

Why Is It So Difficult for Companies to Deliver a Great Experience?

by Chad McCloud

Comparing today's customer experiences to the past provides some revealing insights.

In today's world, we have an abundance of companies with a desire to be customer-centric, yet we're still starving for customer-centric companies. Customers feel this way in both B2B and B2C environments, across industries, and about most companies with significant scale. Amazing customer experiences are exceptional because they simply are the exception.

Why is it so difficult for companies to deliver a great experience? The vast majority of people who interact with customers have the best of intentions, and work incredibly hard on behalf of their employers. Companies invest millions of dollars in CRM technology over a long time horizon. They vigilantly gather "voice of the customer" data, they measure customer satisfaction across multiple interactions, and they proudly declare that customers are at the center of their strategies.

Difficult customer experiences aren't caused by a lack of effort. So why are positive customer experiences still so elusive? Comparing today's customer experiences to the past provides some revealing insights.

Growing up, my favorite shopping experience came from a general store called Lipofsky's. It was owned and operated by Harold Lipofsky, right in the center of my hometown of Barrington, Illinois. The hardwood floors shined with varnish and every square inch of the store was completely covered with product. In the center of the store, every time I walked in, was Harold.

Harold knew every member of my family. He knew about our life events, from sports schedules through the seasons and the uniforms they required, to graduations with caps and gowns. If he didn't have the baseball hat in my size, he figured out how to get it the next time I came in. Our family wasn't unique; he knew hundreds of families in our town just as well, and we in turn rewarded him with our business.



Harold Lipofsky
Courtesy of the Lipofsky Family

Fast forward 30 years, and customer interactions have become infinitely more complex. Companies have multiple siloed functions that all touch the customer, from marketing to sales to onboarding to finance to servicing. Each has different goals and each looks at the customer through a different lens. Marketing's purpose is to drive people into the store, while sales' is to maximize revenue. The lower the customer service function can drive down costs, the better. Companies with multiple product divisions often service the same customer, without coordination or integration. Furthermore, different geographical silos often support similar customers on a global scale. None of these functions' sole purpose is to make the customers happy.

The complexities don't end with the company. Customers are infinitely more complex as well. In his B2C environment, Harold worked with hundreds of customers and kept most of his "CRM data" in his head. Today's B2C companies can support millions of customers, but with that scale comes the added complexity of working with tens to hundreds of relationships inside one single "customer," resulting in a complex multi-to-multi relationship.

The channels through which customers interact are also exploding. Harold interacted with his customers inside the store and over the phone. Today's customers are online, they're mobile, they have wearables, and they expect all of these points of contact to be coordinated, anytime they interact with the company.

Both companies and customers have become more complex, yet

customers long for the authentic relationship they would receive from someone like Harold.

Authentic relationships in an incredibly complex environment can take place only with convicted leaders who light the way. Here are five key efforts our firm observes from customer-centric leaders:

BUILD A CASE FOR AUTHENTIC CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Customer experience gurus traditionally value measures such as "net promoter score" or "customer satisfaction," which can be fantastic measures of loyalty, but only if those who own and influence the company's budgets care about those measures. Great leaders target the metrics that matter, and use "voice of the customer" and product usage data to connect what customers say and do to those targeted metrics. Great leaders build stories behind the metrics that clearly and simply create a rallying call for an organization to effectively change.

BUILD A CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COUNCIL

The scale of today's corporations requires leadership through influence. If you asked Harold, "Who owns the customer?" he wouldn't understand the question. Creating that authentic customer relationship in today's corporate environment requires cross-functional teams working together for the greater good of the customer.

GET EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE.

Harold understood his customers' "journeys" because he was involved in the entire life cycle. Those of us working in today's corporate functions, by design, don't have Harold's vantage point.

Great leaders define the journey from the customer's point of view, and relate what every business function does to each step in the customer journey.

PRIORITIZE WHAT MATTERS

A company could implement thousands of initiatives to create more endearing customer relationships, but limited time, energy, and budget require real focus in today's corporate environment. Great leaders prioritize initiatives with impact over ones that are simply easy to employ. They highlight the parts of the customer journey that will improve, and create business cases to show how those initiatives will impact the metrics that matter.

GET SPONSORSHIP FROM THE TOP

Leading companies tell us that cross-functional customer initiatives are short-lived without an influential sponsor who has the fortitude to make real change. Great leaders provide those sponsors with both the data and the stories to build the case for change, and show real results from prioritized initiatives that keep the momentum going.

Exceptional customer relationships in today's corporate environment require great leadership. Those who take both an analytical and influential approach can, like Harold, create truly authentic experiences. More importantly, they can create authentic experiences that scale.

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