

A background image showing a man and a woman in business attire shaking hands. The man is on the left, smiling, and the woman is on the right, wearing glasses and smiling. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter and several large, bright blue diagonal brushstroke-like shapes in the bottom right corner.

EXCEPTIONAL  
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE...  
**WHY IT'S SO DIFFICULT AND  
5 THINGS YOUR ORGANIZATION  
CAN DO RIGHT NOW**

Everyone remembers a great customer experience, just as we remember the bad ones, and the importance of delivering memorable customer experiences is growing. But in an age where we have come to expect instant responses, omnichannel services, and more personalized relationships with brands, 'great' simply isn't memorable enough. People expect their preferred brand's customer experience to be exceptional.

In the business world, delivering exceptional customer experiences is now no longer a customer service issue; it's a strategic business goal that is as important to growth and customer loyalty as price or product. Organizations know that customers are willing to open their wallets to obtain the exceptional as evidenced by a Huffington Post article stating 86% of consumers are willing to pay more for an upgraded experience.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, delivering delight has become critical in the battle to differentiate and build brand loyalty. The key strategic role the customer now plays in businesses was perhaps best summed up by Ivan Kotzev, Research Analyst at Nelson Hall, when he said "Customer experience is rapidly becoming the only real differentiator between competitors. Price advantage and brand recognition have less weight for digital customers who are accustomed to instant satisfaction."

However, despite the overwhelming evidence supporting the need to prioritize customer experience for business growth, organizations today struggle to master the art of delighting consumers. In 2016, only 17% of companies rate as good and 1% rate as excellent in delivering quality customer experience per Forrester's US 2017 Customer Experience Index.<sup>2</sup>

This tells us one thing; designing customer experiences that delight your customers and deliver tangible business

<sup>1</sup> Huffington Post "50 Important Customer Experience Statistics for Business Leaders"  
<sup>2</sup> Forrester's CX Index 2017

performance improvements isn't easy. So how does an organization deliver that all-important customer experience win?

## Why is Delighting Customers So Challenging Today?

### 1. Expectations are Higher Than Ever and Rising

The digital explosion has empowered today's customer with a wealth of knowledge and options. Customers know all about companies and expect companies to know their needs, provide preemptive solutions, and deliver personalized engagement in the channel of their choice across all touchpoints. In fact, Salesforce's State of the Connected Customer Report states 50% of consumers say they're likely to switch brand's if a company doesn't anticipate their needs.<sup>3</sup> In addition, 52% are extremely or somewhat likely to switch brands if the company doesn't try to personalize their communication to them.<sup>4</sup> Long gone are the days where a segmentation model can predict the preferences of an entire population. With the proliferation of data, it is now possible to provide hyper-personalized service assuming there is a supporting analytical framework in place.

To complicate matters, disruptive companies such as Uber, are delighting with all digital, no-touch, seamless interactions and consumers are coming to expect this level of experience regardless of industry. Ivan Kotzev of Nelson Hall elaborates, "The biggest challenge for companies to deliver consistently high-quality customer experience is the continuously expanding customer requirements. Customer expectations of how companies sell, deliver, and support are increasing exponentially. Today customers compare brands not just on their last interactions or against the direct competitors but against an optimal experience regardless of the industry."

<sup>3</sup> Salesforce Research "State of Connected Customer"  
<sup>4</sup> Salesforce Research "State of Connected Customer"



In 2016, only 17% of companies rate as "good" and 1% rate as "excellent" in delivering quality customer experience per Forrester's US 2017 Customer Experience Index.



## 2. Organizations Don't Understand Their Customers

Understanding how to improve customer experiences means developing a comprehensive, 360-degree understanding of your customers. This understanding must include needs, pain points, and the critical opportunities to deliver the type of service that will create an emotional bond.

Many organizations utilize journey mapping to better view themselves through their customer's eyes. Taking time to dissect and analyze all customer journey touchpoints is certainly helpful. However, effective journey mapping is a challenging proposition that requires organizational talent, lean automated processes, and a disciplined, unbiased orientation.

Collecting and analyzing extensive amounts of data is yet another way companies are attempting to increase knowledge of customers. Data can provide a great deal of information, and as more digital data becomes available, brands have expanded visibility into consumer behavior. However, structured and unstructured data must constantly be mined from all touch points throughout the lifecycle, and the sheer volume can be overwhelming.

## 3. Customer Insights Get Stuck in Silos

Perhaps the biggest hurdle organizations face in delivering exceptional customer experience comes from within. The lack of connection and coordination between departments within an organization can be crippling with the view of customers lost in disparate silos.

48% of respondents view "siloe behavior and ways of working" as the greatest customer experience barrier.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. Complexity Leads to Slow Responses

Brands are constantly on display across a multitude of mediums, channels, and

<sup>5</sup> Brand Learning's Growth Driver Report

touchpoints. Customers choose the where and when, with companies scrambling to maintain constant engagement.

For every channel (web, mobile, social media, contact center call, and email) the customer experience goal should be quick response, and that response must be relevant and contextual; not a one-size fits all auto-responder. When customers receive a canned or slow response, what they hear is "we don't care."

The requirement for effective responses through multiple channels is a major challenge for many brands. Social media is one of the most popular arenas of communication for customers, yet 55% of service requests on social media are not acknowledged per the Huffington Post's "50 Important Customer Experience Statistics for Business Leaders."<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Organizations Forget Context

Understanding the context of a customer experience is another huge challenge. Companies need to recognize that customer experiences are often highly nuanced. Put simply, exceptional experiences are relative concepts. One customer might view an automated order management tool as exceptional while

<sup>6</sup> Huffington Post "50 Most Important Stats for Business Leaders"



Conventional market research and data analytics are not enough. They provide a partial picture of what customers want and don't want, but not the full picture. Data can tell you what happened with your customer, but it can't tell you the more valuable why.



**Owen Daly-Jones,**  
Vice President and Global Head of  
Sutherland Labs



another might view the exact same tool as a poor substitute for a conversation with a customer service agent. This means developing a robust set of customer personas to quickly identify the most likely expectations of the individual customer, which is essential to designing interactions that will fulfill their expectations.

## 5 Things Your Organization Can Do Right Now

### 1. Create a Culture of Customer Centricity

An exceptional customer experience is the result of an organization's top-down ownership, pride, and dedication to exceeding expectations. Taking time to obsess over details, and always putting in extra effort to delight starts with a clear vision and commitment from leadership. For these companies, simply good just isn't good enough, and everyone shares in the responsibility from their day of hiring.

This culture of service starts with focused training that empowers employees with the knowledge and authority to make customer happiness a priority. Meetings lead with customer service initiatives, and there is a daily emphasis on recognizing and rewarding examples of exceptional service throughout the organization.

**Try:** Start your next department or group meeting with three recent customer insights.

### 2. Become Human-Centric

Customer experience requires the human connection and successful organizations actively cultivate a "people first" mindset, starting with their employees. Employees are the first line in delivering exceptional customer experience, and their level of engagement and overall happiness plays a critical role. Savvy organizations apply the same human-centric, empathetic

approach with their employees as with their customers.

To become human-centric, organizations must develop empathy by putting themselves in their customer's shoes, viewing interactions through their customer's eyes. Companies must construct holistic, 360-degree behavior personas of their customer base and this is where the challenges can begin.

Traditional market research strategies do not obtain all the necessary data today, says Owen Daly-Jones of Sutherland Labs. "You need to truly understand human behavior, and this goes well beyond what people can say. Also, you will only get the answers to the questions you think to ask and chances are your competitors are asking the same ones. Thus, everyone is skating to the same spot."

Daly-Jones' team emphasizes the need to deep dive into the study of human behavior, potentially engaging anthropologists or user researchers. Focus on quietly observing actions to fully understand the struggles and desires of your customer base. This could come in the form of user interviews or usability tests.

Taking the time to know your customers, engage them appropriately, and cement lasting relationships can pay huge dividends. Disruptive brands like Uber and Amazon create extensive brand loyalty by understanding customer needs and designing for them.

**Try:** Listen in on one customer interaction and make a note of what surprised you.

### 3. Embrace Self-Service Technology

Today's customer embraces technology and to keep up organizations will need to do the same. The digital explosion offers companies the opportunity to gather, store, and analyze more customer data than ever before.



Create a culture of customer centricity.



The future of customer service will be led by AI (artificial intelligence), machine learning, biometrics, chatbots, automation, and the IoT (Internet of Things). By 2018, Gartner predicts six billion “connected things” supported by AI platforms.<sup>7</sup> AI will reduce user effort and time while machine learning will allow commerce platforms to gather information on customer behavior and preferences. In addition, the use of biometrics will help create faster, more personalized, frictionless experiences. With top agents writing scripts for chatbots, customer service will require less and less human interaction. Gartner predicts that by 2020, customers will manage 85% of their relationship with the enterprise without interacting with a human.<sup>8</sup>

Most important, technology’s ability to automate mundane interactions frees humans to focus on the value-added moments that drive the experience and create brand loyalty. Knowing where and when to implement new technologies is key.

**Try:** Ask your data team what they would need to implement machine learning.

#### 4. Maintain Continual Dialogue with Customer

If you are not engaging your customers, they will inevitably look elsewhere. Successful organizations maintain a continuous conversation across all channels of customer choice. In addition, your brand message must be consistent as 75% of consumers expect a consistency of messaging per the Connected Customer Report 2016.<sup>9</sup>

Listening, gathering feedback, and responding through the customer’s chosen channel is mandatory for an organization wanting to remain relevant. Organizations looking to lead in the future need to maintain strong mobile experiences and emphasize social media as the importance of digital continues to grow.

<sup>7</sup> Gartner  
<sup>8</sup> Gartner  
<sup>9</sup> Salesforce Research “State of Connected Customer”



A customer dialogue program, often referred to as dialogue marketing, can provide excellent forums for communication, gathering information, and the opportunity for organizations to build customer-centricity. Properly implemented, a customer dialogue program should gauge the pulse of your customer, informing of those critical moments when delivering satisfaction can make all the difference.

Robert Sherman, SVP of Global Digital Transformation Consulting at Sutherland, aptly sums this up when he says, “Organizations desiring excellence need to establish customer dialogue programs to map out communications across all touch points to drive those critical moments of truth throughout the customer journey.”

**Try:** Set up one cross-functional meeting to gauge the need for a customer dialogue program.

#### 5. Seek to Create “Wow” Moments

Exceptional customer experience is built on key moments within the customer life cycle when a brand can create a positive emotional impact. Whether it be an airline adding humor to safety announcements or a bicycle company taking the time to send a personal note to celebrate a customer’s 100<sup>th</sup> ride, these moments of truth must be seized and converted into the emotional capital that cements brand loyalty. Robert Sherman explains, “There



Customer expectations of how companies sell, deliver, and support are increasing exponentially.





are opportunities within the customer lifecycle to provide exceptional customer service. Companies that get it right are passionate about pleasing the customer. These companies focus on making interactions seamless and provide special treatment at critical moments. The goal is to continuously encourage loyalty.”

Personalization is critical in creating these wow moments across the customer lifecycle. Customer dialogue programs and centers of excellence can provide valuable information and help maintain the necessary engagement allowing a company to celebrate the unique qualities of its customers. Prepopulating with customer insight and personality pairing agents with customers can result in faster, happier, more personalized interactions. Sending a gift or simply a call to thank a customer for their patronage goes a long way in making an individual feel uniquely valued by an organization.

Ease of experience is another way companies can deliver the delight. Make it easy and they will come. Sherman continues to elaborate, “One of the best predictors of exceptional customer experience is low customer effort. Make it as easy as possible for the customer to interact and buy your product or service. The less the customer needs to do, the more likely they will use your company.”

Ironically, when things go wrong can be a brand’s greatest moment to shine. Moments when customer frustration can peak such as returns, exchanges, and cancellations, provide excellent

opportunities to deliver experiences that turn anger to advocacy. A great example is a theme park engaging visitors by turning the queue for a ride into an adventure. Companies that rise and deliver the exceptional in moments of greatest challenge rapidly endear to customers and solidify the emotional bonds that drive brand loyalty.

**Try:** Think back on a common failed customer interaction and brainstorm how to create advocacy.

## Your Customer Experience Future Starts Now

Providing exceptional customer experience is no small feat today. In the battle for brand loyalty, the obstacles are many and the competition is fierce. However, the importance of diligently tending to the details that delight has never been more important.

Companies need frameworks that build customer experiences into every aspect of their operations, because delivering customer service improvements relies on systemic changes; a top-down culture of service, based on human-centric, empathetic values. Empathy starts with employees and becomes the focus of every customer interaction. Organizations must combine this empathy with a deep understanding of the customer, leveraging enhanced analytics, smarter real-time systems and processes, and more effective staff training programs to drive exceptional experience.



There are opportunities within the customer lifecycle to provide exceptional customer service. Companies that get it right are passionate about pleasing the customer.



**Robert Sherman**  
SVP of Global Digital  
Transformation Consulting



In many respects, customer experience design had become as important to business operations and performance as logistics, finance, and marketing. Where customer service was once an after-the-fact, back-office function, it's now a strategic tool in both designing and executing an effective strategy.

Building “wow moments” in the customer lifecycle isn't just important. It's a bottom line key performance indicator (KPI). Companies that recognize that, know their customers and succeed in creating the emotional bonds that cement lifelong relationships.

The future of customer experience will be a world where exceptional becomes the new normal. Good enough won't be close, and companies will live and die on their ability to know and emotionally connect with their customers.

**Is your organization ready for a new model of process transformation that puts exceptional customer experiences first? For more information on how we can help you transform your process to optimize the customer experience, please visit us at [www.sutherlandglobal.com](http://www.sutherlandglobal.com), email us at [sales@sutherlandglobal.com](mailto:sales@sutherlandglobal.com), or call 800-388-4557 ext.6123.**

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