

Making the most of your customer journey

1. Know your customer channels

What's your customers' experience of your business? And how can you create a better experience that translates into enhanced loyalty and profits? In the first of a series of insights on the customer journey, we'll look at the different ways - some obvious, some not so obvious - that customers interact with you and your brand.



Case study: **Reving up motivation**

We helped a UK motorbike insurer with the communications collateral for their new training programme. The objectives were to motivate their staff and encourage them to become top performers and advocates of the brand. We gave the training an identity and attached a name to each level of attainment. We created a logo, posters, certificates, ceiling hangers and ideas for a leaderboard. Although this is a long-term training programme, the campaign has contributed to a higher first-call resolution rate and sales results have improved by 30%. According to a staff survey, engagement levels have increased by 14%.

It sounds so easy, doesn't it: 'the customer journey'? Like something you tick off a list along with 'user acceptance testing' and 'fulfilment'. All done.

But how well do you really know your customers' journey? What is your customers' experience with your brand at all those touch points? After all, just because you're not receiving any complaints doesn't mean they're happy.

The thing is, the customer journey is always evolving, and so should form part of your company's marketing strategy.

Over the coming weeks we'll look at how you can improve your customer journey, such as understanding your audience, using social media, personalising your approach and measuring success. But we'll start with knowing your customer channels...

Defining the customer journey

Firstly, what do we mean by 'customer journey'? We define it as every point of contact that a prospect or customer has with your brand prior, during and after purchase. It is every marketing channel (sales team, website, email, customer service) that's open to them - or that you make available.

And who are these prospects and customers? For the purposes of this first insight, they are businesses as well as individuals.

The way in which contact points are managed defines your success in converting consumers into customers, and customers into advocates. If done well, all points in the customer journey are directive, helping the customer find the solution they're looking for. They're also intuitive, providing a natural flow of information so the customer doesn't need to search for the next step.

Optimising your customer journey is an ongoing process. See it as a set of dominoes or even a relay race. As your brand evolves or is enhanced across its many channels, every touch point can be affected separately. If not resolved, this will ultimately affect your customers, sales and business results.

Customer touch points: obvious and hidden

A quick exercise: think about all the channels people or other businesses come into contact with during the enquiry and purchase process:

- How does your company generate leads and sales?
- Is your sales team great but your website too sparse?
- Is your website effective but your delivery service letting you down?
- Is your exhibition stand fantastic, but your social media inconsistent or disconnected from your strategy?
- Are your premises state-of-the-art, however there's no parking and your receptionist is not friendly?



Case study: **Food for thought**

We worked with a restaurant chain that was looking to relaunch and shake off previous misconceptions in all areas of its customer journey. Everything from its new unique selling point (USP) to how food was cooked was addressed. While food was the top priority, the entire restaurant experience - from getting out of the car to leaving with a smile - was taken into consideration.

Every point was analysed:

- The staff was briefed about how to speak with customers.
- Food was cooked in open kitchens with a grill for all to see, turning it into a theatre of food.
- Even the car park layouts, signage and paintings on the wall had to follow a specific route.
- Boothed seating along open fires was introduced to give a contemporary yet homely, warm atmosphere.
- The menus also received a full makeover based on how they were used, male vs female. Females, for example, tend to look at desserts first, so the menu needed to include them within it. The new menu made the meal more personalised to the customer, with sauces, sides and mains being a whole customer-led decision.

However, this work was just the start. To retain customers as a high-end restaurant chain, every day is a challenge. Only one customer has to have a poor experience for it to have a huge impact on how they perceive a brand, especially if it's a first-time experience. Examples are a tough steak, cold food, dirty toilets, no available parking, or being served by a waitress with poor manners.

The brand battle in the restaurant industry is ongoing and even while our director continued to work with them their customer experience was constantly reviewed, assessed and changed.

The obvious customer touch points are your website, call centre, sales representatives and stores. However, there are many less obvious elements of the journey that can easily be missed, but nevertheless create an impression in the customer's mind about your brand. For example:

- Do your website links work?
- Are there typos in your marketing?
- Does your shop or restaurant have clean toilets?
- Is your office tidy and you're not tripping over piles of paper or computer cables?
- How quick do you return sales calls or enquiries
What's your customer service plan?

These are the channels that, as a business, you can control quite well. Therefore, it's vital to optimise them so that you're getting the full benefit i.e. sales and leads from them.

If it's about spelling errors, faulty links, cleanliness or tidiness, it's simple to address this with a little more attention to detail. With regard to returning sales calls and customer service, put a service level agreement in place. It provides guidance for your staff and sets the bar against which you measure your performance. To improve sales and leads directly, you will need to test and learn, something we'll go into more detail on in the next insight.

Don't forget your employees

Your employees are the best advocates for your brand - they are the face and voice of it. Do they believe in it? These touch points are less easy to control, but training and giving your staff solid 'reasons to believe' in the brand should help. Employee ownership is another big motivator, ask John Lewis.

Understanding how your staff feels about your company and the brand is important. Employee surveys are very useful barometers, spend some time on getting the questions right and communicate the results, alongside an action plan to improve things, or to celebrate when things go well or have improved.

Find out how your staff wants to receive communication. There's no point creating a weekly email newsletter if no one opens it, or a monthly magazine if it ends up in the bin. Perhaps a communication forum is best? Look at the demographics of your staff and base your communication mix on that. Not sure how to get started? Get an agency in to help you define your requirements and shape your communications strategy.

Staying on top of your game

For all the positives a brand can deliver, this can be wiped out instantly when things go wrong. How a brand responds in that instance can either turn into an even more positive experience (the confirmation bias is changed from negative to positive, reversing the customer's mindset), or seal a brand's fate forever (a permanent breach of trust).

In part 2 we'll look in more detail at how you can improve some of those channels. In the meantime, if you'd like to find out more about how we can help you improve your customer journey, please email enquiries@thewonderland.co.uk.
