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Customer Experience is Best Defined by Customers

by Lynn Hunsaker

The term **customer experience** has a wide array of interpretations. For some people it revolves around shopping or website navigation. For others it's about ease of use as the customer interfaces with the product or service they purchased. For some, it's about technical and customer service. And still others view it as creating affinity through unique events, communities, and promotions. *The big question is: how do your customers define customer experience?*

Customer experience management (CEM) has similar ambiguity across companies. Definitions include personalization of marketing communications and customer service, involving customers in dialogue with the company or fellow customers, collecting feedback for new product development, sharing success stories among customers, arranging executive-to-executive customer visits, creating exciting events, and rewarding loyal behaviors. *The big questions here are: In what ways are customers better off due to these CEM programs? Is anything missing to address the earlier question of how customers define the customer experience?*

Reality Comparisons

The main reason why customers decide not to buy something is doubt that reality will match or exceed their expectations. Likewise, the main reason why customers decide not to buy again is that reality didn't live up to their expectations. Hence, expectations are pivotal to understanding customer experience and to CEM.



Brand Promises Create Expectations

Expectations are shaped greatly by ads and promotions across the brand category, and by comments from sales and service professionals, media and reviewers, the customer's peers, and the customer's prior history with the brand category. These formal and informal sources form the brand promise.

Expectations Are a Moving Target

Ongoing alignment is necessary because expectations are a moving target. Innovations, competitors' moves, and economic and social trends are some of the forces that cause continual morphing of customers' expectations.

True Customer-Centricity

True customer-centricity is a consistent practice of looking at things from the customer's point of view, and making decisions accordingly. To be customer-centric, everyone inside a company should gain a thorough understanding of customer expectations, monitor customer data relevant to their role, and use it to make a difference on a continual basis.



Ripple Effect

The ripple effect of any internal organization's actions is ultimately felt by a firm's customer-facing professionals, and typically by the customers as well. Negative ripples are manifest to customers as hassles, disappointments, annoyances and unnecessary costs. These ripples tend to result in customer churn, also known as switching to a competitor's brand. Pure customer-centricity prevents negative ripples.

Customer experience is best defined by customers themselves. Business that want to improve customer experience must keep a pulse on customer expectations — and consistently make the customer's reality match or exceed those expectations.

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.