

WE CANNOT NOT CREATE EXPERIENCES FOR OUR CUSTOMERS



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We Cannot Not Create Experiences for Our Customers

Written by Pete Tosh

'The best predictor of organizational growth is your customers' perception of their experiences with your organization and their willingness to recommend'

Fred Reichheld - The Ultimate Question, Bain & Company

Your organization, every department and each employee are continuously creating experiences for their customers. At all points where your organization interacts with or touches a customer in providing them a product or service, it creates experiences. And during those experiences customers form perceptions and make decisions as to whether to do business with you in the future.

So the question is not whether we provide experiences - but whether we:

- are aware of where and when these experiences occur?
- are creating positive or negative customer emotions?
- know how do our customers view the quality of their experiences with us versus those they have with our competitors?
- have initiatives in place to improve upon our customers' perceptions of these experiences?

Each of us is tasked with creating emotionally engaging experiences for our customers.

Let's look at a very common and simple buying experience we each have – buying gasoline and products at a convenience store. In addition to the actual price of the product, we encounter a series of touch points: ease of access, cleanliness, availability of windshield squeegee, arrangement of store products, interpersonal skills of the attendant, appearance of the restroom, availability of directions, etc. These touch points are sending a series of cues that, in essence, are telling us how much that organization values doing business with us. Walt Disney was known to say "There is no magic in the Magic Kingdom; it's just a whole bunch of details."

Now contrast your convenience store experiences with a trip to Starbucks. Starbucks is very intentional about the management of each of its cues - signage, decor, product offerings, personalization, etc. Starbucks says it is in the business of creating positive experiences while selling coffee.

Customers form their assessments of us during these specific touch points which are under our control and manageable. The good news is that every organization has many touch point opportunities to create stronger customer relationships and loyalty. The bad news is that a customer may form his/her impression of an organization at its weakest touch point - sales, manufacturing, accounting, customer service, etc.

Customer perceptions are also formed at non interpersonal contacts such as websites, product packaging, the appearance of facilities, marketing literature, etc. One research study found that 86% of consumers say they have stopped doing business with an organization[s] after one bad experience. Improving your key touch points may well be a survival issue.

Those organizations that have made a commitment to enhancing their customers' experiences find:

- opportunities to eliminate investing in initiatives which are of low priority to their customers
- enhanced customer experiences can be a differentiator that competitors find difficult to mimic - leading to 'stickiness' and competition-resistant relationships
- lasting customer loyalty and repeat buying behavior are seldom built on pricing alone
- customers who have positive experiences in combination with quality products and service are willing to pay for those experiences
- their efforts often more than pay for themselves in repeat and enhanced buying behavior

Customers don't want to hear how good we say we are. They want to experience it.

Customer loyalty is built one touch point at a time. And this concerted effort has a significant payback in that loyal customers stay with you through difficult times, purchase more and spend a larger 'share of wallet', are proud to recommend you and are more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt. An initiative to enhance your customer touch points requires several steps: identifying your primary customer segments, identifying your points of contact, understanding your customers' needs and expectations during their primary touch points, communicating your customer experience objectives to employees and restructuring those touch points.

It's a chain reaction: positive customer experiences create strong relationships and repeat buying behavior - which generate profits and growth.

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