All about Customer Experience

Interview with Jamie Brighton,
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Everybody is talking about the Customer Experience. Why is this approach so important today?

There has been a recognition now that you can no longer compete on product alone. Companies recognize that the way that they can engage with customers is around the entire experience that they provide. It can be illustrated using the example of the low-cost airline Ryanair. When they got into the market, it was fine for them to compete purely on price alone. As more and more competitors came into the space that they were in, competing on price, the price was reduced overall. Ultimately, Ryanair realized that the only way that they could then compete with the other players in this space was to offer a differentiated service. They chose to invest in customer experience and started a program called "Always getting better", which is a series of promises that they put out there in the market. All of these revolved around putting the customer at the center of what they are doing. They are not about the product so much as about making it easier to book, about making it easier to engage with the brand whenever you need to, when you need to get help. Focusing on the experience has helped them cement their position as a leader in their particular sector. Brands are recognizing now that the customer experience is a clear way in which they can put themselves ahead of or differentiate from competitors.

What are the key elements to be successful with customer experience management?

At Adobe, we have four key principles that we think the brands have to have. The first one is to speak in one voice. That means seamless communication across all channels. We aim at giving customers the same offer in each channel that he interacts with us. But beyond that, for instance if the customer has a customer service issue, we try to make sure that information is then reflected in the interactions that we have with him on others channels. After a customer service issue we do not send immediately an e-mail to him trying to advertise the same product, as it would obviously going to have an impact on the experience. Another element of speaking in one voice is to make sure to keep your own organizational structure hidden from the customer. The customer does not care that you have a sales department, a marketing department and a customer service department; they just expect that when they engage with the brand, that they get the correct, relevant experience or message. The second principle revolves around privacy and security. It's key to be transparent with the customer about what data you are intending to capture, why you capture it and what you intend to do with it. It's key to then follow through with that and only use this data to provide relevance or some higher level of service. We certainly believe that brands will use that as a way of differentiating themselves from others in that sector.

The next piece is understanding where the customer wants to engage with you. You cannot force a customer to come with you on a particular journey. You have to use data to understand where the customer wants to engage with you. What social channels do they choose to use? How do they like to book? How do they like to create a relationship with you? Then make sure to invest correctly in those particular channels and not just focusing on the latest trend if there is no relevance for the end customer.

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Lastly and most importantly: delight the customer at every opportunity that you have. Use the data that you've captured, use your understanding, the context of the channel that you are engaging with the customer on, to provide relevance, to provide some kind of engaging experience. It also means making it easy for them to access your knowledge base, as opposed to hiding the information seven clicks down on the website, but getting it in front of them as quickly as possible. You have to delight customers whenever they engage with your brand.

What about responsibility for the Customer Experience in the organization?

Indeed, sometimes that is a difficult question. Recently we have seen the definition of marketing expand and that ultimately means that the marketing department is being tasked with much more. So many marketing departments are being asked to take control of the customer experience. We are seeing that organizations such as British Airways are bringing sales and marketing functions together to having kind of a joint responsibility for the customer experience. There is some organizational change that is required as well, both on the company level and on the individual marketer level. The individual marketer is being tasked with more things. They have to be responsible for cross-channel communications, mobile topics, social media and much more. The individual

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marketer has to look at the new skills that they require and the new kind of capabilities that they have to take on board. Management needs to wake up to this fact, but Marketing is generally aware, we are seeing that, in markets like Germany. IT still has a very strong part to play in that overall piece, in terms of the vendor selection around the technology but also adoption of that technology. We are not seeing sort of a single clear answer in terms of where responsibility lies for this. Generally, it is a recognition that everyone in the company has to be bought into what you are trying to achieve when it comes to customer experience. And if they're not, then that will have a strong negative impact on your ability to succeed. So, a key thing is that is has to come from top-down, but it isn't necessarily just a marketing thing, or just an IT thing.

The Return on Investment is always of interest when looking at big transformation projects. How can we get a good perspective on the profitability of customer journey investments?

I think there are a few tangible and lesser tangible ways to measure their impact. Generally, you aim to improve KPIs such as the Net Promoter Score or other Customer Satisfaction measures. Ultimately, if you get it right, even though you are focusing on the customer experience, you are going to sell more products. Hence, one should see improvements

in metrics such as conversion rates, total sales and all of those kinds of harder metrics that you would normally focus on from a product point of view. A few of the big challenges these days with any kind of customer experience or any message that you're putting out there are A, the volume of communications and experiences that you have to produce and B, how quickly you have to get them out there to take things into account like seasonality or changes in customer behavior. Through digital transformation, marketers are able to communicate with customers in a more efficient manner, and more quickly. These efficiency improvements translate in business benefits.

Which questions should future-oriented companies answer in the process of "Where are we? Are we still in the game?"

Brands have to understand the customer journey. Old models don't really work anymore because of the way the consumer expects to engage with the brand on various different touch points. Increasingly there is a technology aspect to digital transformation. You need to have the right platform in place. But if organizations don't understand the right customer journey, then you can't use the technology to engage accordingly. A large amount of the investment in this space should be on the proper understanding of the customer journey. Not just paying lip service to it and doing a single kind of workshop around it, but truly getting out there and understanding how the customer wants to engage with you. Let us take the example of a travel brand; there is research to show that customers engage with a travel brand hundreds of times before they actually do a booking. So in a six-week window that it typically takes for a customer to come up with a destination they want to go to and also to book the tickets to that destination, there is a ramp-up of the amount of touch points that this consumer has with the brand and associated brands up to that point. You have to understand how you can successfully inject yourself into the customer interaction. How can you represent yourself correctly at each one of those stages? It's probably going to be a different view of the brand or providing different piece of communications or experiences at each stage within that kind of period of time to make sure you're giving relevance to the customer. So, coming back to the question to ask: Do we really understand the customer journey? And then: How do we insert ourselves correctly? How do we make sure we have the right customer experience at each stage of that customer journey? Those are the crucial questions to consider.

The interview was conducted by Friedrich M. Kirn