

Digital customer experience - beyond the feedback hype

Contributed by Mopinion
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A customer experience strategy that is securely deployed on digital customer experience goes beyond installing a simple feedback tool on your website. It is not just about collecting feedback, but also about focussing on customer insight and follow-up action. Different organisations use customer feedback in different ways, such as data collection or turning insights into action. However there are a number of clear phases that a business goes through to optimise its digital customer experience and its worth identifying and understanding these fully to ensure you get the result you need.

The customer experience is a hot topic, with a lot of time and energy invested in analysing it and ways to improve it. Often, however, the customer experience is confused with user experience. It's important to realise that these are two different things. Broadly speaking, user experience focuses on ease of use - for example, apps, websites and other digital channels. Customer experience is about the multichannel customer experience as part of the overall business strategy. It is based on the brand values of a company and ensures that all interaction points (touch points) are aligned to connect the 'journeys' that a customer goes through in order to reach a goal as well as possible.

With this in mind you should also look at digital channels. For example, within a website, a customer goes through several steps to achieve a goal. As an organisation you want this to go as smoothly as possible, and you want to excel on the points that are most important. If you have the digital customer experience approached from a user experience thought you will definitely miss a number of important issues.

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Not just a "project"

It is important to remember that organising the digital experience is not just a side project - it needs to be part of the overall customer experience strategy. This means that the focus on the customer is not a "project" for a single department, it is part of the overall business strategy and needs to follow the brand values throughout the organisation.

Customers are closer to your business than ever before, with a myriad of multichannel touch-points, even traditionally offline outlets are embracing more and more online activities and increasingly digitized processes - just think of all self-service and online sales. Equally, when clients go through these processes but then have issues they will often go somewhere else. It is essential, especially in this digital age, to develop a loyal customer base, because customers can switch very easily. To secure loyal customers you must also align the customer experience in the digital channels as well as your stores and call centre. The interaction moments that customers have with companies form the full experience and customer feedback is the key metric to achieve a customer experience that goes beyond your channels. Â

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Can you hear the voice of the customer?

To develop a digital customer experience strategy it is useful to have insight into the phases a company goes through. Here are the typical phases: Â

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Phase 1 - The Early Stage,

Initially many companies look at their website statistics. There are tools in place to see where the visitor enters and exits, which pages are doing well and which pages are not. There will probably be some A / B testing in place and they are mainly looking at click behaviour and quantitative research. In this phase, the organisation has not yet conducted qualitative research because the current understanding is enough, according to the controller, or perhaps because there is no time at that stage. For example, an organisation knows where a visitor leaves the site, but not why and the focus is on numbers alone.

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Phase 2 - The Traditional Route,

At this point, companies look beyond pure numbers and statistics. Here companies use one-time or periodical website questionnaires, for example as part of their customer satisfaction programme. We all know the long pop-up questionnaires with 20+ questions about "what is your age?" and "why are you here?" and "how would you rate the aspects of our website?". Qualitative feedback and open comments are used, but not yet "in the moment" as the customer is going through the process. Customer feedback is mainly used for general web-evaluation purposes, which has its uses but the end is not yet in sight.

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Phase 3 - The Experimental Venture,

By this phase the link with real time feedback is in place. If, as in phase 2, a periodic examination is done (semi-annually or quarterly), the research results are too late. When a customer is unhappy, you are unable to restore the relationship immediately. And so there are now tools used such as a feedback forms on every page of the website, where customers can specify where they get stuck and are encountering problems. The company focuses on direct feedback from the customer, but the focus is still mainly on collecting feedback. This phase is not the final destination but it has the advantage that the costs involved to achieve results do not have to be very high. There are several "plug-and-play" tools available to install a feedback form on the entire website.

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Phase 4 - The strategic approach,

When companies have mastered the digital customer experience, they arrived in the fourth phase. The company monitors all major online customer journeys and captures useful feedback on a structural and real-time base. Based on the collected quantitative and qualitative data, action is taken. Internally action is taken to participate in the continuous optimisation of digital channels and internal processes. Also the feedback loop is closed in a way that customers are engaged and they see something is happening with their feedback (i.e. when an issue with the website or app has been resolved), this is conveyed back to the customer as closed loop feedback. The focus in this phase is turning insight into action.

A good analogy is to think of a traditional offline store. When people visit a grocery store and leave their shopping basket loaded with products standing near the freezer area and walk out, you can assume the store owner wants to know why. Is it the type of product? Is it too expensive? The owner does not wait six months before a survey is distributed and results are analysed. Instead, he continuously monitors where things go wrong (or very well) and he takes action. When you connect this concept to the current stage many organisations are in concerning their digital channels, there is an increasing distance between the customer and the company. It all may seem less personal. The bakery on the corner usually knows what customers think of his bread. But when thousands of customers are ordering products online on a daily base, then it's a different story.

The tricky part of stage four of the maturity model is that this takes effort and commitment from within the organisation. The challenge of working with customer feedback is that it transcends the online marketing department. Customer feedback also plays a role in the sales department, customer service, the website management team and so on. Implementing a feedback form on your website is easy to do, but to work as customer centric organisation the voice of the customer should be heard in the entire organisation. To accomplish that there is a need for cultural change.

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