



UrGEN-C

UrGEN-C: The Value of a Strategic Customer Experience Strategy

Can you recall the bad customer service experiences you have had? The eye rolls, rude remarks, or lack of help you may have received from brands big or small? These brands may provide high quality customer service most of the time, but it will be that one bad situation that will stick out and be shared with friends, family, coworkers, and peers. On the flip side of that, we can also recall the amazing experiences we have had either first-hand or heard about through others. Planes being held, an eight hour phone call with a customer service representative, or defunct products replaced without a second thought. Why is it that some brands just seem to get it, while others are failing? What is the key to great customer service? It is easy to get stuck on the fundamentals of customer service, and rightfully so in the initial stages of development, because without good basics, a brand will not get very far. Providing a process for representatives to follow will guide them in the right direction, but they need to be able to do more than just go through the motions and provide a service - they need to provide an experience.

Top brands know that creating a magical, memorable, customer experience involves the alignment of a combination of factors and teams. Everything that your customers can see or interact with will become part of the experience. Right from the design and development of products and services, to the recruitment and training of your staff, to how the marketing team conceptualizes and brings your brand to the public - all of these elements must work together. Having a special customer experience can set brands apart from competitors, but in order to develop a strategic plan of action, the business and its customer base must be properly analyzed.

A great place to start is to determine what your company is all about and what it is that you want to achieve. Define your mission and values, establish your company culture, and make sure it is embedded in everything you do. Think about what the main service goals are. To increase sales? To deliver great service? It is important to first know *what* to achieve before determining *how* to achieve it. You will want to think about how your brand communicates with customers. Does your communication or interaction with customers convey your culture and values in the right way? In order to determine if the right perception exists, a better understanding of your customers is required.

Asking specific questions such as who are your customers, what are their specific behaviors or purchasing patterns, and can they be segmented into different sections (i.e. millennials, by gender, etc.), will help to create a complete 360 degree view of the customer landscape. Once a profile has been built out, it will be easier to see which groups may need more attention. If one of your main goals is to increase the reach of your brand and exposure to a larger number of people, than you may want to target the most influential customer segment. One particular group that is overwhelmingly influential, growing quickly in number, and may be applicable to a number of industries, is Generation C.

Although Generation C (or simply Gen C) is composed of 80% Millennials (Forrester Technographics Q2, 2012), it is known to include people of various ages, genders, and backgrounds – tied together through similar traits and their dependence on technology. Gen C is more than a segmentation of the population, it is a mentality; a way of life. This group holds a great deal of value; an influence that accounts for \$500 BN of spending a year in the US alone (Barkley's).

The people that comprise Gen C are always connected, communicating, and creating with 91% of them sleeping next to their smartphone (Engaging Generation C, November 2012). They typically update their social profiles on a daily basis and love to share their opinions with others. Eighty-five percent of Gen C relies on peer approvals before they make a buying decision (Engaging Generation C, November 2012). Due to this constant connectivity and love of sharing, they often use a number of channels to interact with peers and brands. Having a brand page on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter could appeal to this segment and fulfill their desire to interact in this channel.

While traditional customer service platforms, such as voice, are still common and necessary, more organizations are finding that there is a great deal of value in interactive verticals, such as mobile or social media. According to *Customer Experience Insights About Today's Connected Consumer* (Execs in the Know & Digital Roots), “62% of consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they see a company responding to consumers on community sites” and, “72% of consumers wish more companies offered the ability to interact with them via SMS”. However, some are jumping full-force into new channels too quickly. Certain brands are experiencing tunnel vision, only focused on developing customer service channels because specific customer segments such as Gen C are known to visit them, not because they have the right strategy or execution plan in place, or if it even makes sense for their brand. Going down this path could backfire, resulting in a loss of revenue, resources, and potentially even customers. For this reason, the next step in strengthening your customer care strategy should be to evaluate your service channels. What communication channels are currently offered? Examine what is done well in each channel and where there is room for improvement. Would new, interactive channels help to fulfill any of your goals? Focus on how your customers like to be engaged, which channels they prefer, and develop accordingly. For example, many retail brands are taking advantage of image based sites such as Pinterest or Instagram, often linking to products for purchase. This adds a level of convenience to the shopping experience and makes sense for the main demographic they are trying to appeal to.

Customer service trends come and go, impacted by various economic and socioeconomic factors, and affect the way certain brands do business with their customers. For some, these trends can positively influence customer loyalty. According to *Customer Experience Insights About Today's Connected Consumer* (Execs in the Know & Digital Roots), issue resolution will drive brand loyalty and the Connected Consumer is seeking immediacy, personalization and ease of use. Often working in conjunction with customer service trends, technology can act as a catalyst, influencing the behaviors of consumers in the ways they interact with brands and make purchasing decisions. Take for example new mobile trends such as geocaching or digital wallets. Adding this service option may work wonderfully for some, but fail miserably for others. Every new idea or site is not worth developing for every brand. Proper assessments and pilot programs need to be completed to ensure customers are present in that particular space, would find the service beneficial, and if it is even feasible to complete in the first place. If it does make sense to branch out and develop new channels, the work does not end with the creation of the space. For example, it is not enough to simply be present on social sites; monitoring, moderation, and engagement with customers should also occur. The proper recruitment and training will have to be done according to the agent profile for each channel. A voice agent will require different skills than one that works solely with social media, and this needs to be considered when creating a team of brand specialists. In addition, there are constant improvements being made to mobile and various other technological platforms, and it is important to stay on top of current news and make updates accordingly. Platforms should be user friendly, increase the level of convenience, positively impact overall customer satisfaction in the service offering, and integrate seamlessly with each other.

Putting emphasis on Generation C will not be the focus for everyone, but hopefully provided an example of the important steps to take when developing a customer care strategy. There are many aspects that will go into developing each brand's customer experience, but the most important thing to always keep in mind is that it should be tailored specifically to each brand. Taking the time to understand customers and develop a strategy may seem like a daunting task now, but will be worthwhile in the long run. A strategy will help to eliminate unnecessary spending, improve redundant processes, and reach more customers in the channel of their choice. In addition, customer loyalty will strengthen, leading to a strategic edge over competitors, and the further development of a customer community. Focus on customer insights and continuously evaluate your strategy to build the best customer experience possible.