

Top 9 Customer Experience Imperatives

Customer Experience (CX) is the holistic, journey-based evolution of what was once known – albeit myopically – as customer service. Today’s smartest companies are paying attention to CX trends and making much-needed adjustments – some minor and some major. Why? Because a remarkable customer experience leads to customer loyalty ... which leads to repeat and referral business ... which is a preferred and sustainable path to profitability, and – as it turns out – a strengthened organizational culture. Below are 9 key areas that are proven to be more than worthwhile investments, they are imperatives:

1. Tailored Experiences / Personalization

Gone are the days of the one-size-fits-all service model. Ever had a suit or dress custom-tailored to fit your body’s every dimension? How did that feel? Can you provide a “custom-tailored” experience for your customers/clients?

We’ve always been taught to practice the *Golden Rule*: Do unto others as you’d have done unto you.

So what’s wrong with that approach? Well, personalization requires the *Platinum Rule*:

Do unto others (i.e., your clients) as they would have you do unto them. Create experiences that are unique to each individual.

2. Relevant Advice & Learning

From gardening classes at Lowe’s to cooking classes at Chef Tony’s, some of the smartest and most forward-thinking businesses now offer advice and learning opportunities to their customers and prospects. According to Gallup research, when it comes to customer expectations, this is the highest level at which a firm can earn “points” with its customers. Delivering advice/learning opportunities is proven to turn prospects into advocates.

3. Experiential Model and Mindset

There’s a reason that we’ve transitioned from the tired and trite term, “Customer Service” to the more holistic full-journey “Customer Experience.” This requires a paradigm shift since many of us have perhaps never quite thought of our customer interactions/transactions as contributing to an overarching “experience.” But they are. This experience is made up of countless *moments of truth*: how they first heard about you, the first phone call, first visit to your web site, parking, greeting ... and that’s all *before* the “experience” – as we might naturally think of it – even begins.

4. Employee Engagement

See: *Fortune Magazine’s 100 Best Companies to Work For* and you can’t help but ask yourself, “What comes first, the happy customer or the happy employee?” Your people will be intrinsically motivated by autonomy, mastery, and purpose, but it all begins with the hiring – measure for CX aptitude with questions that include: above/beyond story, unreasonable request story, if the sign outside said, *[Your Name]’s Place...*

5. Needs Anticipated

You're able to gather more customer intel than ever before. The information is out there – often like low-hanging fruit – and your CRM (Customer Relationship Management Software) gives you an easy way to record it all.

Your customers didn't go to customer school so they're not likely anticipating their own needs. What you are currently doing for your customers – via your products and services – you get to do every day and you may be doing it for the ten-thousandth time. But for that customer, this may be their very *first* time. Anticipate their needs and you might just win them over.

6. Balancing Hi-Tech AND Hi-Touch

Too often, we get wrapped up in trying to choose on behalf of our customers. Today, we have only a fraction of the number of daily human interactions that we did just 25 years ago ... yet some people do prefer the DIY option. What to do? Instead of forcing a decision between hi-tech and hi-touch customer options, why not offer both?

Technology should complement your customer process, not hinder it and certainly not replace it.

7. Social Proof

Human nature has us look to the behavior of others to help guide our decisions. Not long ago, many of us were turning to Yelp, but only for restaurant reviews. Now, we can turn to Google (and Yelp) and countless others for 3rd party reviews on everything from plumbers to mortgage companies to dentists to I.T. firms and more. Are you proactively managing your online reputation, or are you at the affect of it?

8. Storytelling

Facts tell and stories sell. Give people something to talk about. For example, is the story of: “Why you do what you do” compelling enough to attract customers? If so, how are you sharing that story? Some of the most successful marketers are finding ways to share stories in quick home-page videos while some brands ARE their story (i.e. TOMS Shoes).

9. Voice of the Customer (VOC)

We're too close to our own business and industries and often get in our own way as a result. VOC is about seeking a professional's outside perspective and related guidance on existing and proposed processes, procedures, and systems; a perspective that represents customer preferences and aversions, while looking to exceed expectations. Additionally, a closed-loop customer feedback system is paramount when working to uncover what matters most to your customers while including them in affecting positive change.
