making and more rapid access to improved results.



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CHECK STEP!

At this stage we should now have a clear start point, through having determined the following: -

- What experiences are our customers looking for?
- How far away are we from delivering on their expectations?
- Our own ability to enhance the CE?
- This should have thrown up a number of quick wins at this stage that already start to improve the CE.

With our start point established we once again look internally to explore our proposition. This should be based upon our market understanding of customer needs and experiences. This links into the business strategy and ensures we stay aligned. *What are we great at & what do we plan to be famous for?*

Going where the value exists - Are all experiences equal?

We have already determined what basics we need to deliver. We now move beyond this to explore the type of experience our high value/high potential customers require. This can be done by mining our internal 'Readiness Assessment' and mapping our current delivery to highlight where CE needs to be enhanced or down tuned. Remember: - Over delivery wastes value that can be diverted elsewhere.

Developing our customer experience

We start at the bottom; this ensures we get the basics in place at each touch point within our organisation. We need to understand the reaction we are trying to solicit. Delivering a consistent quality experience, ensuring our brand/service promise is clear and we have established clear expectations. We must also be sure that the basic CM business practices are in place to deliver the experiences.

Where can we beat the competition: - Our CE delivers a competitive advantage? The experience we deliver starts to re-enforce our brand /service proposition and delivers our business requirements. Where can we be great? What can we be famous for?

At this stage we take each channel and then segment sub-group and map our brand /service proposition using axis against: - Impact upon our CE, if they go wrong and impact upon the CE +or-. To do this the customer journey will need to be mapped and the moments of truth /points of influence identified. With these identified you can establish the key areas where you could be great and famous across the whole organisation.





Determining what great means?

At each of these points we need to identify what we want our customers to: -



Think: - about the experience they have just received.

Feel: - about the experience they have just received.



Tell others: - about the experience they have just received.

Remember:- Our key focus here is to work on those key things we want our customers to retain and remember beyond the actual engagement with us. If we can be great in key touch point areas then our customers will prefer our brand or service.

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Becoming Famous: - In this area we intersect research emanating from customer relationships that deliver what we call 'customer intimacy'. Our customer relationship and the experience the customer receives are based upon:- our intimate knowledge of them, mutual trust, shared integrity, open communication and interdependence within the whole experience. It develops such a strong experience that the organisation becomes famous for it.

The service proposition will need to be clear against: -

Level	Think	Feel	Tell others
Basic			
Great			
Memorable			

This has to be translated into deliverables within the organisation and frameworks to ensure it is actually being delivered to the required level. Here we refer back to our 'Health check' findings and highlight the areas that need work to bring us up to scratch to deliver the CE required. We don't need to develop a Ferrari, when a Ford may do.

Letting your customers know what to expect. We need to be clear how, when and the form in which we let our customers know the experience they can receive from us. What is the message we are trying to convey and what mediums do we use. This forms our communication platform.

How do we know we are doing it?

At SCS we think there are three key areas: - Two are informal and one is formal. The two informal areas require methods of capture and pulling into one source that can monitor our progress against the delivery of our customer experience.

1. Customers Tell Us!

Believe it or not! Some customers will actually tell us that they are having a great experience with us. This may come into the org through any medium, but needs to be channelled and collated. We can push the customer to tell us, i.e. a restaurant chain have two buttons that you can press on leaving the restaurant a 'were you satisfied button' or 'were you dissatisfied button', OK, it is quite crude, but does capture a headline level of customer experience satisfaction and engages the customer.

2. We hear it through the Grapevine

Once again quite informally this comes through the trade press, peer group, trade bodies, other customers, etc. This will indicate an improvement in the CE within the company around the area the customers remember post engagement.

3. We can go out and ask them

Be Careful! This isn't a satisfaction audit. We are asking our customers in a structured way the experience they receive against each element of our proposition. It is also an ideal opportunity to develop insight into what enhancements are required. This needs to be on a one to one basis, allowing the opportunity to dig below the surface and uncover both good and bad experiences. This provides a consistent view of just what we mean by great and famous.





Conclusion

We all understand the importance of CRM technology and information in an organisation whether it comes from a major CRM system or from a simple spreadsheet. CRM attempts to unify your businesses view of the customer. It helps you understand what you know about your customers. Conversely, and arguably more importantly, understanding the Customer Experience allows you to understand what customers know and think about your company.

It is possible to establish the experiences your customers want and to make these tangible through your proposition and brand. Now it's time to move on and ensure that these experiences are actually delivered and carried through at all customer touch points and across the customer sales service spectrum.

The emergence of robust and reliable methodologies can help you differentiate the character of the customer experience whilst also regulating the quality of key interactions. Despite the limitations of both technology and human nature.

Customers need to receive the unexpected or surprising experience within the relationship to make it feel unique and special. We expect to get through straight away to a sales line if we want to buy something, what if we get through straight away to the technical support service when we have a problem, in most cases it would be a surprise. These experiences should feel unprompted and spontaneous for the consumer if they are to be effective.

With so much choice around, customers are searching for companies that they can trust to provide them with assistance in their product selection and they need to be re-assured that there will be a level of honesty within the relationship to provide them with reasonable value for money.

When consumers have a specific need or issue then they expect a creative and personalised response, which makes them, feel valued within the relationship and a part of the solution.

A more profitable customer experience for your business can lead to a more valued customer experience for your consumers.

This article was co-authored by Andy Pool and Mark Hollyoake from Springboard Commercial Solutions Ltd. To find out more about 'customer experience' contact either Andy or Mark on:- contact@springboardcs.com

