Synthesizing Customer Experience for a Winning Edge

Abstract

In 2016, 89% of businesses are expected to focus on customer experience as a key differentiator as compared to just 36% in 2010[1]. Companies, particularly in the high tech sector, which deliver an integrated and holistic approach to Customer Experience Management (CEM), from pre-sales to purchase and after-sales support, are likely to be more successful.

"You've got to start with customer experience and work back toward the technology—not the other way around."

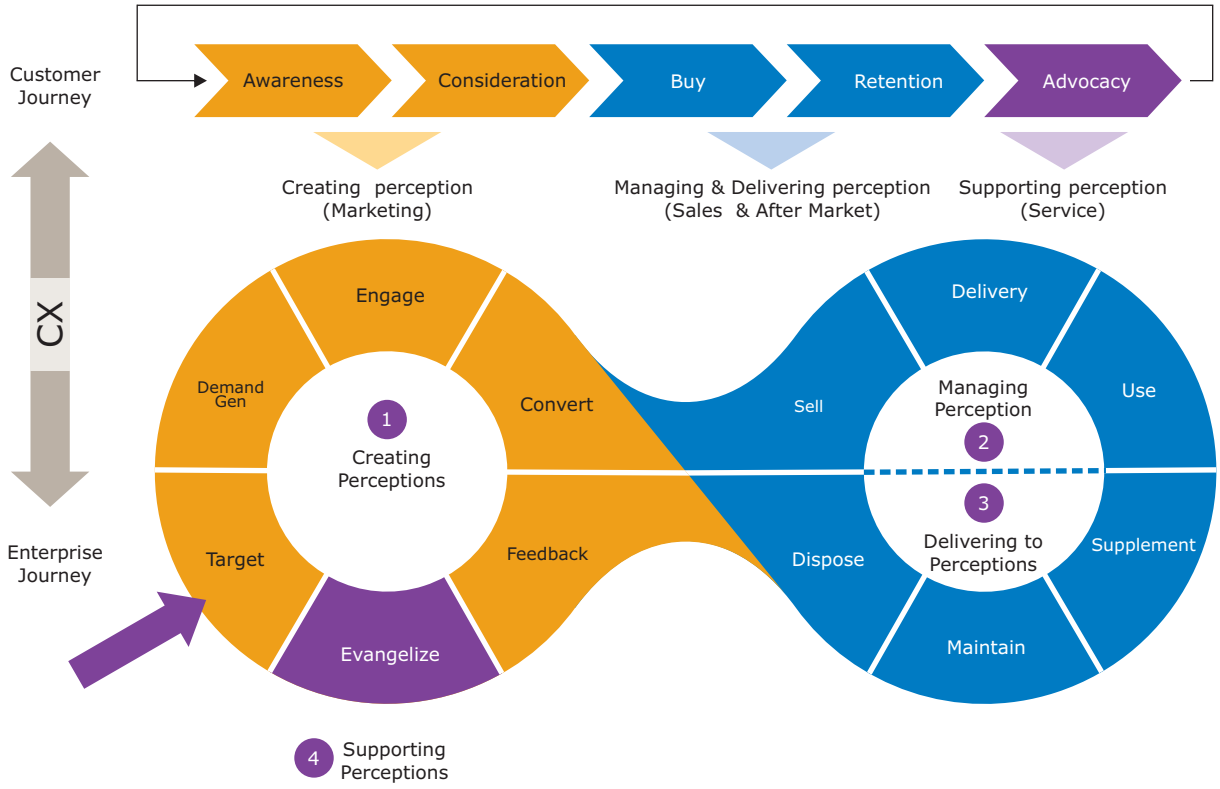
- Steve Jobs

The Need for an Integrated Approach

Rapid technology changes and their commoditization, dynamic market forces, and complex supply chains with short product lifecycles have increased the criticality of delivering a differentiated customer experience. Many businesses focus on alpretni eht no tuo ssim hcihw ,stniop hcuot c icepsy between user personas, the customer journey, and the entire ecosystem.

Mapping the Customer's Journey

While there are differences in B2B and B2C marketing, there are several similarities too. For instance, managing complex and lengthy sales cydna snoitautcu dnamed htiw selc economic factors is a major challenge in the B2B segment, whereas creating consistent brand experiences with high technology investments and lack of skilled resources is the primary concern in the B2C segment. For both individuals and enterprises, however, integrated CEM is an ongoing process that involves creating, managing, delivering, and supporting customer perceptions.



Mapping the customer experience at different stages in the engagement lifecycle across B2B and B2C ecosystems.

Hewlett Packard found an innovative way to engage customers through a brand advocacy program called HP ITSM Insider.[2]

Digital connectivity and social networking have greatly empowered customers, increasing their abilitecneu ni ot y others, and consequently their expectations, manifold. High tech companies need to create differentiated experiences at all stages both prior to and post purchase which warrants the creation of customer journey maps. Customer journey maps help manage, optimize, and prioritize touch points and assess the suitability of digital tools and technologies that are available to enhance the customer experience. Creating buyer personas is also crucial for an in-depth understanding of customers' characteristics, motivations, needs, and goals.

Understanding customer needs

In the initial awareness and consideration stages of the engagement lifecycle, customers identify a problem and seek a solution. In the high tech space, legacy products, support issues, return on investment, system security, and interoperabilitc iceps gnitniopnip yB .snrecnoc gnirrucer era y problem areas, sales teams can better address and resolve the major challenges of concerned stakeholders.

Understanding the customers' demand for integrated platforms fueled Lexmark's transition from a hardware vendor to a provider of complete imaging solutions for end-to-end document flow management.

Delivering on promises

Companies also need to enhance the customer experience during the purchase, retention, and advocacy stages. Pricing, contracts, licensing, support, and maintenance are areas that can be targeted during the sale. Even after the purchase, companies need to take steps such as incorporating customer-focused metrics in service level agreements (SLAs) with contact centers, and training support personnel to diagnose and manage issues accordingly. Integrating frontend customer-tnemll luf ecivres dne-kcab dna ,ec fo-elddim ,gnicaf operations is also vital to designing effective outreach progrw ,tnemeganam strap ,tnemll luf ecivreS .smaarranties, and product return management are other focus areas that can enhance the customer lifetime value and increase the service-to-sales revenue.

Leveraging Technology for CEM

Technology plays a pivotal role in deploying an integrated CEM strategy. Using digital technologies, businesses can drive innovation and acquire actionable intelligence on customer preferences to provide a seamless, Omni-channel experience. It also helps brands to be present on the same channels as their customers, enabling them to provide information, answer questions, or address issues in near real time. Social media

and business analytics are two critical technologies that can spur greater customer engagement.

Adobe Systems relies on crowdsourcing to handle queries on its online support forum. As an incentive, users who answer questions quickly, frequently, and accurately are offered free cloud subscriptions to the company's products.[3]

Providing personalized experiences using social media

Social media communities are growing rapidly, changing the way businesses interact with customers. Instantaneous responses to queries on online forums are increasingly becoming the norm. Crowdsourcing to address customer concerns is now a viable alternative to full-time service support.

Gaining actionable insights through analytics

High tech businesses need to keep pace with dynamic customer demands, manage shrinking product lifecycles, and ensure rapid innovation and faster time-to-market. At the same time, Big Data, cloud computing, social media, and mobility are impacting the way customers consume information. This makes data an integral part of the CEM strategy. By leveraging predictive analytics, high tech companies can make faster and more accurate decisions to improve the overall customer experience.

Lenovo tracks customer conversations online to offer more relevant products and deliver greater value to customers. Innovative data-driven methods help tailor their online shopping experience by integrating customer preferences.[4]

Qualitative and quantitative customer data generated across various touch points can be analyzed to provide a complete picture of the engagement experience. Companies can build cross-channel intelligence for channel optimization and create more effective cross-sell and up-sell strategies. Today, most customer interactions such as feedback, complaints, and service requests are being conducted online. By automatically processing textual data from online forums and customer service portals, companies can identify key patterns, behavior, and potential issues that negatively impact the online customer experience. An analytics platform, backed by predictive modeling, machine learning, and statistical natural language processing (NLP) techniques, can offer quick and actionable insights. The abilitad c iceps a no sucof dna nwod llird ot yy, or evaluate sessions over days, weeks, or even months, can help sales and support personnel identify trends and address customer issues quickly.

Conclusion

Since purchase behavior for technology products is complex, high tech companies today need to manage customer experience strategically and provide an integrated, consistent experience across all touch points of the customer journey for better communication and collaboration. By moving to a

customer-centric approach, they can readily identify risks and opportunities, provide contextual and personalized care, and drive customer advocacy.

In a competitive market with fragile customer loyalties, implementing integrated customer experience management will enable high tech companies to differentiate themselves by driving unique and contextual experiences.

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About The Authors

Vijay Muttur

Vijay Muttur is the Head of Enterprise Transformation Group within the High Tech business unit at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). With more than 28 years of experience across industries, he has a deep understanding of the customer experience space and anchors consulting engagements and technology implementation projects for high tech companies the world over.

Contact

Visit the Hitech page on www.tcs.com

Email: HiTech.Marketing@tcs.com

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