How to Realize Experience Program Gains for Your Brand

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What is the goal of an experience program? Objectives vary infinitely from brand to brand and industry to industry, but it's safe to say that all organizations initiate experience programs with the goal of being better for customers, employees, and their own marketplace standing.
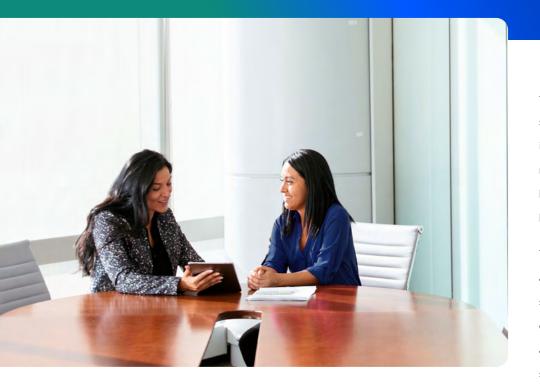
There's a lot that goes into this process. Experience improvement leaders must first design their program, carefully considering the audiences they want to impact and the specific goals they want to achieve before any listening posts are turned on. Then comes listening to customers, non-customers and employees, understanding those individuals' feedback, and leveraging the gathered intel to meaningfully transform the business.

My colleagues Andrew and Jennifer have provided detailed overviews of these first four steps. Now it's time for us to conclude this improvement framework with a discussion of its last step: realizing your experience program's gains and attaining true experience improvement.

End with The Beginning

The first step to realizing gains from your experience program actually begins with setting concrete goals, the first step in an effective program framework. It's important to establish concrete goals for your initiative before you even activate any listening posts. Rather than go with abstract goals like "become more customer-centric", organizations must tie their experience programs to specific financial and/or cultural objectives. This makes it possible to know exactly how much good your program is doing for the company (and to prove ROI).

Realizing success occurs when you can evaluate how well your program is hitting goals and when you can quantify the results. Even if you don't hit a homerun against all your goals, evaluating what you have achieved—and what you haven't—still gives you a great idea of what exactly about your program might need tweaking.

The Four-Pillar Paradigm

There's another, more profound way to evaluate your experience program's impact on the business, and that's through the lens of four economic pillars. The handy thing about our model is that it's broad enough to be of use to any company regardless of size, brand, or industry while also giving experience practitioners a foundation from which to evaluate additional financial metrics.

First, consider whether your program had a tangible impact on new customer acquisition. Even if that metric was never a specific goal for your program, a positive acquisition impact can serve as yet another great piece of hard ROI proof. Another element to look out for here is customer retention—did your brand succeed in holding and keeping new audiences' attention? Perhaps you were aiming to instill further loyalty in long-term customers or save at-risk individuals who were thinking of going to a competitor. Either way, retention is a powerful program realization because it's easier than acquisition and happy customers become advocates.

The other two elements to consider here are cross-sell/upsell and lowering cost to serve. Cross-selling your existing audiences on other products and services is an important, often overlooked revenue source that experience programs can help brands tap into. Lowering cost to serve begs little explanation, but believe me when I say it's one of the best outcomes practitioners can cite when discussing how their programs have resulted in realized success. For example, using an experience improvement program to identify friction points for customers makes lowering cost to serve easy to quantify.

There's More to Success Than Money

Proving financial goals is important for realizing program success. Numbers and percentages are simple to understand, which make them effective storytelling tools for proving financial benefit. However, there's a deeper, more abstract layer to realizing experience goals than money, and it's the cultural and organizational changes that can occur as results of your program. These elements were some of my primary drivers when I was a practitioner.

There are a myriad of ways an experience program can leave its mark on a company that go beyond money. For example, if one department or team starts scoring major wins because of changes an experience program helped realize, that success will motivate other teams and create new employee opportunities within the business. I've also seen new and improved processes usher in positive cultural change. These changes may not appear to have a hard-and-fast price tag attached to them, but they're no less important for achieving a stronger bottom line.

Realization in Action

It's powerful to see a company realize its experience goals and transformational success in real time, especially when you've been watching from the very beginning. A client of mine started their experience transformation before they had even launched their first listening post. We worked together to design a thoughtful, intentful experience program with the end goal in mind. We blueprinted a program that would drive the company's needs—financial and cultural—and help it reach its aspirations. We then began listening to customers after setting tangible goals and audience preferences, and took the time

we needed to understand what those folks were saying.

After carefully sorting through and digesting what its customers were saying, my client worked hard to turn those learnings into business transformation. Shortly thereafter, the company began realizing some pretty awesome goals. The firm's call center teams are highly engaged thanks to realized changes brought about by its experience program. Data is being shared across the organization to give employees a united, holistic vision of the experience they help provide. And, as the company realizes some real wins, it's looking ahead to additional transformational improvement initiatives based on this very framework.

Realizing experience program success can only come about as a culmination of designing, listening, understanding, and transforming with your experience program. This framework can help any brand transcend managing experiences for something far more powerful: Experience Improvement (XI). Companies can continuously realize transformative success for themselves, their customers, and their employees with this framework, and I wish you well on your journey toward achieving the same.

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