Elevating **Customer Experience** at Every Step of the **Customer Journey**

In Focus

Introduction

Your potential customer is browsing online and stumbles upon your advertisement (ping). She clicks and lands on to your online store, which is neatly designed and easy to use (ping). Your live chat widget helps her around the website, and understands her requirements (ping). Based on which, a personal shopping is assigned to the customer, which helps her pick out a smashing pair of shoes (ping). Your website's product specific checkout feature expedites the whole purchasing process, and also collects her email address for future purposes (ping). This newly acquired customer is assured of a possible exchange/return, in case she changes her mind about the purchase (ping).

Later that day, your customer tweets a picture of her new shoes and mentions your store (ping). She even recommends your website to other shoppers on yelp.com (ping), as she's feeling loyal towards your brand (ping). A couple of weeks later, you send her a promotional email (ping) that offers her a discount (ping) and reminds her of your brand and its core values (ping), eventually making them come back to your store again (ping ping)!

At every stage of a customer's journey, there lies a unique opportunity for the brands to trigger a buying decision. These triggers are more commonly known as customer touch-points, or points of contact where the customers and business engage to exchange information, provide service, or handle transactions. Brands are always looking for innovative ways to enhance their customer interactions, often experimenting with newer technologies to create experiences around one or more of the touch-points. The advent of regulations such as GDPR and PSD2 has further fueled the need for superior customer experiences. We are moving towards an era which will be dominated by standout customer experiences, with customer-centric solutions, and digitally advanced processes.

Mapping a Customer's journey via **Touch-points**

Customer journey is a story designed to visualize the customer experience, in order to gain insights into the customer mindset. Put simply, it is an end-to-end interaction the customers have with your company, whether it be a product, or a service, or any combination. Going forward, we will discuss the stages of a customer journey in detail, by taking a look at some innovative examples of how brands have enhance their customer journeys through ground-breaking campaigns. We will also try and establish some pain points in customer journeys, and come up with possible solutions that could elevate customer experiences in the respective industries.

Research
Step 1

Evaluation
Step 2

Purchase
Step 3

Use/Service
Step 4

Loyalty
Step 5
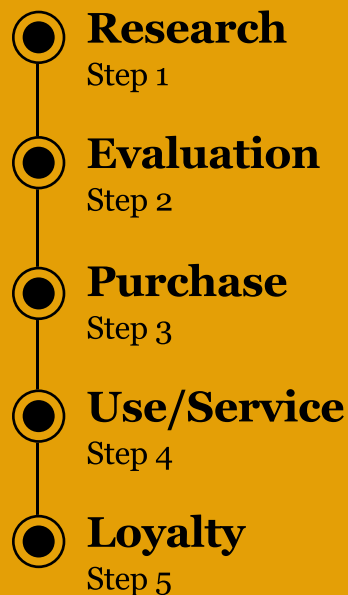
Research

For a customer to reach your brand, be it offline or online, the customer needs to be aware of your brand. Touch-points at this stage could include external advertising, PR, social media and editorial content. Expanding customer awareness is all about reaching them at the right moment, and on the right platform. Various brands are making use of cutting-edge technology to reach beyond their existing clientele, and wooing potential customers with alluring experiences.

What's Happening

One of such applications is Volvo's Volvo Reality campaign. Imagine what would it be to test drive a car on your mobile phone, especially when you don't have a dealership nearby. By collaborating with Google Cardboard, Volvo was able to a provide access to their cars, to a much larger section of its audience. This is a brilliant marketing move because, not only has it put Volvo on the map (again) for something innovative, it's also very easily accessible. They're also offering a "weekend escape" version of the app which includes 360-degree landscapes, allowing adventurers a chance to cement the pairing of "adventure" and "Volvo" in their heads, something which, given the practical element of Volvo's branding, may never have occurred before.

What's Next

Drones, the small, remote controlled aircrafts, aren't a commercially mainstream technology yet, but they've already come along way. From delivering packages, to recording live games, to providing wireless internet access, drones have an array of use cases that can be readily applied. One such application, drone advertising, also called 'drone-vertising' is an interestingly unique concept that could shape the future of advertising. Of course, flying advertisements have been around for a while, but drones due to electronically advanced mechanisms can take this to a whole new level. Imagine a drone flying around the city, 'projecting' advertisements that would otherwise be on the billboards. Not only will this allow brands to advertise to a larger set of audience, but this would also help them cut huge costs. Think about it, it's like a portable advertising banner, which can change according to your needs.

Evaluation

Before making a purchase, customers will most often than not look for reasons to purchase from you, and not any other brand. How your brand interacts with the customer here, decides if the customer will choose you over your competitors or not. Touch-points at this stage would include landing pages, webinars, demos and free trial.

What's Happening

Amazon continues to amaze people with its extremely scalable inventions. Another one of its features is the Try Before You Buy service, which is absolutely massive for the retail industry. A lot of companies charge customers whenever they buy an item and later decide to return it. Online shopping stores suffer from a major drawback, customers cannot really see how the product fits them, unless they purchase it. For someone who buys stuff all the time online and needs to exchange a different size, that's a problem — and a lot of money. Amazon again is making customer's lives simply easier and better — and they will continue to gain market share in doing that.

What's Next

Insurance is usually associated with problems. Perhaps one reason is that most of us only encounter insurance providers when we have a problem. Which is why insurance companies come under deep scrutiny when it comes to customer service. Fortunately, a number of fin-tech startups have popped up in this sector recently, and are working to leverage technology in order ensure better experiences for customers. Even before making a purchase, a huge population of insurance customer have problems understanding insurance products in detail. Add to that the task of choosing the right product, and understanding how it will impact you at different stages and scenarios of your life, the task becomes way too complicated. Artificial Intelligence can help insurers solve this issue by revolutionizing how they interact with the customers. Placing chat-bots on websites for examples, can help insurers learn a few things about them by asking questions, and suggest the right policy for them.

Purchase

The customer is taking the plunge, and has decided to purchase. From selecting the product, to getting it through the cashier, the experience has to be seamless. Touch-points here would include store/branch, website, and checkout page. Payment processing is key here. Fortunately, payment methods have become more diverse and are helping brands expedite the whole purchasing process.

What's Happening

Think of a 24-hour store run entirely by technology, with no humans at all. Enter Moby Store, launched by Wheelys, a Stockholm-headquartered crowd-funded startup. You walk into a store, a holographic human face with a calm expression and neatly cut bangs greets you. There is a wide range of products sold there: fruits, potato chips, coffee, magazines, and even sneakers, each with a bar code on the package. All you need to do is scan the bar code using a smartphone app with your banking card information registered in it. As you approach the exit, a glass door slid opens automatically to let you out.

What's Next

Innovation in financial services has skyrocket in the past few years. Startups have leveraged technological modifications to disrupt almost every segment of the finance vertical. For some reason, cash has been wrong side of all this. And even though we are constantly moving towards a cashless society, a large part of all transactions are still handled in cash. Withdrawing cash from ATMs has been a massive simplifier for all of us. But there are times, when we think if this process could be simplified further. For instance, imagine a scenario where you need some cash urgently, but you don't have your ATM card to hand. So you take out your mobile phone, touch the app for the bank account you want the money taken from, and select the sum you need. You enter the one-time PIN number you've received by SMS into the bank's ATM, and collect the money. The mobile app even directs you to the nearest ATM. Simple, convenient, and secure.

Use of Product/Service

More commonly referred to as after-sales services, brands should offer customers a wide variety of ways to interact with your organization post-purchase. Being able to reach out to customer support is always a turn on for the customers. Making sure that customers are satisfied with the product/service is an absolute must for any business. Touch-points here would include web self-service, chat/customer support, and social media.

What's Happening

Office products and services superstore and US e-commerce leader, Staples, partnered with IBM Watson to meet the increasing needs of their customers, and make everything easier with its intelligent Easy System. With the integration of IBM's Watson technology, which makes use of artificial intelligence, Staples has been able to connect consumers across all the various methods of ordering, making transitioning of that order between the Easy Button, chat-bots and the Staples mobile app. Staples' Facebook Messenger bot can answer common customer questions, which tend to be about orders—tracking and returns—and whether specific items are in stock.

What's Next

The absence of direct competitors trying to capture their market share, might make customer experience a far-fetched phenomenon for government agencies. But as taxpayers, citizens of the country expect a certain level of service from the government and expects fast resolutions for their queries. Poor customer service makes government agencies look inefficient and reckless. The major reasons behind poor customer service are the use of old technology in tackling customer queries and absence of a streamlined process to deal with them. Enhancing customer service can save policy implementation costs and increase efficiency of the organization. Federal agencies should take advantage of virtual assistants and other technologies that can automate simple functions and provide fast, convenient service. This will not only enhance the customer experience, but also help them in saving money and enabling staff to focus on more complex tasks.

Loyalty

Customer retention is an important part of any business. The relationship between brand and customer is starting to grow, and the brand needs to build up loyalty from the customer. Offering discounts and rewards to returning customers has been proven very successful in retaining clients. But there is still a need for brands to personalize shopping experiences. Touch-points at this stage would include newsletters, blogs and loyalty programs.

What's Happening

Spotify is one of those rare brands whose customer experience strategy is based around understanding listeners personally. Using customer preference to offer a personalized experiences has helped the streaming service in making every listening experience different, and fit user's distinct tastes. By integrating users' established favorites with tailored recommendations, listeners are never bored. Moreover, they keep coming back for more. None of this would be possible without analytics.

What's Next

Telecom companies have traditionally relied on their original business model of building the biggest network they can, and then charging customers for the demands they make on it. And to be honest, this worked pretty well, since voice calls were something of necessity as well as a luxury back then. But this success has now been overhauled by instant messaging services, which are the primary source of communication now. With falling revenues, telecom operators are now shifting their focus on expanding the range of services they provide, and more importantly create superior experiences for their customers. Telcos broad customer reach makes them subject to heavy criticism, but also presents an opportunity to expand its offerings by partnering with third parties that bring specialist expertise to complement their services. For instance, working with on-demand media services such as Netflix, Deezer, or Spotify, can help them expand into areas that are not only close to the core business, but also provide additional growth potential.

The Future is Hybrid: Digitalization with a Human touch

The customer experience is at a breaking point. By now, business leaders and entrepreneurs know building a successful company starts with the customer experience. In fact, 72 per cent say improving the experience is at the top of the list. It's evident that customers are driving brands to transform, and many organizations are turning to technology to elevate customer experiences at every stage of the customer journey. But the answer to cultivating brand loyalty doesn't lie solely in technology and, in the race to stay competitive, brands are losing touch with the very customers they are trying to serve. Now more than ever, customers are looking to connect with real people. It's the people in the contact center who can truly personalize every interaction, and business leaders must recognize them as the foundation to customer experience success. s Avoiding a breaking point is simple so long as customer experience strategies are focused around people. Whilst technology is a great first point of contact, self-service and automated services must be backed by people who are prepared and available to answer even the most difficult of enquiries. Customers want human interaction, and it's the agents in the contact center who have the power over the interactions that build brand loyalty. By finding the right balance between tools, technology and people, organizations can design the ultimate customer experience.

About us

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