



ClearAction mentors executives for sustainable customer profitability.

www.clearaction.biz
1.877.CEM-ROI-4 toll-free
1.408.687.9700 direct

ClearAction means unique vision and rapid results.

Customer Experience Innovation Covers the Experience Spectrum

by Lynn Hunsaker

What's the difference between user experience design and customer experience design? Although the phrasing is similar, there's a real gap between the two concepts. User experience typically focuses on product-specific ease-of-use, ergonomics, and ethnography -- participative observation of the product-in-use. Customer experience design is broader. It encompasses the full customer experience spectrum.

Your Recent Experience Just think of your own experience in buying something recently. First, you must have concluded that you had a need, and then you sought a solution.

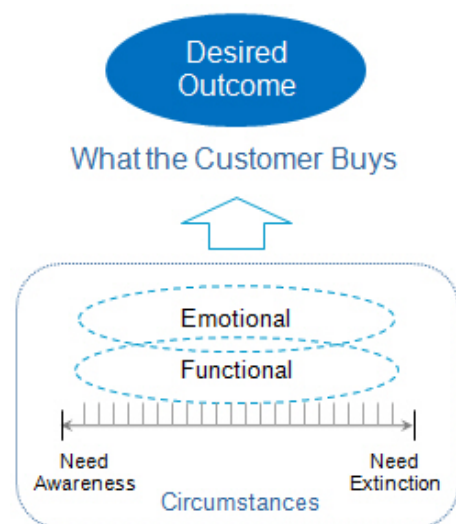
- What was your experience in those two steps? Was it easy to outline your requirements for said need?
- Did you find anything in your search that guided your thinking or helped you realize your decision criteria?
- Did you come across anything that made it quicker or easier to access a solution?

Next, you must have decided to invest in a certain brand that promised to meet your needs.

- How easy was it to make your transaction and access the actual product or service?
- To what extent did that process occur as you expected?
- Once you started using the product or service what was easy and what was not so easy? (This step is the primary focus of user experience design.)

Of course that's not all -- after using the product or service for a while, you may have come across a snag: something you wanted to do a bit differently, or a glitch in performance, or use of a previously ignored feature.

- At this point, how well were your needs met?
- Were you turned away because your solution is now considered obsolete by its provider?
- Did you have to wait an exorbitant time period for assistance?
- Were you required to pay a relatively large fee for help?
- Did you wade through tons of information or ward off enticements to upgrade?



- And when you finally decided to move on from that product or service, how easy was it to disengage from the provider, or find suitable disposal methods or easy trade-up methods, or switch to a wholly different solution?

Keeping the Brand Promise All of these questions determine in the customer's mind whether the brand promise was kept. Was the company firing on all cylinders to build the customer relationship and brand equity? Often, a positive or negative experience for any one of the above questions will determine brand switching or brand evangelism, with definite impact on customer lifetime value.

Customer-centricity means doing the whole job from your customer's perspective. It involves systems thinking and cross-functional interaction on a broader scale from product concept throughout the product life cycle. Many marketing plans contain significant detail relating to product launch, go-to-market, or new product introduction. But they are often static and short-sighted when it comes to managing the product life cycle, particularly from a customer's viewpoint.

An Example An example we may all relate to is a college course. The institution's focus is on the class catalog, registration process, and grades distribution. The onus is on the instructor to make classroom time meaningful. But of course there's a lot more to it for the students.

- They must decide which classes will best serve their long-term goals and which instructor will match their learning style. Before the learning begins, they must travel to the class site, find parking, and find the classroom. I've known many students who have experienced quite an ordeal by this time.
- While the instructor's focus is the syllabus and lectures (akin to user experience design), students are equally concerned about textbooks, communication style, homework clarity, straightforward exam prep, time required for study and projects, out-of-class access to the instructor, and fairness.
- Some students still need to access the instructor for administrative requests several months after grades were submitted.

Surely there are a few institutions that strive to ease each step outlined above. But in most cases, tunnel vision takes over for the institution and for the instructor with their typical focus areas.

Innovating the Full Experience On the other hand, companies such as Starbucks, Virgin and Ritz Carlton have earned great reputations by enhancing most everything that surrounds the actual product or service. Marketing leaders and product managers in particular can greatly enhance the value of their brands -- and their perceived value within the firm -- by championing innovation processes that consider the full spectrum of the customer experience, from the customer's viewpoint. Customer experience design can add that "je ne sais quoi" to a brand for competitive advantages that build sustainable revenue streams.



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