

CUSTOMER-DRIVEN PRIORITIES

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Customer experience leaders share 20 top priorities for 2016.

BY Susan McDaniel, Execs In The Know

By now you have heard many ideas on what customer experience trends have been predicted for 2016. According to Gartner, 89% of companies plan to compete solely on customer experience in 2016. That statistic alone has garnished the attention of industry leaders from service to marketing to operations and beyond. Within the enterprise, the emphasis on customer service over the past decade has followed an undeniable path.

How are the most recent industry trends, and growing dependence to compete for the best experience, translating to priorities in the life of a care leader?

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with 25 customer experience leaders in a small group session to find out what their customer experience priorities were for 2016. This was not a formal survey, but rather a group of leaders providing great insights into priorities beyond the usual industry norms.

The following are 20 priorities that are worth adding to the wall beside your desk to ensure that they are a current priority, a checked item or a planning item.

- ▶ **MAKE IT EASY FOR THE CUSTOMER.** It was unanimously agreed upon by our group leaders that this must be at the base of every step in the customer journey. Customers look to ease of use more than ever and leaders must examine processes and technology, to allow for an “easy” experience with their brand.
- ▶ **GO MOBILE.** The mobile platform and the interfaces it supports have an impressively high adoption rate. You must examine the

areas of mobility that make sense for your product/service and your customer, and then fully develop them. When looking at app development, ensure that the end product can provide great value to your customer.

- ▶ **A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE.** Customers continue to grow intolerant of a fragmented experience across channels. Organizations must be prepared to invest in the culture, technology and processes to allow a seamless journey, across multiple customer touchpoints, including consistency with the brick-and-mortar experience.
- ▶ **CREATE MORE CUSTOMER FOCUS.** Going beyond just a vision and mission statement, customer focus needs to be embedded in every department and functional area. From hiring and training to telephony routing, companies need to understand the impact of new policies and programs to ensure that they are supporting a customer-first mentality.
- ▶ **REINVENT MY SOCIAL PROGRAM.** The definition of “having a social channel” has considerable variation across brands. Proactive social care and the technology to support it have evolved and organizations are aiming to reinvent how they engage and support customers on social. The science of social listening and service can offer great insight and opportunity, across the enterprise.
- ▶ **GET CUSTOMERS EXCITED ABOUT SERVICE.** One of my favorites! As service professionals, we are excited about the evolution of service, but how about your customers?

Essentially, you are looking to create an emotional tie to your business. When a customer is truly excited about a service experience they will want to share it. Brand advocates are the biggest compliment to a business.

- ▶ **MOVE FROM SATISFIED TO EXTRAORDINARY.** Achieving high cSat is a goal for most organizations. Does a high cSat score mean you are delivering extraordinary service? This emotionally charged element is challenging to measure as each perspective is unique to the eye of the beholder. Is an extraordinary service experience achieved when your customer is moved to write a review, or recommend you to their friends by word of mouth, or even better, on their social channels? Move your organization to define your brand’s measurement of extraordinary, outside of the walls of conventional surveys.
- ▶ **EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CHANNEL MANAGEMENT.** A broad priority that requires a well-developed channel strategy in alignment with your business goals. With continual changes in customer adoption and preference, coupled with technological advances, a channel strategy is not a one-and-done. Service leaders need to persistently review their strategies to ensure that they align with service and business goals.
- ▶ **REDUCE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRANSACTIONS.** Whether you are viewing this as an expense reduction to the business or a benefit to your customers, they are both right. When approached correctly, this is a win for the business and the customer. Companies need to consistently review their journey maps and processes to ensure that they are not driving unnecessary transactions. Proactive customer service is also a key element here. Review the reasons for your calls and determine if you can deflect any of them by proactively communicating information that often drives high call volume.
- ▶ **BE CONSISTENT.** With the omnichannel goal, consistency is key. The silos that often exist between channels or departments need to be overcome so that customers receive consistency, as it relates to brand image, processes, policy etc.
- ▶ **CREATE MOMENTS USING TECHNOLOGY.**

THE EVOLUTION OF SERVICE



Data analysis and integration is allowing for us to dive deeper into our customers' behaviors and profiles. Companies are learning how to interpret and utilize the data to create an engaging moment with a customer. There are many different levels of moments that a company can create. The small ones can count big—and that can mean something as small as reminding customers to reorder a product that, according to your profiling, they should be running out of soon!

- ▶ **GET BETTER AT DETERMINING CONSUMER INTENT.** This is an important priority for both marketing and service. Understanding your customers' intent can create a personalized experience, and lead to an effective and efficient transaction. Service leaders are focusing on predicting service needs to add value to their brands, through both customer satisfaction and cost reduction, via reduced or negated service requirements.
- ▶ **EMPLOYEE FOCUS.** I have heard many people say that 2015 was the year of the employee. Let's be honest, if our team members are not the focus every year, then we will ultimately have a crisis on our hands. Your team is the gateway to your customer and, if we are not finding ways to engage, grow and retain them, then ultimately the gateway will crumble. If employees are not advocates of your brand it will be virtually impossible to create customer advocates.
- ▶ **VOC PROGRAM.** Although many organizations have VoC programs, they are usually very departmentalized. The focus needs to be on joining VoC programs across the enterprise, to gain a more holistic view of the customer's feedback and experience. This needs to be a critical priority to enable improvements and changes across the company.
- ▶ **QUALITY.** Although quality programs have been around forever, channel expansion and the omnichannel quest are causing companies to reassess how and what they are measuring as it relates to quality. The points of assurance must be widened to allow for a more strategical than tactical view on quality.
- ▶ **MORE AND IMPROVED JOURNEY MAPPING.** A customer journey map can be a very

powerful tool. It allows you to see beyond just data to understand the potential failure and frustration points that exist within your customer journey. However, the key to journey mapping is not only in the development of one, but in the constant recreation, realignment and communication across the organization.

- ▶ **DEVELOPING A TALENT POOL FOR RAPID GROWTH.** Organizations are being challenged to grow and promote their leaders at rates they have not seen before. Not just any leaders either: customer-focused leaders who are knowledgeable in your culture and brand. Organizations need to focus on internal leadership development programs that will allow them to capitalize on the experience and tenure within their companies.
- ▶ **TAKE ACTION.** It is an age-old problem for companies to "talk" about what they are going to do rather than do it. Getting customer service and customer experience right, as we noted previously, is critical for brands to compete. Brands must create, execute and measure plans to improve the customer experience or risk being left behind their competitors. Culture and buy-in are critical first steps; however, it can't stop there. Operational execution, with monitoring and follow up, are also critical in this ever-changing landscape.
- ▶ **ALIGN SUPPORT WITH BRAND.** By its own

right, a brand can create customer expectations. Service is the link to the delivery of these expectations. This can be a great way to build buy-in and drive awareness in your organization, if the two are not aligned.

- ▶ **REDEFINE THE ROLE OF THE AGENT.** This is an area of focus that tends to be overlooked. Customers want to speak or digitally interact with empowered, knowledgeable agents. For leaders, this impacts the way they hire, train, monitor and create processes to support them. Service leaders continually need to review and ensure that the role of the agent is consistent and aligned to the service expectation they are looking to create.

The opportunities are endless to align and create service experiences that truly impact a customer's relationship with your brand. By creating, communicating and managing your customer experience priorities, you will be well on your way to competing in the customer experience landscape. •



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