

# Four Components of the Successful Customer Experience

*It's about more than fulfilling a transaction.*

Most contact center leaders are battle-tested enough to know that each and every customer interaction is a test of the service organization as a whole. But not everyone realizes that each and every customer touch is a test of the entire brand and its promise to that customer.

When your brand goes on trial, you must deliver the kind of experience that transcends the ordinary and the everyday, and reaffirms the company's entire brand premise. In the contact center, the front line of so many businesses, revenue is made and lost every day not on price or performance, but by the quality of the customer experience. "Managing the customer experience is a complex undertaking that requires strategic choices to be made, new competencies to be developed, and management's will to execute," says Shaun Smith, customer experience expert of Shaun Smith + Co.

Smith cites four criteria that are the base for any solid, sustainable customer experience management effort. A positive, managed customer experience must be consistent, intentional, differentiated, and valuable. Meeting them head-on is critical if the customer experience is truly a top priority.

1. **Consistent:** Consistency at the agent level is about more than simply giving everybody access to the same screen pops, call scripts, and escalation protocols, however. It requires being able to identify and anticipate the needs and interests of a customer, and ensuring that the right steps are taken--every time--to satisfy those requirements in a timely, predictable manner, and in a way that is on-brand. Inconsistencies and misses will dampen the experience--and the returns from that customer. Consistency is a hallmark and fundamental strength of top organizations. And in the contact center, consistency hinges on the organization's ability to know everything relevant about the customer, regardless of the contact channel or agent handling the interaction.

2. **Intentional:** The contact center must be able to clearly articulate and understand the customer experience it is trying to create and preserve in order to carry it out. Furthermore, the procedures and policies of that service organization must be specifically geared toward meeting the needs of the customer and, by extension, gratifying the customer experience. That is the failure of many CRM implementations; management assumes that

technology will drive the customer experience, whereas, in fact, the opposite should be true. The customer experience must be designed first within the framework of the brand strategy and then implemented throughout the organization. Calculated intention can be expressed as a way of using channels that serve a clear purpose and deliver clear value to both the customer and the company.

3. **Differentiated:** Simply put, if your customers cannot discriminate between the experiences they achieve with your company and those of a competitor, your customers won't distinguish. The experience you deliver to your customers must produce an emotional connection on some level that no other organization can do quite the same thing for its customers as you can. Skeptics may believe that customer loyalty is based entirely on issues of product and pricing, but such an assumption misses the entire point. No organization can afford sameness in its customer experience unless it is happy to allow price to become the determining factor.

4. **Valuable:** In a sense, this is the validating step after the first three directives have been considered. Once a consistent, intentional, and differentiated strategy is devised, the question must be asked--will implementing this strategy produce value for both the company and the target customer base? And by value I don't mean relative price, but the whole experience of the brand.

When you deliver on all four elements, you create an experience so positively powerful that it burns a memory of your company's brand into your customers' mind. These customers become your biggest advocates--they can't wait to return for more and they'll bring their friends and colleagues along.

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