

Customer service experience v Customer experience v Customer service management experience

Customer service experience

A great 'customer service experience' is something that happens in one situation once or quite possibly a multiple number of times. The great 'customer service experience' usually refers to a great telephone call from a very helpful and/or knowledgeable person, or a great meet and greet in a retail store. This can be consistent, in that each time you make a contact by the same mechanism or 'access route', the experience is the same, its impressive, it creates your admiration or possibly even your immediate loyalty (another subject in it's own right) and you probably tell a few others. You are drawn to what you have experienced, you rate it. Customer service experiences are nearly always associated with face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact.

Customer experience

A great (branded) 'customer experience' (note exclusion the word service) is about the very fabric of an organisation – the warp and the weave, something that always permeates the essence of the company, whatever you do, whoever you are, whenever or wherever it takes place and whoever you touch (real or implied). It is much more endearing and lasting than simply a 'customer service experience'. The exclusion of one word – 'service', is far more than semantics. A great 'customer experience' is where an organisation delivers everything you expected, demanded and hoped for as a customer (present and future) and more besides - every single time and it is so consistent and differentiated, that it becomes absolutely associated with brand - when you talk about it or recall it you judge others against it in broad terms (regardless of product or service) – i.e. 'I get that when I deal with Fred Bloggs Ltd, I now expect it of Halifax' - and/or you judge others against it in specific terms – i.e. 'I get that when I deal with Vodafone, I never got that when I was an O2 customer'.

It is about having a great contact, a great piece of fulfilment which re-cements the brand (all too often we have a great 'front office' experience but a terrible 'back office' fulfilment (or vice versa) where a promise was not delivered or when it was it was not quite right, or in the wrong format), a great resolution, an exceptional or unexpected outcome – not one of these but all of these, all the time and every time. A great customer experience is about all the things every single part of the organisation (every 'touch point' – direct and indirect) says and does which underscore what is visible - i.e. EVERYBODY is a contributor to the experience - they live and breath the values of the product and the business - they believe in them and that always comes across in everything they do and say – whether it is the first point of contact or the last, whether it is voice-to-voice, face-to-face, web-to-web or any other method. Passion is a key ingredient of the 'customer experience' - empathy, understanding...everyone sharing the same set of overall values, beliefs and basic generic competencies. The customer has no interest in silo organisation structures and disjointed processes – it views its relationship with you as a single, unified entity – those that are not able to demonstrate one hymn sheet, are unable to create a true 'customer experience'. The propositions of the business and the resultant customer experience, reflects the competencies and the culture of the organisation - everything gels into one whole (rather than one hole). A great customer experience has a significantly higher chance of creating lasting loyalty and genuine recommendation as it is based on consistent excellence, a single voice, customer-centric processes and a single-minded vision.

The First direct example is key here. 16 years after launch it is still the talked about subject in banking. Why? - because it is true to its promises, always. Its staff are some of its customers; the voice of the customer is of great importance; the experience of the brand is everything - the ads are open, honest, straight forward, black and white, the cards and the cheques books and all the ad and fulfilment material is consistent with clean, sharp and bold colours with black and white being predominant. Amazing effort went into designing customer-centric processes and not bank-centric, amazing effort went into selecting (not recruiting) great people who shared the values...

For Firstdirect the proof is in the pudding - loyalty is amazing (staff and customer attrition/churn is and has always been in single figures). Customer recommendations are high and have always been so (60% of all new customer come from recommendation). Customer satisfaction survey responses and ratings are off the scale - always! The feel of the web site/Internet banking is as the service elsewhere. What you get is the same at 3 a.m. on a Sunday as it is at 12 noon on a Monday. Technology intervention is relatively small - people are and have always been the differentiator. Everybody in the organisation knows the significance of service.

The Firstdirect team have always argued that the product is service and not banking products. Many believe that Firstdirect could now charge for their service and get away with it - most other banks can't even dream of that.

Peter Murley