DISCOVERING, DESIGNING AND DELIVERING PEAK CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Every company faces a critical choice in determining how it will deliver brand and customer experiences—either go through the motions or resolve to deeply understand customer needs and create experiences that truly matter.

Customer loyalty and advocacy—the goals of great customer experience—are born from trust and faith, essential human emotions. Companies that create great customer experiences heed Maya Angelou’s advice: “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Clearly, some experiences along the customer’s journey are more emotional—and thus more important—than others, but many companies overlook this obvious fact and create needless complexity that leaves them data rich and insight poor. Decisions based on superfluous data prove to be ineffective, as illustrated by a survey in which 80% of companies believed that they delivered superior customer experience while only 8% of their customers agreed. In reality, there may be dozens—even hundreds—of touchpoints, but only a few are significant and actually contribute to forming the emotional bonds that truly create customer loyalty and advocacy.

Sloan Management Review suggests, “Organizations in general have found success in identifying and focusing on points in the service cycle where emotions tend to be high. Rather than include everything, it helps to simplify by concentrating on the strong positives and negatives.”

MEMORY AND PEAK-END EXPERIENCES

According to psychologists, emotions influence what customers remember. Furthermore, exactly what we remember is determined by the intensity of emotions created by an experience—not the overall experience. Nobel laureate and

EMOTIONAL JOURNEY

The chart below depicts consumers’ emotions experienced along the shopping journey.

- **POSITIVE FEELING** (Emotional Benefit)
  - Gratify
  - Satisfy
  - Neutral
  - Bad
  - Horrible

- **NEGATIVE FEELING**
  - Net pleasantness or unpleasantness or the length of the experience is forgotten.
  - Peak experiences that break through a positive threshold encourage brand loyalty.
  - Negative experiences that break through a negative threshold discourage brand use.
  - We remember past experiences based on their peaks and how they ended.
Peak customer experience is best defined and understood on the basis of how it evokes emotion within the customer.
“Customer experience is something that has to be personally internalized. It must be “caught not taught.”

significant time with them. Not this is exactly the type of activity that will often help clarify the situation, enable teams to work more efficiently and focus on those things that truly matter to the people they serve. This is where empathy building can help.

Getting senior leadership and other key stakeholders to “live” the experience can help your team understand what your customers experience in their day-to-day lives. It can truly shift the way you look at your business and spark fresh thinking that is rooted in empathy and an understanding of your customers.

Discovering the deeper drivers of your customers’ behavior and building empathy are critical for designing your emotional platform. The emotional platform is really about setting the experience vision and identifying what emotional responses to evoke. It’s about defining what actions will be directed, and building on the present potential of the client organization or situation. Applied social science research has demonstrated that this “positive psychology” approach improves an organization’s internal capacity for collaboration and change.

The basic idea is to utilize the findings from Emotional and Appreciative Inquiry to get individuals and organizations to focus on what works. Appreciative Inquiry draws its strength from the alignment of insights with stories of success to create meaning for and engagement with the new experience. This approach motivates and inspires individuals and creates a strong sense that “living the experience promise” is more than a project. Instead, it becomes a way of life; it is never finished and continuously drives improvement.

It is one thing to articulate a promise and another altogether to live that promise. The most important aspect of this new focus involving internal stakeholders is a well-designed and well-implemented, highly inclusive internal experience engagement program.

To ensure that the new brand position is “caught not taught,” Brandtrust utilizes a well-proven approach known as Appreciative Inquiry. It focuses on posing appreciative questions and envisioning the future in order to foster positive relationships and build on the present potential of the client organization or situation. Applied social science research has demonstrated that this “positive psychology” approach improves an organization’s internal capacity for collaboration and change.

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To accomplish this, a work plan should be undertaken to facilitate rapid acceptance, understanding and adoption of the essential behaviors necessary to bring the vision and values of the customer experience to life throughout the organization. This process will help to transcend ambiguities and inspire individual colleagues to internalize and live the experience promise.

BRANDTRUST CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CASE HISTORIES

For over a decade, Emotional Inquiry® methodology has been used to discover foundational understandings of the nonconscious motivators for brand and customer experiences. These insights directly inform strategies for designing and delivering optimized customer experiences that create loyalty. Following are a few case histories illustrating how emotional insights enabled companies to improve the customer experience and, consequently, build brand preference and loyalty.

Increasing Net Promoter Score® with deep insight into the customer’s emotional experience

A major appliance maker uses Net Promoter Score to measure consumers’ ownership experience and predict intent to repurchase. Increasingly the scores shifted lower and trailed the average of competitors. Research data indicated what was happening but failed to reveal why fewer consumers wanted to promote the company’s products versus their competitors’. The company turned to Brandtrust to answer its nagging questions. Emotional Inquiry® successfully revealed the deeper emotional and psychological reasons behind the brand’s troubles. The findings were critical in helping the client frame strategies designed to reverse the declines.

Creating a positive experience even when the power goes off

What could a major public utility company do to raise customer satisfaction scores consistently in the 90th percentile? Senior managers, whose performance evaluations are based on increased customer satisfaction, wanted to know. It’s difficult to improve satisfaction when the only time people think of the utility is when there is a problem or power outage. Emotional Inquiry® revealed a critical singular positive peak experience recalled by numerous customers. Strategic concepts designed to intensify this peak experience were developed and deployed during power outages and service calls. The new strategies have created incremental gains in customer satisfaction.

Reversing the share erosion of a top beverage brand caused by a poor customer shopping experience

Customer response tied to customer experience maps

Customer Experience Mapping

Translating vision into succinct, definable customer experience maps

Experience Plan Implementation

Emotionally owning the customer experience

Customer Experience Delivery

Leveraging customer advocacy

Measuring the Experience

Customer response tied to customer experience maps

Project Framing

Frame the experience opportunity/problem

Peak-End Discovery

Identifying peak-end opportunities of high-value customers and key stakeholders

• Uncover points of emotional intensity in customer journey

• Understand deeper motivations of peaks

• Role of employees

Empathy Building

Immersion of key stakeholders in current customer journey

Emotional Platform Design

Setting the experience vision

• Create desired emotional platform

• Map functional and emotional clues

• Define what actions will be directed, to whom and how they will be enacted

<insert diagram here>
A top beverage brand had significant share erosion occurring in the U.S. market. Scanner data clearly indicated what was happening, but the beverage maker could not explain why. Brandtrust’s Emotional Inquiry® and a Touchpoint Analysis were completed to discover the deeper reasons why the brand was losing share. Peak encounter emotional issues were revealed involving packaging, merchandising and SKU counts that created a poor customer experience. The poor experience also contradicted the essence of the brand position and promise. Corrective measures were taken to revise packaging and SKU rationalizations to abate share erosion.

Teaching customers new tricks helps to top a package express company improve customers’ experience

This well-known overnight package express company wanted to understand the key motivations of its business-to-business customers in order to improve their overall experience. Brandtrust’s Emotional Inquiry® discovered the emotional elements that create peak experience moments for the company’s best customers. The findings are being used to incorporate new and improved touchpoints that promise to create similar peak moments for target customers who have the potential to become better customers.

Ensuring that an iconic brand promise comes to life on the dealer’s retail sales floor

One of the world’s top motorcycle brands worked with Brandtrust to understand its customers’ deeper, nonconscious, emotional motivations for this well-loved brand. Revealing the deeper psychological reasons that create the passion for the brand also pointed to the importance of the entire life cycle of the customer experience—to understand the key motivations of its business-to-business customers in order to improve their overall experience. Brandtrust’s Emotional Inquiry® discovered the emotional elements that create peak experience moments for the company’s best customers. The findings are being used to incorporate new and improved touchpoints that promise to create similar peak moments for target customers who have the potential to become better customers.

Creating new customers through attention to the details that matter most in the customer experience

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One of the largest contractor services companies wanted to know how to create greater customer loyalty and acquire new loyal customers. Emotional research and Touchpoint Analysis clearly pointed out what really matters to builders in the company’s service offering. As it turns out, the “little things” in the relationship and the overall experience are the elements that matter most in the emotional evaluation of customer experiences. The findings are being used to review and enhance the most critical encounter points of the customer’s experience.

Optimizing a top insurance company’s direct-to-consumer sales and service experience

Insurance companies usually do not come to mind when you think of a superior customer experience. If you’re talking to one, it’s probably about something bad—a problem on your bill or the accident you just had. One of the oldest and largest insurance carriers asked Brandtrust to help change that negativity into something positive. Emotional Inquiry® was instrumental in pinpointing the critical exchanges throughout the customer experience—from getting a quote and buying a policy to filing and getting paid for a claim. Several key touchpoints were identified “that created angst and anxiety” customers weren’t aware of consciously. The company reworked a number of policies, procedures, products and communications to deliver a much more customer-sensitive experience. Customer retention and satisfaction rates have increased significantly.

Treating the entire customer experience as a holistic and aesthetic encounter

A large healthcare company struggled to understand why it could not improve patient satisfaction scores in several specialty areas. Many things were tried and still the scores refused to budge. Brandtrust was engaged to conduct Emotional and Contextual Inquiries along with a comprehensive Touchpoint Analysis of the patient’s end-to-end experience. The research suggested the staff training had paid off—patients were very approving of the human touch evident throughout the facilities. Some processes and procedures needed improvement, but the research revealed that neglected aesthetic nuances were creating negative impressions, affecting nonconscious feelings about the facility and the care that might be provided in such an environment. If you can’t take care of the plants, can you take care of people? Corrective actions were taken to improve the unappealing aesthetics and over time satisfaction scores began to rise.

Breaking down barriers by building empathy

Long-term care insurance is a product that has never been easy to sell. The product causes people to consider their own mortality and face their worst fears of being sick and unable to care for themselves. This creates a complex emotional minefield for the customer and the salesperson. Though business was good, customer acquisition and closure rates were low and the turnover in salespeople was high. Brandtrust was engaged to help our client better understand its customers. The company had customer demographics, a general idea of market segmentation and even specific sales ratios, including one that indicated customers compared up to three companies before purchasing a policy. The client was well aware that a customer’s negative attitude caused salespeople to lose heart quickly. Better salespeople resorted to high-pressure tactics, but most simply gave up over time. Recruitment and training costs were through the roof.

Emotional research revealed consumers worry about their responsibilities to loved ones and even more deeply about how they will be remembered. The research revealed that these feelings create such psychological barriers that customers rarely shop the policies at all. It also pointed to a specific set of questions and probes the salespeople could use to change the interaction from guarded to open and trusting. Brandtrust recommended the client embrace the idea of creating authentic affinity with seniors and become completely engaged in understanding the real needs of seniors. Brandtrust worked together with the client to develop an extensive list of initiatives the company could undertake to build the brand and build the business.

Category sales were down at this CPG brand’s largest retailer. As the paper-crafting category leader, the client was being challenged by its largest retail partner to offer solutions to turn the declining trend around. While this CPG brand had good consumer insights, it lacked the fundamental shopper insights and knowledge about the steps in the purchasing journey to create the right experience at the point of purchase. Brandtrust was engaged to help understand why the decline was happening and what to do about it.

Insights revealed that paper-crafting projects are both very involved processes and offer the potential for huge payoff for crafters and retailers alike. Brandtrust was able to help its client understand why women do paper crafting. Furthermore, the company was able to reveal the underlying emotions driving the shopping behavior of these crafters as well as uncover what experience they were looking to have. Insights revealed that a crafter’s shopping experience in the crafting aisle is a critical component in making her vague project idea real and attainable. Understanding the unarticulated hierarchy of needs and how these needs are being met at each stage of the path to purchase is fundamental to creating peak experiences and retail success.

Brandtrust created a long-term learning plan to help its client understand deep consumer and shopper emotional drivers of behavior. These rich insights were then used to inform internal branding, marketing tactics and retailer category growth strategies.

The results? There was an immediate change to the plan-o-gram and test in 250 stores. The client was also asked to develop a vision for the paper crafts department to deliver the desired shopping experience. This great achievement has secured its role as a thought leader and ensured a seat at the table for all future important retailer initiatives.

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Creating an insights-led category experience and growth strategy

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“Shift your mental model from ‘voice of the customer’ to ‘mind of the customer.’”

REFERENCES


