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## Customer Experience Improvement on a Tight Budget

by Lynn Hunsaker

Great strides in customer experience improvement are attainable with minimal out-of-pocket investment. Most companies have a wealth of untapped resources within. Proven winners both during and after a down cycle are those that embrace a slowdown as an opportunity to strengthen innovation and business processes. This strengthening better aligns offerings and ways-of-doing-business, which are hard for competitors to copy.

### Latent Information

Consider the data residing in survey reports, complaint logs, service and sales call reports, CRM databases, win-loss analyses, the blogosphere, and so forth. If they are pieced together, a broader and deeper picture of the customer experience emerges. A small team might peruse these disparate sources to create or enhance customer segment personae. Valuable new insights can extend the typical persona definition from buying-decision-focused toward a panoramic view of the full customer experience spectrum. This spectrum should be defined through customer interviews, and it typically begins with his/her awareness of a need or desire for a solution and extends through full use of the purchased product or service, including use after new models have been released as well as eventual downgrade, upgrade or disposal. With these new insights, myriad opportunities become apparent.



### Prioritization

Customer lifetime value (CLV) is the cumulative profit stream over the duration of a customer's interest in a brand category. CLV may be revised to sharpen prioritization of the panoramic experience persona segments. Prioritization can aid executives' strategic decisions and front-line employees' tactical decisions. To enable CLV-based decision-making, provide executives and front-line employees with tools that keep CLV policies top-of-mind. CLV prioritization also aids listening strategies and experience improvement initiatives.

### Listening

Referring to the experience personae and CLV findings, evaluate customer sentiment monitoring methods. Is the full experience reflected? Are CLV-prioritized segments represented accordingly? Is

there adequate representation of influencers across the experience spectrum? Does it incorporate the typically latent data listed above to provide a panoramic view? Are employees at various levels personally involved in formal customer listening? Your answers to these questions indicate whether your data collection needs to be adjusted for higher return on investment regarding its use for innovation, internal branding, and affinity development.

## Innovation

Expand innovation horizons to include the full customer experience spectrum. Inspire development teams by streaming listening data, CLV and experience personae to them. Involve representatives from manufacturing, customer service, support functions and channel partners along with the development teams in improving products, services, and touchpoints. Touchpoints are all the occasions when a customer's perceptions may be impacted, and are sometimes referred to as moments-of-truth. These include packaging, billing, information and communications throughout the customer experience spectrum. A broader viewpoint, supported by streaming fresh customer inputs, can propel innovation well beyond competitors' offerings.



## Internal Branding

*Data streams.* To be customer-centric rather than ethnocentric, employees throughout the organization need to be plugged into customer sentiment data streams. Through meaningful dispositioning of the latent data sources listed above, each department can receive data that is pertinent to their stewardship. This sharpens understanding of their impact on the experience spectrum. Adoption of a



mantra such as "Good news is no news, no news is bad news, bad news is good news" can make it easier for employees to accept customers' constructive feedback. Treat complaints and negative ratings in a concerted manner similar to an RMA (returned materials authorization) process. Help departments take ownership for their specific impact on the customer experience by providing worksheets and reporting forms they can use to create and monitor action plans.

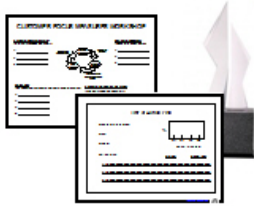
Motivate follow-through and ongoing momentum through management visibility, recognition programs, and incentives criteria.

*Snowball effect.* A typical business process is deployed by several departments, creating a value chain of internal customers. Timeliness and quality of hand-offs throughout this internal value chain snowball exponentially toward revenue-generating customers. After characterizing each department's ultimate objectives by their impact on the external experience spectrum, customer-centricity can be further improved by emphasizing internal customer satisfaction and internal supplier quality. For internal supplier quality, a process owner can communicate proactively with those who provide inputs to their process. It's surprising how often this seemingly simple step is not enacted. Effective hand-offs typically result in smoother processes and fewer customer hassles.

*Culture.* Weave experience improvement objectives into existing business practices such as staff meetings, operations reviews, the annual operating plan, performance reviews and internal communications. Include customer-centric messages prominently in intranet pages, internal

newsletters, war rooms, break rooms, bulletin boards, cafeteria, and lobbies. Be creative and thorough. Consistent emphasis in simple ways is a defining factor in nurturing a customer-centric culture.

### **Make Action-Planning Easy & Motivate Follow-Through**



*Rewards.* 'You get what you measure' and 'you get what you reward' are watchwords for customer experience improvement. Scrutinize employees' perceived weightings of performance metrics. It may be that the behaviors elicited by these perceptions are not the behaviors that management intended to motivate. Avoid sub-optimization by balancing metrics and incentives, and by double-checking alignment with intended outcomes.

These internal branding initiatives can pay excellent dividends through prevention of customer hassles and heightened customer-centricity.

### **Affinity Development**

Customer experience personae and CLV are important reality-checks in developing marketing campaigns. Simple tools can keep CLV policies top-of-mind and stream relevant customer sentiment data to marketing and sales departments. With this guidance in creating ads, promotions, and sales presentations, stronger results can be achieved in customer affinity for the brand, spurring positive word of mouth, and further increasing market share and CLV.

### **CEM on a Shoestring**

Be creative and thorough in maximizing customer data usage. Revive latent information, channel relevant streams throughout the organization, and emphasize the experience spectrum in innovation, internal branding and affinity development. By using existing data and processes in new ways, great strides can be made in customer experience improvement.

*Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author [lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz](mailto:lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz).*