



The Power of Human Emotions and Their Impact on Customer Experience

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One of the first things I realized when I started my career in marketing was the fact that customers make emotional decisions, and that by understanding and tapping into those emotions, brands can create powerful connections that, in turn, create fierce advocates. On the flip side, not understanding or responding appropriately to customer emotions can also create powerful detractors. Don't believe me? Think about memorable experiences you have had with brands. Why do they stand out? For me, the ones that truly stand out are those that were extreme; I was either extremely surprised and the experience exceeded my expectations, or extremely unhappy because the experience was disappointing.

Let me give you an example. I found myself in a hotel coffee shop in England facing a two-block walk (no available Ubers) to our office in a torrential downpour. I asked the barista for a recommendation on somewhere close where I could purchase an umbrella. He recommended a store not far from the office, but we both agreed that by the time I could walk there I would be drenched. Here is where the surprisingly

memorable part of the exchange took place. He told me to hang on for a minute, walked to the back and returned with his personal umbrella, asking only that I bring it back later that evening when I returned to the hotel.

I used the borrowed umbrella to walk to the recommended store, purchased my own in addition to a thank-you card and a token of my appreciation for that barista. I make a trip to that office at least once a quarter and, largely because of my experience with the umbrella, I make sure to return to that coffee shop each time I do. The barista doesn't even work there anymore, but my extremely positive experience with him keeps me coming back anyway.

I can contrast that with an extremely negative experience I had with a well-known digital imaging company I used to create a picture book for my son. I ordered it early and paid for expedited shipping to ensure that it arrived on time. It wasn't until a day before I was scheduled to receive the book that I realized I hadn't received any shipping notification.



an impression with customers—an impression, good or bad, they will most likely share with others.

For many brands, the idea of providing an emotionally significant experience has taken a backseat to an avalanche of customer metrics, reactive management, and rigidly structured data. These elements are important, but they don't really tell us why customers seek emotional experiences or come to certain brands for them.

This focus on metrics and reactivity is why so many experience programs fail to make a difference. Many organizations are so focused on boosting NPS or OSAT or whatever metric they use that they lose track of what really matters: a chance to create real, meaningful connections that keep their customers coming back. In other words, what brands are seeing is that scores don't always correlate to business success.

THE CRITICAL INTERSECTION OF UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY

If expectations are the key to delivering good experiences, and meeting/exceeding expectations is the way to create loyalty, it is critical for brands to actually understand, empathize with, and connect with their customers. Do you think the coffee shop understands *why* I continue to return, or the digital imaging

“EMOTIONS ARE AT THE VERY CORE OF ALL THE ACTIONS BUYERS TAKE, AND YET FOR YEARS, BUSINESSES HAVE IGNORED THEM.”

— Colin Shaw, Author, Customer Experience

I contacted the company to learn that my order would not be arriving on time. Why? No one could say. And no one could tell me when I would actually receive the book. Needless to say, I was extremely frustrated with the brand's lack of communication and disregard for something that was obviously important to me (I paid more for the expedited shipping than I did for the actual book). I haven't done business with that company since, even though the book arrived only a day later than I'd expected and in beautiful condition. The company's lack of ownership and empathy demonstrated it was not the brand it proclaimed to be.

What do these experiences have in common? Expectations. When expectations are exceeded, there is surprise and delight. When they are not, well... you get the picture. Every experience has the potential to leave

company *why* I now go elsewhere? They should. I told them. I completed surveys, I posted reviews, I explained myself to their call center agent.

If it understood, the coffee shop would use my experience to promote empathy and problem-solving with its employees. It would be part of a training program for baristas about empathy and going above and beyond. The digital imaging company would have acknowledged its lack of communication with overcommunication, and sought to make it right in a way that secured me as a repeat customer.

Our research shows that there's a higher level of connection that brands can get to with their customers. That level is—you guessed it—customers who are emotionally invested are more loyal. A customer who's satisfied with a product or service is one thing, but a customer who is emotionally engaged with a company will keep coming back to that organization, ignore the competition, and be a brand advocate to friends, neighbors, and relatives.

The feeling of being understood and listened to is highly contagious. Brands that focus on this type of connection will create dynamic experiences that result in emotional connections with customers.

THE ROAD TO MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

Now that we've established why brands should make as many customer interactions as they can more meaningful, it's time to talk about how they can actually do that. How can companies get to a more connective and meaningful experience with customers?

The first step is to embrace the fact that humans are emotional creatures. Our Experience Improvement (XI) approach challenges brands to do that by learning what customers find meaningful, then building an experience based on their needs and expectations. You should tune into your unstructured data to see what customers are telling you, as well as how they're sharing those narratives with oth-

ers. The main takeaway here is to understand what excites your customers and what frustrates them.

Next, work carefully to pass your findings onto your wider organization. This information usually lives within customer experience (CX) teams and is pushed out to frontline employees, but we recommend you expand your reach to other teams, granting a 360-degree view of customers, your brand mission, and employees' roles in carrying out feedback-based business decisions. A meaningful customer experience begins with a meaningful employee one—sharing data, relaying positive customer stories, and recognizing invested employees are all great ways to create greater connections.

Once your company engages employees emotionally, that excitement will start rubbing off on customers. I mentioned the importance of unstructured data earlier—use open-ended questions to feel out how an experience made customers feel and react. Our research shows that questions



about trust, confidence, transparency, and making their lives easier all relate to an individual's emotions and expectations. You can pull additional intelligence together from a variety of channels, including social media, review sites, etc.

Finally, don't be afraid to do things differently when it comes to conveying the emotions and meaning behind customer feedback to employees. For example, a few of our clients play audio or video of their customers giving feedback during meetings so that their employees understand how the experience they provide makes customers feel. Hearing and seeing customers express their experiences is a powerful way to connect customers with employees.

TACKLING THE ELUSIVE CUSTOMER EMOTION CONNECTION

Building your brand's experiences around human emotions and expectations lets you connect to your customers as people, not just clients. What do your customers want, A comfortable and orderly experience? Do they want you to be more personable, or to keep your promises? Today's brands

need to obsess over understanding and building customer connections based on what they expect. This factor is what keeps customers (and their friends) coming back for more and even advocating for you during these extremely competitive times.

We have learned from working with our leading clients that the brands that create connective, personal experiences become industry leaders. Everything we've discussed in this paper is a formula for achieving both continuous success and fundamentally connective relationships with the people who matter most.

It's not lost on us that making an emotional connection with customers can be difficult. We also know it's worth it. So, begin creating emotion-driven experiences by understanding what excites your customers and what frustrates them, clearly communicating your findings to customers and employees to drive change, and not being afraid to do things differently to harness the power of human emotion and customer experience.

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