

October 3, 2007

The Chief Customer/Experience Officer Playbook

by Bruce D. Temkin

for Customer Experience Professionals



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Lessons Learned From Senior Customer Experience Executives

by **Bruce D. Temkin**
with Steven Geller

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As many firms take on corporatewide efforts to improve customer experience, more of them are establishing positions like chief customer officer or SVP of customer experience — that we collectively call the chief customer/experience officer (CC/EO). To understand what it takes to be a successful CC/EO, we interviewed executives from a variety of firms that currently have those positions. Their insights fell into five categories: 1) Make sure that you've got the right environment; 2) prepare to take on a broad change agenda; 3) establish a strong operating structure; 4) kick off high-priority activities; and 5) look ahead to the future. As these executives start to change the culture in their firms, they are initiating what we call the silent customer experience wars

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Forrester interviewed executives with responsibility for customer experience that cut across normal product and/or channel boundaries from several different organizations including Air Transat, Alaska Air Group, Bank of America, Bombardier, the California State Automobile Association, Century Furniture, the Colorado Rockies, and Symantec. In addition, we spoke with Jeanne Bliss, author of the book *Chief Customer Officer: Getting Past Lip Service to Passionate Action*.

Related Research Documents

["Customer Experience Leadership Matters"](#)
March 2, 2007

["Building Your Voice Of The Customer Program"](#)
February 8, 2007

["Experience-Based Differentiation"](#)
January 2, 2007

["Considering A Chief Customer/Experience Officer?"](#)
November 2, 2006

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SENIOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE EXECUTIVES

Firms are increasingly developing corporatewide customer experience efforts (see Figure 1).¹ Since these initiatives require cooperation across existing organizational boundaries, they can benefit from having a dedicated executive leading the effort.² That's why we're starting to see more firms establish positions like chief customer officer or SVP of customer experience: roles that we collectively call the chief customer/experience officer (CC/EO). For instance, we recently found that 54% of North American banks have a CC/EO.³

But what should these new executives do to ensure their success? To answer this question, we interviewed CC/EOs from several different organizations including Air Transat, Alaska Air Group, Bank of America, Bombardier, the California State Automobile Association, Century Furniture, the Colorado Rockies, and Symantec.⁴ In addition, we spoke with Jeanne Bliss, author of the book *Chief Customer Officer: Getting Past Lip Service to Passionate Action*.⁵

We've organized the comments from the interviewees into the following themes:

- Make sure that you've got the right environment.
- Prepare to take on a broad change agenda.
- Establish a strong operating structure.
- Kick off high-priority activities.
- Look ahead to the future.

Make Sure That You've Got The Right Environment

The role of CC/EO is challenging — it requires working across organizational boundaries and breaking down long-term siloed behaviors and attitudes. So an executive should only consider taking on the role if it is positioned for success (see Figure 2).

- **Hold out until you get active support from the executive team.** CC/EOs need to influence changes across the organization. This type of activity can create severe political challenges if the senior executive team is not extremely supportive of the effort. But the support needs to be much more than lip service. Our interviewees discussed the importance of getting regular access to the senior management team and in having those executives publicly support their efforts.

“Once a month I present to the president of our division and to the chairman of the company who is passionate about the topic. I have the referential power from their commitment.”

“The CEO is a huge advocate for what we're doing. That helps internally and externally. He always talks about creating exceptional service for our customers.”

“You can’t underestimate the importance of a champion. You need someone who will get into the details and stand up to his or her peers. Can’t just be an advocate; he or she needs willing to get on the stage with you.”

“It takes massive support from senior management. This role can destruct careers.”

- **Take on progress against a plan, not improvement in customer metrics.** If the CEO points to the CC/EO and says, “You need to fix our loyalty metrics,” then she will be very likely to fail. The rest of the management team will find it too easy to attribute any bumps in the road to this person. For the CC/EO to be successful, she must be positioned as helping the management team fulfill their objectives. That’s why the CC/EOs that we spoke with did not take on responsibility for these metrics, but they were being measured by progress against their project plans.

“Initially, I asked about what success would look like. The president started rattling off metrics like loyalty. I told him that I could not own those numbers. We established traction on the overall plan as the biggest goal for this work.”

“My goals are around performance against items on my road map. The first year or two it’s hard to get measures around employee engagement and satisfaction until you get a handle on them.”

“One of the things that is important is staying flexible. If you are thin skinned, then this is not a good job for you. Lots of discussions of my role versus the corporate roles that look at satisfaction.”

Prepare To Take On A Broad Change Agenda

Successful CC/EOs don’t own the customer experience. Instead, they take on the role of a change agent — pushing a new perspective and customer-centric approaches across the organization.

- **The ultimate goal is customer-centric DNA.** The CC/EOs all discussed plans for a number of different efforts. While these concrete activities varied across the interviewees, they all shared a common objective that didn’t have a clear timetable or a specific project plan: a customer-centric DNA. These execs recognize that the most sustainable advantage for their firm will come from cultural change that requires a concerted long-term effort.

“Customer experience is a journey; you can’t make a difference overnight. We need to have the patience to see it through.”

“What’s more important, but less tactical and takes longer, is the realization that customer experience is culture. It’s the mindset of our associates and their empowerment. Not stuff, but attitudinal. We’ve recognized that this is a journey.”

“We want to empower employees to make decisions faster. Change our DNA from ‘protecting the companies’ assets’ to being more externally focused.”

“We’re going through a change in the organization from product-centric to customer-driven and employee-powered. We’re rethinking accountability for customers.”

- **Just about every effort requires cooperation.** The interviewees recognize that many organizations affect customer experience. That’s why the changes they’re trying to make aren’t limited to “customer experience” groups or even to customer-facing organizations. But these execs know that they can’t force other organizations to do what they say — so they spend a great deal of time cultivating cooperative relationships.

“People tend to blame downstream organizations. Customer support sees the issue, although the problems are often created upstream — with inappropriate expectations being set or with product mistakes.”

“Each of the groups in our company already had some customer experience efforts, so I wanted to make sure that they were on board and not threatened. I needed to talk to each of those groups individually. It’s an ongoing issue — and it’s an ongoing effort for me.”

“We spend a huge amount of time with product managers sharing the information and getting commitments to fix things. And tracking the work toward commitments.”

“This job is about leadership, not ownership. It’s all about getting people to common agreement and objectives.”

- **It’s critical to engage employees in the process.** These CC/EOs recognize that employees are a critical asset in their efforts. First of all, frontline employees can often describe the problems that customers run into. And when it comes to changing processes, employee involvement makes sure that changes take into account the actual way that people work — raising the probability that changes will take hold.

“We focus on employees first. Happy employees make a happy customer. They were very skeptical — so much of our communication is internally driven. We need to support the hell out of them.”

“Want to go back to legacy of any employee being able to help customers. Our customer care group built guidelines and tools to allow customer service agents to handle problems — without having to escalate the issue to our customer care team.”

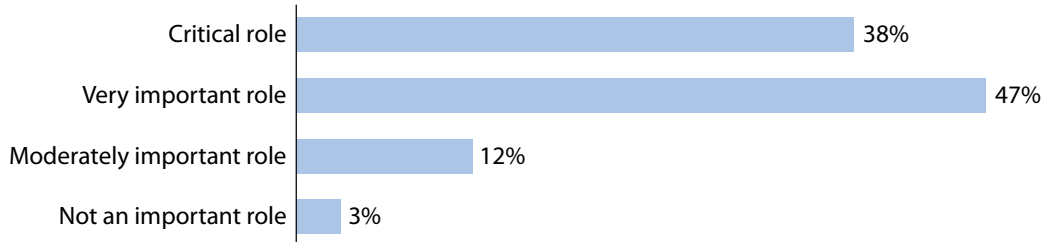
“All of the ideas for improvements came from our employees — especially the technical support people. We got 500 ideas and selected the top 10 to implement.”

“We have a big display board with positive emails from customers. Supervisors will call out different people and explain what they did.”

Figure 1 Firms Increasingly Focus On Customer Experience

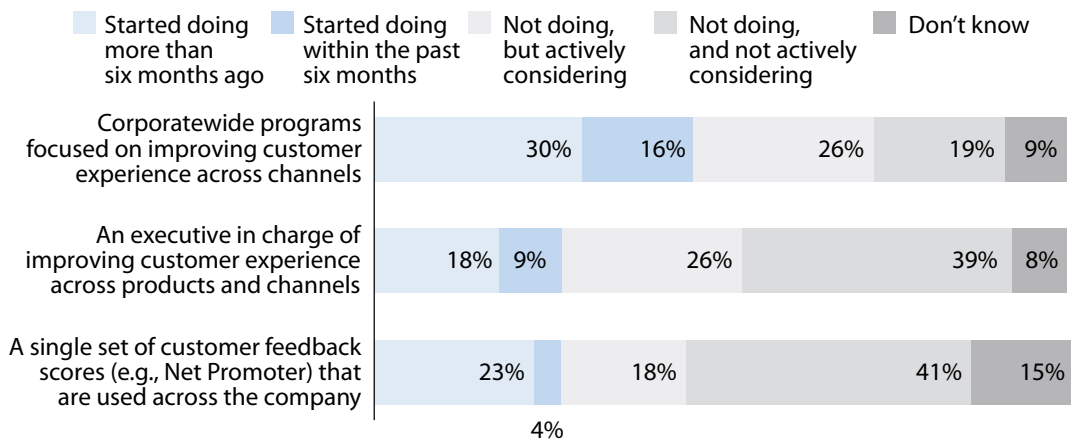
1-1 Customer experience is critical or very important to most firms

“What role will customer experience play in your firm’s competitiveness over the next three years?”



1-2 Most firms are at least considering corporatewide efforts

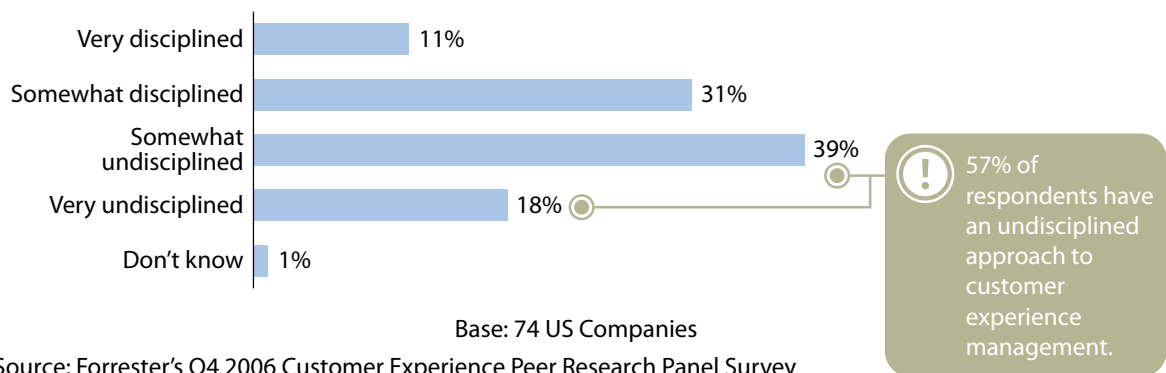
“To what extent has your company put in place any of the following?”



(percentages may not total 100 because of rounding)

1-3 Companies lack customer experience discipline

“How would you describe your company’s overall approach to customer experience management?”



Base: 74 US Companies

Source: Forrester’s Q4 2006 Customer Experience Peer Research Panel Survey

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 2 Evaluating The Readiness For A Senior Customer Experience Executive

	No	Yes
Does your company view customer experience as critical to its success?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your company have the ambition to change how it interacts with customers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is customer experience viewed as an integral part of your firm's overall strategy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your CEO willing to hold the executive team accountable for customer experience improvements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can the CC/EO candidate be comfortable without a large organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Readiness for a senior customer experience executive	
<u>Number of "Yes" answers</u>	<u>Readiness</u>
5	Good
4	Fair
3	Poor
0, 1, or 2	Terrible

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Establish A Strong Operating Structure

CC/EOs need to take a holistic view of their organizations. Ultimately, their success depends not only on the performance of their own groups but also on how effectively they create other structures that push customer experience efforts across the organization.

- **Put in place a good, small team.** The CC/EOs can't tackle everything on their own, but they also have figured out they don't want to build large organizations. They strongly suggested that the CC/EO's organization should manage the company's voice of the customer programs.

"There are six of us and we'll probably add four or five in the next six months. We're organized around our approach to work: customer listening systems, driving action and change, and data analysis."

"We have the voice of the customer on my team. I strongly recommend that you include the gathering voice of the customer and voice of the industry teams. Need to have access to fact-based data about what's working."

"I'll grow the team to 12 people. We have three groups: Customer focus team that works on our satisfaction surveys; colleague team that works with the internal sales and service teams; and strategy and issue resolution team that fixes what's broken."

- **Develop an initial action plan.** Since the CC/EOs need to coordinate their efforts with a large number of people across the organization, it's critical that they develop and communicate clear project plans. These execs recognize that many of their activities in the first 90 days need to focus on exploratory and "PR" efforts like discussions with key executives and frontline employees across the company. Jeanne Bliss calls the first 90 days the "9-1-1 period" when CC/EOs need to understand why they're losing some customers and keeping others." At the end of 90 days, the CC/EOs suggested that firms focus on three to five initiatives.

"We put in a 90-day plan focused on the PR side of it — getting people to know what the initiative and my role are all about."

"We look at how we evolve our capabilities and stage our information, so we continually evolve the efforts — we can't give them everything at once. People need to adjust, learn, and engage."

"We have some four areas that we are spotlighting — trying to close out items in 90/120 days."

"First six weeks was developing a road map that broke out the main delivery milestones in 90-day increments."

- **Set up a clear and broad governance structure.** The customer experience executives don't just focus on a list of to-dos for their customer experience organization, they establish governance structures that get the right people involved. Most of the CC/EOs described setting up two types of cross-functional groups — a working team (that meets every week or every other week) and an executive steering committee that meets monthly.

"I have a weekly meeting of director level people — they are like the brain of the efforts. Monthly, we have a 2-hour meeting with the presidents of the two divisions and the executive team from the service organization."

"We created a customer working group with employees involved in each of the touch points. They identify where we need to go next to help customers and also focus on how the employees manage the handoffs. These meetings are inspiring to listen to."

"I do a read out to the leadership team every month and tell them my perspectives on how we're doing (fact-based); a no-holds-barred discussion. No attempt to keep any of that stuff under the rug."

"In the last three months we have established a customer experience council — a leadership committee — which is made up of VPs one level below the CEO."

- **Keep focused at the strategic level.** Jeanne Bliss describes the role of the CC/EO as the “Velcro person” — other organizations love to dump all of their problems on this new executive. So it can be very easy for a new CC/EO to get caught up in constantly responding to specific customer service issues or to just turn into the complaint department. That’s why our interviewees are keenly aware of making sure that they spend enough time on strategic issues.

“There are weeks when I find myself 98% tactical and only 2% strategic.”

“Through empowerment and transferring issues, I’ve been able to make my role more strategic and less day-to-day tactical.”

“I found that it was more important for me to understand what we are doing versus going out and getting in the middle of a bunch of sales calls.”

“The role was handed to me as “customer service,” but we’ve broadened the thinking about overall customer experience and then ultimately going toward advocacy.”

Kick Off High-Priority Activities

While each of the CC/EOs was working on his or her unique plans, we found some common elements that should be a part of any initial efforts for someone who takes on this role.

- **Map the end-to-end experience from your customers’ perspectives.** The most powerful thing that a CC/EO can do quickly is to provide the company with a view of what it feels like to be a customer.⁶ There’s nothing more aligning than the realization that customers are being treated badly. That’s why Jeanne Bliss recommends a “fast-track to change” that includes mapping the experience, diagnosing problems, designing new experiences, and implementing the changes. Many of the interviewees follow her advice and initiate efforts to map their customers’ experiences. This effort often ends up identifying several key moments of truth.

“Customers want one relationship with us and we’ve given them about 10. Our data sources and systems are isolated; the organizations are isolated. We’re trying to break down the silos.”

“We now take satisfaction information and put it against the stages of the experience — looking at how many customers are joining and how many aren’t renewing by channel or region. We look at customer satisfaction by stage of the experience — purchase, servicing, renewal, and two other major moments of truth.”

“We built comics that described what we found when we mapped out the experience of working with us from our customers’ eyes. The comics were very good at driving an understanding across the company.”

“We mapped out end to end what the current experience is and created goals across the traditional silos. We looked at the nine touchpoints in silos — everyone had a different set of criteria.”

- **Analyze the customer economics.** Jeanne Bliss talks about “customer math” — which is a way to realign metrics and analysis to be more about keeping customers and less about selling. Most firms can’t even accurately determine where, why, or when they’re retaining or losing customers. And they often can’t identify their best customers. By analyzing existing data from different systems, the CC/EO can start to show the economics of customer experience — an important step for getting buy-in for action across the company (especially from the CFO). The results from this analysis often end up shifting how the company thinks about its customers.

“We have been lost in averages — what gets lost is variability. It’s the egregious experiences that kill loyalty. We’ve started to remove the variability.”

“We’re changing metrics in the call center to eliminate focus on average talk time.”

“We’re really enjoying discovering about our customer base. Did some simple analysis and found out that 400 of our 3,200 clients drive a huge majority of our revenues. Now we need to get the company focused on those 400 customers.”

“It’s not about making customers happy. It’s about focusing on the profitable customers and making them happy. It’s not about getting customers to sing kumbaya.”

- **Establish a voice of the customer program . . .** The CC/EOs all understood the importance of incorporating feedback from customers into their organizations. That’s why just about all of them began to formalize different parts of a voice of the customer (VoC) program. While most of the CC/EOs were establishing a high-level corporate metric like the Net Promoter Score (NPS) or satisfaction, those efforts represent only one piece of what Forrester calls the five levels of a VoC program (see Figure 3).⁷

“If I did it over again, I would have focused earlier on consolidating our customer listening posts and voice of the customer efforts. We now look at the perception of reliability, not the actual reliability.”

“We have a program where any key customer that calls/writes to customer care with a complaint gets a call from an officer after the issue is resolved. All of our senior executives make these calls.”

“We set up brown bag lunches for people to listen to customer phone calls. Trying to get associates without customer-facing jobs in front of customers — so they know what they sound like.”

“Most excited about how we are developing our ability to listen. Quickly got a system for getting complaints, comments, and suggestions. Our frontline people are great at resolving issues, but we weren’t great at capturing these and then driving improvement.”

Figure 3 Five Levels Of The Voice Of The Customer

	Description	Used to:
Relationship tracking	Survey customers at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly, annually) on how they feel about the company. Use simple metrics such as likelihood to recommend, Net Promoter Scores, likelihood to repurchase, or likelihood to switch companies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set long-term corporate goals and track overall progress • Focus investments in key areas that correlate with improvements
Interaction monitoring	Survey customers after key interactions to determine how satisfied they are with both the results and the processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spot problematic trends • Provide detailed feedback to/about frontline employees • Trigger an immediate response to events like negative feedback from a key customer
Continuous listening	Sample frontline customer interactions on a regular basis by listening to call center conversations, reading emails, chat logs, or blogs, or by visiting stores/branches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify early signs of problems • Understand the emotional side of customers' issues and concerns
Project infusion	Systematically include definitions of target customers' needs within project plans for tools like design personas and requirements documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep projects focused on the needs of specific customer segments • Align investments on a core set of customer experience improvements
Periodic immersion	Periodically get executives to spend significant time interacting with customers and frontline employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify obstacles encountered by employees • Question the status quo about business rules and processes

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

- . . . **but don't get enamored with a single metric like Net Promoter.** There's been a lot of debate across the industry about the value of NPS versus other metrics like satisfaction.⁸ Our interviewees clearly recognize the power of any metric that will help align the organization around improving the customer experience, but many of these execs see issues with blindly anointing NPS as the sole measurement.

"We have a longer survey and ask specific questions on the different touchpoints — it helps organizations get on board about what they can do. We need these underlying specifics in addition to our NPS, or people will think that the data is ridiculously simplistic."

"We're currently keying in on satisfaction as our key metric. Will be moving to NPS in the future, but I am worried about having our company chasing the scores."

"The Net Promoter Score has been invaluable as a North Star for me. We've been able to correlate NPS with profitability. It is quoted by our CEO as part of the earnings call in the same discussion with EPS. Getting people to talk about a customer metric at this level is key."

“We’re looking for line of site between our initiatives and NPS, which is a lagging indicator. We’ve worked on projects that have taken three quarters to improve the NPS.”

Look Ahead To The Future

Although these executives have their hands full with their current efforts, they need to be looking ahead in a number of different areas. In particular, our interviewees were thinking about:

- **Maintaining the corporate enthusiasm.** As with any initiative, it’s often easy to gain initial excitement across the organization. But the CC/EOs we interviewed were very concerned about how they’d keep up the enthusiasm for their efforts in future years — since many of the cultural changes they want to make will take several years to pan out.

“This first year we can find low-hanging fruit — the first 10 problems. Finding the next 10 will be even harder. We need to continually show the wins.”

“We need to convince people that it’s not just the program for this year. It won’t disappear next year.”

“I’m working with our management team so that this becomes part of their job and not just the flavor of the month.”

- **The next evolution of their efforts.** The CC/EOs aren’t just focusing on their current plans; they’re developing plans for revamping their efforts. For many of them, that means improving how they analyze and act on customer data. One of the approaches that we heard several of them talk about was something that Jeanne Bliss calls the “Customer Room,” which is a dedicated space for displaying data about customers (see Figure 4). She believes that this type of space creates an environment where teams can more effectively make decisions.

“In the future when we get feedback from the customer, we can have more real-time dashboards.”

“We have a monthly customer meeting. Want to transform that into more of a participatory meeting versus a report-out meeting.”

“I talk to the executive team for an hour every month. We’re not like a GE or an HP — we don’t have a ton of dashboards. One of my key action items is to develop a dashboard that contains all of the leading indicators.”

“We’re setting up a customer room — the war room. So we can use it to identify what we’ve heard from customers and what we are going to do about it.”

- **Preparing for their next job.** The CC/EOs realize that they won't be in their role for more than a few years. As change agents, they see that they will either burn out or successfully put themselves out of a job.

“If we are successful, my role changes and this just becomes how we run our business. Who knows?”

“This is a tough job. You want to rotate people into this role. If the journey takes more than three years, then you need fresh meat.”

“At the end of this journey, there's no customer experience officer; just a distributed network of customer experience advocates that continue the good work.”

“I hope that I do myself out of a job.”

Figure 4 Elements Of A Customer Room

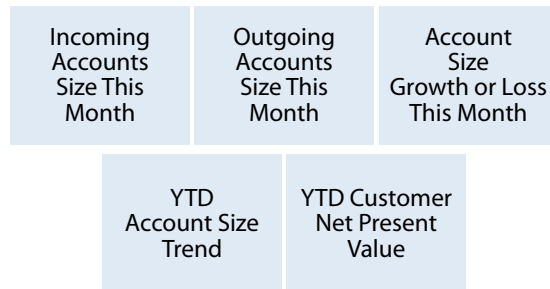
Why Have a Customer Accountability Room? What's In One?

- Drive continuous learning and understanding — how the company impacts customers
- Assign accountability and impart urgency for improvements
- Execute ongoing modifications and improvements
- Create awareness and manage customer profitability pipeline and risk

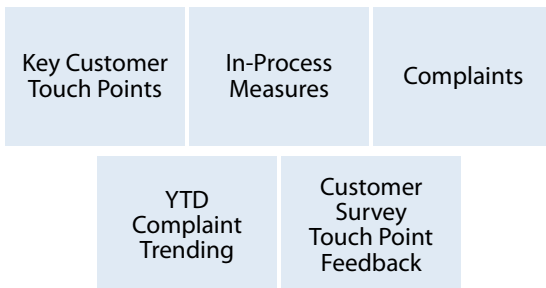
Status: Customer Relationships



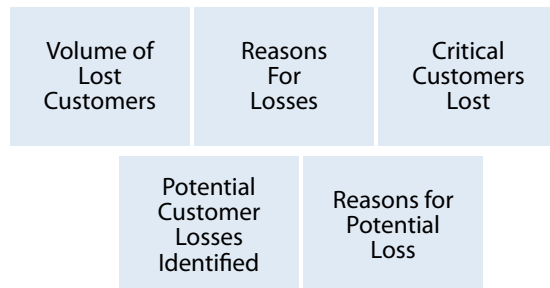
Status: Customer Quality



Status: Customer Experiences



Status: Customers at Risk



Source: *Chief Customer Officer* (reprinted with permission from Jossey-Bass and Jeanne Bliss)

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

WHAT IT MEANS

THERE'S AN INVISIBLE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WAR UNDERWAY

Senior customer experience execs recognize that they're undertaking a multiyear effort to change their organizations' culture. While all plans need some highly visible, short-term results, the most dramatic improvements will come over time — as these execs change attitudes and behaviors of employees across the organization. Firms that spend too much time just trying keeping up with the visible changes made by their competitors may miss these more fundamental, yet less-visible shifts. As a result, they risk getting defeated in the long-term, invisible customer experience wars. That's why companies need to set their sights on building a long-term path toward what Forrester calls Experience-Based Differentiation.⁹

ENDNOTES

- ¹ We asked customer experience executives about their efforts. Although nearly all of them think that customer experience is an important part of their firm's competitiveness, most do not follow a disciplined approach to customer experience management. About half of the respondents have an enterprisewide customer experience effort, but only about one-quarter have an executive in charge of customer experience across channels. See the February 6, 2007, "[Obstacles To Customer Experience Success](#)" report.
- ² Companies are increasingly trying to improve the experiences that they deliver to customers. So should they turn to a chief customer/experience officer (CC/EO) as part of the effort? These execs can be very valuable, but only if they are charged with the appropriate responsibilities — otherwise, they don't have any chance of success. If the CEO is intent on instituting changes and will hold all execs accountable, then a CC/EO can help as a change agent. But if the plan is to make the CC/EO responsible for customer experience, then the company would be better off without creating this position. See the November 2, 2006, "[Considering A Chief Customer/Experience Officer?](#)" report.
- ³ In a joint survey with The American Banker, we asked 190 executives from North American banks about their customer experience efforts. Fifty-four percent of the respondents reported that they had an executive in charge of improving customer experience across products and channels. See the June 26, 2007, "[Banks Prepare For Customer Experience Wars](#)" report.
- ⁴ The executives whom we spoke with had a number of different titles — including chief customer officer and SVP of customer experience. For the purposes of this report, we will refer to them all as chief customer/experience officers (CC/EOs).
- ⁵ For more information about Jeanne Bliss, visit: Customer Bliss (<http://www.customerbliss.com/index.html>).
- ⁶ In a joint survey with the American Banker, Forrester interviewed 190 executives from North American banks. The respondents took Forrester's Experience-Based Differentiation (EBD) self-test, and we compared the answers between two groups: banks that had a CC/EO and those that did not have a CC/EO. We found the biggest difference in the scores for the first principle of EBD: Focus on customer needs, not product features. So banks with CC/EOs did much better in this area. See the September 10, 2007, "[Customer Experience Execs Help Banks](#)" report.

- ⁷ Our research uncovered five levels of voice of the customer activities: relationship tracking, interaction monitoring, continuous listening, project infusion, and periodic immersion. Companies should create formalized programs that address these different types of insight. See the December 1, 2006, “[Voice Of The Customer: Five Levels Of Insight](#)” report.
- ⁸ Net Promoter has become a popular way to measure customer satisfaction and loyalty. But, as with any single measurement, it doesn’t tell the entire story. To put a Net Promoter Score — or any customer metric — into action, companies need to analyze it alongside other insights, operational metrics, and ongoing customer improvement efforts. See the February 2, 2007, “[Net Promoter Scores: Good, But Not Enough](#)” report.
- ⁹ With more access to information, more sensitivity to price, and less sensitivity to advertising, customers are getting harder to win and keep. Organizations try to woo these empowered consumers with mediocre customer experiences — but it won’t work. Firms need to dramatically raise the bar on the customer experience they provide. How? By adopting what Forrester calls Experience-Based Differentiation (EBD). This enterprisewide effort focuses on three principles: 1) Obsess about customer needs; 2) reinforce brands with every interaction; and 3) treat customer experience as a competence, not a function. To succeed with EBD, firms must commit to a multiyear journey. That’s why firms need to make this one of their top corporate initiatives. See the January 2, 2007, “[Experience-Based Differentiation](#)” report.

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