Why 'Just' Listening to Your Customers Isn't Enough

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Listening to customers is obviously an integral part of any well-built experience program, but it isn't enough on its own, especially when brands don't truly know what they're listening for. Listening broadly can be helpful, but far more useful is the capability (and the willingness) to listen purposefully.

There are mountains of data out there, and the only way for companies to own the moments that matter (when business, customer, and employee needs intersect) and thus achieve transformational success is to figure out how to listen purposefully. That's why it's important for brands to design their experience program's goals, objectives, and other factors before turning the listening posts on.

DESIGNING BEFORE LISTENING

Brands need to consider which problems they think listening to customers will solve before they actually begin doing so. They also need to think carefully about the goals and objectives they want to accomplish, which also allows organizations to pinpoint which customer segments are the most effective to listen to. Frankly, some customers are better to listen to

than others, and taking time to consider both goals and current issues can help companies know which is which.

There's another element to goal-setting that I often see companies omit, and it's defining objectives in financial terms. Experience program goals should not be vague, i.e. "become more customer centric." Rather, experience program objectives should be quantifiable. Consider a desired economic outcome such as, for example, increased customer retention, and factors like key driver analysis, proper listening tools, and specific improvement percentages will fall into place on their own.

After identifying a desired outcome and the elements needed to achieve it, it's time for the next step: gathering the proper stakeholders. Experience program managers must garner strong executive support for their initiatives as early on as possible if they wish to see those efforts continuously resourced. Strong governance like this is essential for any listening program, as it helps drive strategic priorities and encourage employees to own their respective parts of the process.

Finally, if a brand already has an experience effort in place, it's important to ascertain where that effort is and how it's doing. Consider whether current listening posts are helping employees actually do their job better. Additionally, what metrics are being used to determine success? Assessing touchpoints like this allows brands to clearly understand their current customer journey, as well as the cultural and organizational changes that may occur as that journey shifts.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Most experience programs are currently geared toward asking all customers the same questions instead of determining who to listen to and what objective that accomplishes. Utilizing the process outlined above can help businesses shift toward the latter setup and even create different sub-programs tied to unique objectives. This approach also allows practitioners to prioritize their efforts based on customers' "moments of truth", which occur when the human, emotional need they came to a brand for is met. Meeting that need is vital to fundamental business success.

Moments of truth shouldn't stay bottled up with a single team after they've been identified. Data integration allows organizations to expand and enhance their holistic understanding of the experience you provide. As I mentioned above, there are mountains of data out there, and companies need an approach that allows them to mute out all the white noise and find the right moments within that information. Thoughtfully designing a business goal-based program before listening can enable companies to find those moments and help them avoid bad data and therefore bad decisions.

If you're truly interested in improving experiences for your customers and employees, that goal can't come about by just putting an ear to a channel and hoping for mere insights. Listening is only effective if it leads to informed action, which means that companies must listen intently and empathetically. Empathy is very important here, as it compels your customers to say "hey, I get to voice my opinion!" instead of just "hey, I received a survey."

As important as effective design and listening are, though, they're only the first steps on the path to true Experience Improvement (XI). Join me next time for an examination of the next stretch of the road and, ultimately, how taking the road of designing and listening intently can lead to transformational success for any organization.