

Managing CX Programs in Times of Crisis

In times of crises that affect large portions of the population, many companies struggle to decide if they should continue conducting their customer experience (CX) programs. On the one hand, they want to be sensitive to their customers in times of need. On the other hand, times of crises can be when customers need companies most, and companies should make sure they are providing quality services during these times.

While the decision is not easy for any company, at InMoment, we have guided our clients through many times of crises (9/11, hurricanes, the 2008/2009 financial crisis, etc.). Our recommendations below are based on those experiences.

Should You Suspend Your CX Program?

We believe that for most companies and most CX programs, it is important to keep listening to customers by continuing CX programs. However, there are several factors that may affect various program functions.

- **Severity and Geography of the Crisis** - Most crises affect many people psychologically but fewer people are affected to a severe degree physically. This phenomenon is currently taking place with the COVID-19 pandemic. Some specific areas have been hit hard with illness, but most people are suffering indirect effects such as anxiety and the necessity to make life-style changes to avoid the virus. We recommend that clients suspend CX programs in areas that are experiencing severe and direct effects of a crisis but continue programs in other areas.
- **Survey Method** - Companies appropriately worry that their CX programs will intrude on customers during times of crisis. While most CX programs are conducted digitally, some are conducted by telephone or use mixed methodologies that include an outbound telephone component. Because receiving a telephone call is much more intrusive than receiving an email, telephone data collection should be the first thing to suspend in geographies in crisis. An added benefit to suspending telephone data collection is that CX programs are not taking up valuable phone lines or wireless bandwidth in regions hard-hit during a crisis.

- **Type of Survey** - Generally, CX surveys can be divided into transaction-based surveys or time-based/relationship surveys. Transaction-based surveys are triggered by a transaction the customer has with a company and time-based, while relationship surveys are not. In most cases, we feel companies should continue transaction-based surveys during times of crises because customers are still conducting “everyday life” and interacting with the company. Also, it is during these times that companies should make sure they are serving their customers well. However, time-based surveys are more intrusive because customers have done nothing to trigger them. They are also less time sensitive and can usually be suspended with minimal disruption to a company’s business. Therefore, consider suspending time-based or relationship surveys in times of crisis.
- **Industry** - Companies in industries directly affected by the crisis should usually continue their transaction-based CX programs. They could even potentially add questions asking customers how well they think the company is responding to the crisis and how any efforts put in place due to the crisis are being perceived by customers. This crisis-specific information should be reviewed on a daily basis and used to inform further crisis-oriented efforts. In the present COVID-19 crisis, these industries would include the hospitality, financial, entertainment, and retail industries, at the least.

Changes to Existing Programs

While we believe that most transaction based CX programs should continue during times of crisis, they often can, and should, be modified due to the crisis. First, it is important to show sensitivity to customers so companies should consider:

- Acknowledging the crisis in the survey invitation text by saying something similar to, “We understand these are difficult times and we want to make sure we are serving our customers well during these times....”
- Adding a few questions to the survey that assess any actions the company has put in place due to the crisis or assess issues that might arise due to the crisis (e.g., item shortages in retail stores).
- Reducing or eliminating reminders during the time of crisis.
- Adding links at the end of the survey to companies’ policies and statements about the crisis.

Data Process and Interpretation

We believe that it is important for companies to make changes to their data processing and data interpretation during times of crisis. For programs using automated text analysis, we have fine-tuned processes like proactively adding category tagging around Coronavirus and related terms, across our customers' text analytics models. Please reach out to your client manager or account representative for more information.

As mentioned before, companies should monitor their CX program data more often during a crisis and use the information to determine the effectiveness of the company's crisis-oriented initiatives.

Finally, no matter if you change your program or not, your results are likely to be affected by the crisis. You should examine your data as it comes in and consider adjusting or suspending target scores, compensation, and other decisions based on CX scores. While it is important to know how you are serving customers during a crisis, long-term business decisions should not be based on crisis-driven data.

As a critical partner to your business, we understand that limiting any impact a public crisis could have on our service to our clients is imperative. Our team is here to help in any way we can. Please contact your client manager or account representative for more information.

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representative for more information**

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