

5 Keys to Customer Experience for the Future

I have a dream that in the future we'll look back and say "Remember how hard it was to be a customer back in the 2010s? Thank goodness it's so much easier now!" This dream stems from acknowledgement that it's all too often a bit rough to select, buy, or use a solution in our lives and businesses. For example, when we buy something the farthest things from our minds are that it might not work as expected, or how it will be to call customer service, or the surveys we'll be invited to answer, or recommendations we'll be encouraged to make, and so forth. Yet, for customer experience (CX) managers in companies, these are the first things on their minds.



Can this gap continue indefinitely? Probably not. Customers and executives alike will become impatient. Mixed signals we're seeing already include declining response rates to surveys, declining satisfaction ratings

[1], reduced budgets and staffing for CX, and executives losing faith in the potential for CX-driven business results[2] — while other companies are seeing the opposite of these trends, toward stronger customer relationships and stronger CX-driven business results. Let's learn from the latter.

Here are 5 words representing successful customer experience management (CXM) in the future:

- 1) Context
- 2) Outside-In
- 3) Patterns
- 4) Collaboration
- 5) Momentum

1) Customer Experience Excellence as a Context

Every job exists thanks to customer funding. Therefore, every job has a stewardship to customers' well-being. If not, why fund it? Every manager not only has fiduciary obligations and supervisory duties, but also responsibility for how decisions and deliverables contribute to customers' propensity to buy and rebuy.

Why it's key to future success: This viewpoint is powerful in shifting from our current collective mindset of CXM as something that customer-facing staff takes care of. It is a shift from the micro management of CX as encounters, interactions, experiential events and processes, or case-specific resolution. It is an expansion from relatively superficial treatment of CXM as digital or content marketing or touch-point management. It centers our thinking on realities as customers see them, across their end-to-end process for selecting, getting and using the solutions we sell. It has the power to dismantle silos that currently dominate and severely limit CXM.

Customer experience definitions that transcend current mindsets to enable superior performance in the future are:

Customer Experience is customers' realities in selecting, getting and using a solution that enables a capability they want.

A customer is anyone who has a role in the decision or action to get something, or who uses what is obtained.

2) Outside-In Perspective of Customer Experience

Which of these two questions is outside-in: (1) "How likely are you to [do X for or think Y about] our company?" versus (2) "How well have we helped you meet your goals?" The latter is about us helping the customer, while the first question is about the customer helping us. Think about which of those two questions is most appealing to customers. If we give anyone the opportunity to talk about themselves we'll get a lot more participation and a lot more valuable information.

Why it's key to future success: Expecting customers to do something for the company is perhaps a bit odd. They've already paid fair market value for what they bought. If they're participating in a survey or in social media or anything else we can be grateful for that generosity. Otherwise, as much as we're reaching out, it's actually from an inside-out, self-serving perspective. We should seek to extend value or create value to continue a fair dynamic in our hopes for customers to engage with us.

Focusing on the customers' goals can make a huge difference in what we can achieve through CXM. First of all, it gives employees and suppliers a higher purpose. Second, it is the key to being more innovative, and more successful in launches. Third, it characterizes expectation-sets. Customer segmentation and CX personas based on expectation-sets are more natural and a better view of reality, and they are instrumental to every manager using CX excellence as a context for their decisions and deliverables.

3) CX Patterns Move the Needle

Patterns in customer experience data reveal trends, connections, and impetus to make a difference for the greater good. To identify patterns we need to study cross-tabulations, conduct correlation analyses, characterize groups of customers who see things similarly, link various customer feedback sources, connect quantitative (ratings) and qualitative (verbatim) data, and explore linkages between customer perceptions, sentiment, behaviors, operational data, employee opinions, and financial data. Patterns are enriched through root cause analysis (ask "why?" 5 times), Pareto charts, scatter diagrams in quadrant charts, and calculating customer lifetime value. Patterns can motivate collaboration.

Why it's key to future success: Patterns are influential in shifting from our current emphasis on index scores, micro approach to following up on low ratings, tactics for moving a few decimals in ratings averages, seat-of-the-pants action planning in silos, and weak accountability for driving changes that customers will reward. Patterns are currently used most effectively by

Business Intelligence and Marketing, but the greatest power of patterns is how they inform the rest of the company in using CX excellence as a context for their decisions and deliverables.

4) Collaboration Earns Customer Trust

The customer experience journey or lifecycle is horizontal, fluid, and continuous across a company's various departments, processes, and facets of CXM. Incongruent CX governance, design, data, or improvement efforts are typically more transparent to customers than we realize. These mis-matches erode confidence and trust that are essential for relationship strength that yields business growth. Nearly every issue that causes surprises or hassles for customers cannot be resolved without cross-functional collaboration. Perpetual existence of these issues, especially after customers have voiced their dissatisfaction, takes a toll on customers' trust that they are heard and valued, and that their future well-being is assured.

Why it's key to future success: This viewpoint is impactful in shifting from our current silo treatment of VoC instruments (i.e. customer listening posts). It is a shift from silo management of VoC, references, predictive analytics, loyalty management, user experience design, customer service, and other facets of CXM. It is a shift from finger-pointing and the not-invented-here syndrome. Collaboration is an indication of internal trust, which is a precursor of external trust.

5) CX Momentum for Company Growth

At the end of the day, company growth is the ultimate reason for customer experience management. Growth is something that's ongoing, and customer experience is also ongoing. So of course momentum is an essential aspect of customer experience strategy and governance. Coincidentally, shared vision and ownership among the entire C-team for CXM is the starting point for enduring momentum, which is not accidental or automatic. Momentum is assured when "CX excellence as a context for every job's decisions and deliverables" becomes a way of life. Team recognition, incentives based on action progress, and weaving CX insights into the company's ecosystem can be instrumental in propelling momentum.

Why it's key to future success: This viewpoint is significant in shifting from our current emphasis on individuals, heroics, programs, and compartmentalization of CXM. It is essential to overcoming the negatives in the mixed signals noted in the introductory paragraphs of this article. It is a shift from patchwork CXM strategies and Jenga-like managerial decisions. Growth requires fuel.

Not every company will succeed in profitably differentiating customer experience. Very few companies are making this wish a reality now. The strongest differentiation won't be about sizzle, but rather, substance. Future success will not hinge upon an impressive technology, but rather, people and processes. To rise above the pack, context, outside-in, patterns, collaboration, and momentum are five keys to managing CX in ways that customers will reward in a strong positive trajectory.

[1] From the 2015 Temkin Experience Ratings: "Between 2014 and 2015, only five industries improved and 14 declined." [2] From the 2013 State of Customer Experience report by Forrester: "Despite 90% of respondents saying that CX is a top strategic priority for their firm, a shocking 86% said their companies don't actually expect to get much value from it".

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