

Customer
Experience Basics:
Getting Results



Introduction



As the world markets become more integrated and business becomes more competitive, the only true competitive advantage that will really matter is your business ability to create and manage a world class customer experience. If you don't, your competitors will – and you will lose the one thing that all businesses must have to survive – customers.

Many companies have realized this and have been working to be customer driven for years. Some has been accomplished to various degrees, with some of the world most powerful brands reaching their goals and others completely missing the mark.

Companies that successfully manage their customer experiences are distinguished by broad systematic programs that engage leadership, build accountability and link the essence of the customer to their business processes.

- Getting results requires:
- Clarity in what to measure
- Linkage of items measured to your business processes
- Accountability
- Measurement



What to Measure

Touch Points

Managing the customer experience begins with understanding how your business interacts with customers. A pervasive study of how your company interacts with your customers is used to ensure the feedback provided by your customers is inclusive. This process creates the definitive “touch point” model for your business. Remember that all “touches” are not physical, vocal, or electronic; some are emotional; many happen when you are not actually present. Anytime your customer thinks about your company, your products or your services, you are touching them.

It is important to understand what your customer is doing when they are touched by you. What business process are they engaged in? It is equally important to understand what business process (or processes) you are engaged in at that moment. Touch point analysis is used to understand the relationship between customer processes and your processes.

Attributes

Every touch point has attributes or qualities and it is these attributes that define the experience. For example, a customer touch point like product delivery might have an underlying quality of “on time”, and the process owner might be your shipping department. Delivery on time is likely to be dependent on more than a shipping department. It may depend on many parts of the company. With understanding

these relationships, it becomes impossible to effectively manage the customer experience.

It is likely that each touch point will have several attributes that impact how the customer feels about your company. To achieve a broad understanding of touch points and their associated attributes customer research will likely be necessary. It is important to involve your customers to make sure you completely understand all of the ways you touch them and what is important to them when it happens.

Attributes are what we test with customers in satisfaction surveys. What we generally ask customers is “how are we doing?” and “how important is that to you?”

Linkage to Business Processes

After you have a clear understanding of customer touch points and attributes, you can build the linkage to your business processes. Sometimes this is simple; an attribute is obviously directly related to a specific process. Be careful to make sure you have really dug into the attribute. We had a client who had linked “sales reps understanding of their products” to their sales training process. Customer feedback indicated this was an area that needed improvement. Significant emphasis was placed on improving sales training. As it turned out the product portfolio was so confusing that no amount of training would ever make the sales reps understand.

Take the time to map the touch points and their attributes to all of your business processes that might impact them, and





define additional attributes to test that will help you isolate specifically what to improve when customers expose a problem. In our example above, adding attributes related to product roadmap clarity or ease of deciding which product was the best fit to their needs would have helped.

Once you have developed complete linkage to your business processes, it is important to reengage your customers to make sure you have defined attributes that are important to your customers and have done so in language that they will understand.

Accountability

Eventually, each attribute should be assigned to an owner. They may have to implement a cross-functional team to improve the processes necessary to satisfy your customers, but ownership and accountability is critical. As a business leader, you need to make sure that appropriate measures are implemented to make customer experience a focus of the process owners. Frequently, compensation and rewards are tied to attribute performance.

It is important to establish accountability before problems are identified. That way when a particular attribute is measured at level that is unacceptable there is no questions about the individual responsible for correction.

Measurement

Customer feedback can be collected from a variety of processes (surveys, complaint systems, sales win and loss reviews, support incident tracking, customer advisory panels, users groups, customer visits, etc.). An annual customer feedback survey is the most common way to collect feedback. A good survey will help “take the temperature” of your customers and provide a baseline for future measurements, but frequently has to be too broad to include enough information to drive actionable feedback. You will be able to identify the most critical things you need to improve; exactly how to improve them will likely require the linkage of other information. Some of it you already have, some may require more in depth research with your customers.

Remember that you most likely have a wealth of information about your customers experience in your operational systems and processes. It’s fairly easy to connect customer dissatisfaction with the initial setup of your product with support request information. Use all of what you have, when it doesn’t give you a very clear picture of what to improve and how to do it then you should consider a specific in depth feedback approach. Focus groups, customer panels, and formal customer visit programs work well at this level.





Putting it together: Your Customer Experience Model

Information about your customer touch points, attributes, measurement techniques, internal processes, process owners, and attribute measurements and trends should be organized in a way that promotes understanding and documents linkages. This information repository can be used to create dashboards and other visual communications elements that can help keep your team focused on improving your customer experience.

Your customer experience effort can drive deep and far reaching change.

- You can capture the customer ideas and input that you need to focus your efforts on customer-defined priorities.
- You can measure your satisfaction against your competitor's to create business advantage.
- You can seek continuous improvement, and measure it from your customer's perspective.

A well-designed, well-implemented customer experience program can do all of these things and more.

Overall customer satisfaction drives retention and referrals which impact profit, share and revenue. As you continue to develop your abilities and knowledge about your customer experience you will be able to add the final linkage to your customer experience model – the impact of your improvement efforts on revenue, profit and the return on your customer experience investments.



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