

Mastering Customer Journeys to Enhance Customer Experience and Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

Successful organizations and market leaders like Lexus, Hotel Ritz Carlton, and Disneyworld know they are in customer experience business. Their happy and loyal customers ensure repeat business, higher financial payoff, brand image and sustainable business. An organization knowing that they are in customer experience is not enough. It requires strong sustained leadership to creating a customer focused organization which is critical to designing and delivering customer experience.

Leadership needs to establish a holistic customer experience strategy covering, People, Process, Technology & Governance. One of the key and essential components of customer experience is mapping, managing and mastering end to end customer journeys from customer perspective.

Mapping customer journeys reveal some interesting aspects such as “Not all customer journeys impact customer satisfaction equally”, “mapping Business to Business (B2B) customer journeys are more complex than Business to Consumer (B2C) customer journeys.

Mapping, managing and mastering customer journeys has many benefits such as aligning internal functions towards common goal of designing and delivering superior customer experience, identify all the key touch points with customer, identify various stakeholders involved at different stages of customer journeys, continuously reinventing customer journeys to deliver superior wow customer experience.

Complete paper

In recent years, customer experience (CEX) has become a major differentiator and competitive advantage for many companies such as Walt Disney, Amazon, and Lexus etc. Successful organizations know they are in customer experience business. Conversely organizations which are not in the business of customer experience are easy to spot. Organizations delivering high CEX can have higher financial payoffs also. Let’s look at Walt Disney example of CEX.

“Everything Speaks to the Customer¹”: Disney World Example of Customer Experience

Typically, a customer in retail business uses his/ her senses such as touch, feel, and smell, sound to make buying decisions and experience the product / service. The Walt Disney Company uses it very well e.g.

1. Sight: 70% of body’s sense receptors are located in our eyes making sight the greatest transmitter of setting. Disney carefully plans and decides What customers see and What they do not see.

2. Colour: For fun, Disney uses bright colors whereas for adventure they use hot red colors. Orange colour is used for action. Colour of uniform of cast (employees) is all carefully used.
3. Touch: Skin is the largest organ in body. In water rides, timing, direction, force of water etc. is planned to maximize customer experience.

It is no wonder then; Walt Disney is the all-time Oscar champ.

In another example organizations like Amazon and others are using technology to enhance customer experience. Customers today are able to track their shipments, get shipments delivered by drones, time or reschedule deliveries of packages, get notifications etc. In another example. Alexa from Amazon can make phone calls for you, control home lights, open car garages, read out news for you just through voice command. Technology is enabling customer experience as never before.

Knowing CEX Is Important Is Not Enough.

An organization knowing that they are in customer experience is not enough. They need to understand how it helps perform differently from competition. Gaining competitive advantage and deliver wow customer experience is not easy. It calls for sustained leadership commitment to customer experience, developing a shared vision on service excellence which is simple and easy to relate to customer by employees, mapping, managing and mastering customer journeys, using technology to transform customer experience, being innovative, bridging service quality gaps, building staff competencies to support customer experience strategy etc.

Not All Drivers of Customer Satisfaction Contribute Equally to Customer Satisfaction.

In one of the major airports¹ customer experience program was designed to solve an airport’s problems serving travelers. Study revealed that characteristics such as Restroom cleanliness, Availability & quality of post security seating, Relevant and timely journey information, Entertainment for long-stay passengers etc. were some of the most important drivers of passenger satisfaction while other characteristics such as Easy of drop off, Retail variety, traffic flow outside were relatively less important. Study revealed (Refer Figure 1); airport was only meeting their expectations and was not delighting them on any of the important drivers of satisfaction.

What is important for organizations is to know what are major drivers of customer satisfaction are and focus more on them so at to enhance customer experience.

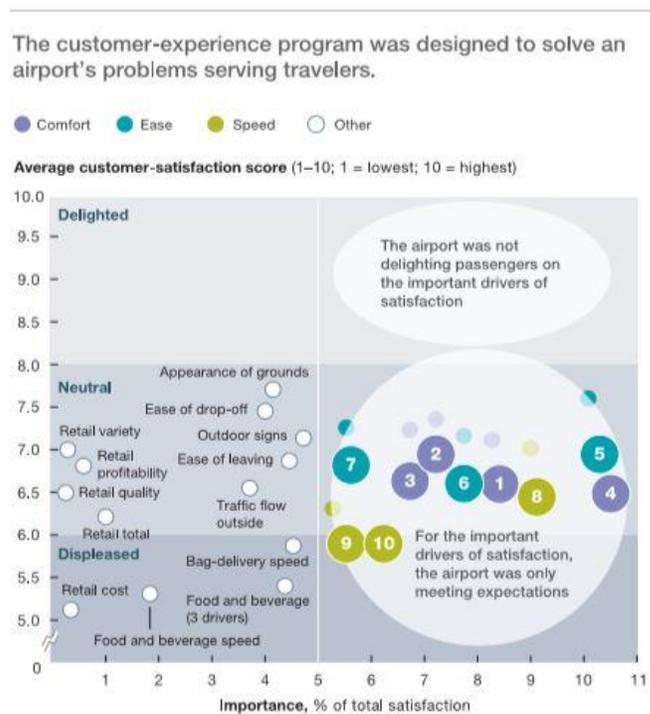


Figure 1 – Satisfaction of Customer Vs. Importance

Strategies for Enhancing Customer Experience

To provide and continually enhance customer experience, leadership has to commit to it by creating a culture of service excellence which typically includes:

1. Establishing a holistic strategy for customer experience with a compelling vision for customer experience
2. Clearly define what CEX means to its business and ensure it is understood by its people and other concerned stakeholders.
3. Map end to end customer journeys – from customers perspective
4. Establish/ review and improve policies for enhancing customer experience
5. Establish/ review and improve processes contributing to customer experience e.g. customer listening systems
6. Establish/ review and improve services standards
7. Establish/ review and improve service delivery channels
8. Empower people to deliver customer experience
9. Create a culture of continual improvement
10. Have right measures of performance for customer experience. Etc.

Mapping, Managing and Mastering Customer Journeys

Though most organizations know how customers engage with them, it is still quite useful to map end-to-end customer's journey in detail. As part of simplifying customer journeys, government entity in UAE mapped customer journeys for all of its services. It was quite an interesting and revealing experience. During customer journey mapping workshops, many of the participating teams / functions were internally focused on their own functional point of view rather than customer point of view. It helped identify all the key touch points with customer, design communication messages for customers, identify various stakeholders involved at different stages of customer journeys, establish/ revisit key measures of performance from customer point of view as well as for their internal business needs. It helped various functions responsible for different parts of the journey to come together as one team and felt responsible for designing and delivering customer experience. Mapping journeys also help customers and organization track the progress / customers order e.g. status of shipment or house mortgage loan application.

Project Sunrise: Designing Customer Experience Using Customer Journeys for Passengers of World's Longest Non-Stop Flight from New York to Sydney

Project Sunrise is interesting and exciting. As part of world's longest nonstop 16,200 kms. ultra marathon flight from New York to Sydney, Qantas airline, using Boeing 787-9 Dream liner aircraft, planned how the passengers (and crew) will experience the journey (Refer **Error! Reference source not found.**). Qantas designed the "Flying Laboratory" with 40 passengers and crew to know the effects of long flight on them with the objective of minimizing crushing, body buckling jet lag. "Experiment" was designed for different stages of travel such as Before travelling, Off the ground, Two hours into flight, Four hours in, Fourteen hours in, Seventeen hours in and Preparing to land. Passengers were provided with equipment to monitor and test their heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen saturation levels. Even memories and moods were monitored through scientific questionnaires etc. Specially designed dishes were important part of the experiment. E.g. two hours in flight, passengers are served poached prawns with chili and lime to "fire them up" - to keep them awake and "tune" them with Sydney time zone.

Organizations like Qantas and many more make huge effort and investment to understand customer needs and design customer experiences through mapping customer journeys.

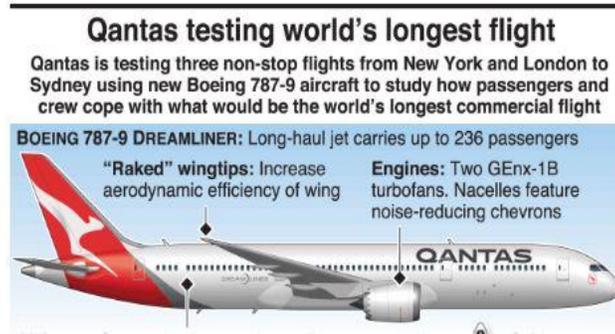


Figure 2 – Qantas Airline Project Sunrise

Customer Journey Example

Customer journeys can be long, stretching across multiple channels and touch-points, E.g. house mortgage loan customer journey might include learning about options, preparing documentation, submitting an application, opening an account, with some twists and turns on the way and so on. It can often last days or weeks. For some services from the Government, journeys can last for weeks, months and even years. Figure provides an example of a customer journey for an auto loan from a bank.

Customer Journey Example for "Auto Loan from a Bank"

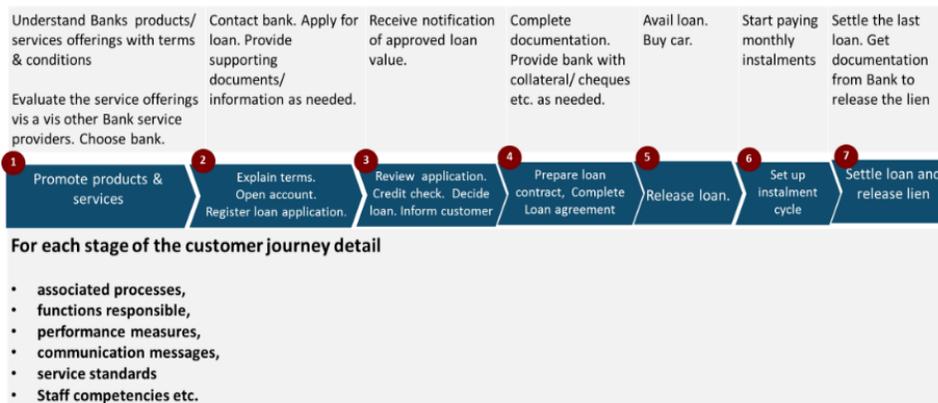


Figure 3 – Customer Journey Example for an Auto Loan from a Bank

Customer Journeys Some Interesting Findings

- Not all customer journeys impact customer satisfaction equally:** E.g. for opening bank account journeys, Transparency of fees, Ease of communication with the bank and Ability to track the status of on boarding process accounted for 42% of overall satisfaction. Whereas characteristics such as Courtesy of staff, Timeliness of call backs and Clarity of documentation had limited impact on customer satisfaction.
- Digitization improves CEX. But customers do not always need automation especially when things go wrong:** With digitization of services, speed and convenience for customers will enhance the CEX. But only to a certain limit. When something goes wrong, customers want to talk to a person not to "IVR Machines" widely used by call centres like banks, airlines etc. Organizations need to make sure

they also have people in place to talk to customers. Best is to have a combination of machines and people.

- c. **Front end staff should be champions of CEX:** Customer service front end employees should be made champions of CEX as delivering customer experience requires engaged, empowered and inspired employees with energy and passion to serve customers.
- d. **Business to Business (B2B) CEX lags behind Business to Customer (B2C) CEX:** B2B customer journeys are typically more complex, long and quite technical in nature. B2B requires continuous interaction involving multiple teams from different functions. In addition, product/service offering for B2B need customization to suit individual customer needs.
- e. **CEX programs if executed well, they usually reduce costs** or are, at worst, cost neutral. Successful CEX projects in private sector typically achieve cost reductions of 15 to 25% within couple of years.
- f. **Manage end to end customer experience from customer point of view:** i.e. pre-sale, during sale, post sale e.g. from selecting which car to buy to purchasing a car, using it, servicing it, selling it off. Move from touch points to end to end customer journeys from customer point of view.
- g. **CEX is important for Government Entities also:** CEX is applicable for all types and sizes of private companies in B2C and B2B. Same is true for Government Entities serving Government to Government (G2G), Government to Business (G2B) and Government to Citizen (G2C).

Benefits and Use of Customer Journeys

Mapping, managing and mastering customer journeys has many benefits covering almost all aspects of business i.e. People, process, technology, governance, transparency, communication etc. It truly helps create a customer centric organization. Some of the benefits are:

- a. Identify all the key touch points with customer and use it to design communication messages using appropriate channels.
- b. Identify internal communication needs at various stages of customer journeys and use it to enhance communication and coordination among various internal stakeholders.
- c. Identify external stakeholders involved at different stages of customer journeys and use it to build and manage relationships to serve customer better.
- d. Employees see how they are contributing to CEX.
- e. Identify and link required processes to the relevant steps in the customer journey and manage them effectively to ensure consistent service delivery.
- f. Eliminate / radically reduce unnecessary work and complexity from customer-facing processes. Can use Value Stream mapping / Lean techniques.
- g. Enhance transparency among internal and external stakeholders' helps customers and organization track the progress / customers order.
- h. Identify employee competencies needed at various touch points and use it to train people.
- i. Plan and conduct audits as per customer journeys from customer perspective.
- j. Develop performance measures from customer perspective covering end to end customer journeys. Use actual performance to improve CEX and operations.
- k. Reinvent / continuously improve and innovate customer journeys and CEX.
- l. Design customer satisfaction measurement instruments considering end to end customer journeys.

Conclusion

For a Quality professional it is interesting and heartening to see application of Quality Management concepts such as “Customer Needs to Customer Satisfaction Cycle”, Process Mapping, Design of Experiments, Plan-Do-Check-Act, etc. being used by companies even today to design, deliver and enhance CEX.

Central to any successful CEX program is understanding, identifying, mapping, managing and continually improving end to end customer journeys from their perspective and using it to create a truly customer centric organization, align people and deliver memorable positive experience for customers & differentiation over competitors.

Keywords

Customer Journeys
Customer Experience
Customer Centric Organization
Strategy
Business to Business (B2B)
Business to Customer (B2C)

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Biography / Biographies

Sunil Thawani is Author and Fellow, American Society for Quality (ASQ). He is International Consultant, Quality & Excellence, and United Nations and CEO, Quality Indeed Consulting Ltd, Abu Dhabi. Currently he serves as Member, Board of Directors, and Dubai Quality Group. Sunil has assisted many organizations to implement Excellence frameworks such as EFQM, UAE’s 4th Generation Model, etc. and enhance performance through Process Reengineering, Creating Customer Journeys, Enhancing Customer Experience, Training thousands of professionals in Quality & Excellence etc. Sunil is recipient of prestigious ASQ Lancaster Medal for his dedication and outstanding contributions to the International Fraternity of Quality Professionals. He has presented and published 50 + technical papers and case studies covering Customer Experience, Customer Journeys, Benchmarking, EFQM, ISO:9000, BPM, Reengineering etc. From 1984 to 85 he Travelled Around the World on Motorcycle through 23 countries. Sunil lives in Abu Dhabi, UA.E. and can be contacted at contact@qualityindeed.com.