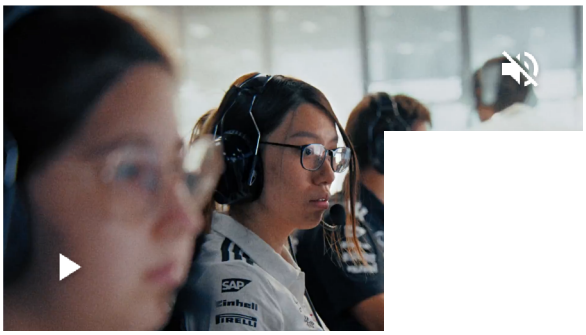
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INNOVATION

Three Steps To Turn Digital Experiences Into Superior Customer Service

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for Forbes Technology Council, COUNCIL POST | Membership (fee-based)

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Have you ever thought of your brand as an emotion? The truth is your brand is much more than a name, product or service. For consumers, a brand is how people feel when they see your logo. It's business common sense that you want them to feel positive about your brand. But do you know how to evoke that feeling? One of the most tried-and-true methods of creating a positive, memorable brand is by delivering superior customer service.

Because the consumer landscape has changed dramatically, it is necessary for organizations to also make dramatic changes. After enduring lockdowns, movement restrictions and remote work, consumers have developed an "anything, anywhere" mindset. The shift from thinking, "The next time I go to the store, I'll get…" to "I'll order this on my phone…" happened faster than many retailers and organizations had time to prepare for. Organizations need to respond accordingly, making their service or product a go-to with anytime fulfillment.

Why the sudden hyperfocus on customer service? Actually, it's not so sudden. Consumerism has been growing steadily, and people have always been emotionally

invested in their favorite brands. The last several years have shown that customers will stay even more loyal to brands they love, even if cheaper options exist. Many companies are making that emotional connection a part of their service strategy.

In my company's recent Innovation Index report, we surveyed 1,000 IT and business executives across 16 industries, from manufacturing to financial services. When it came to creating digital experiences for their customer, 57% of respondents said customer wants and needs are changing too quickly to provide high-quality experiences. Meanwhile, just 39% consider digital experiences to be critical to satisfaction and loyalty.

What's considered a superior customer experience? Start by thinking about an ongoing and continuous cycle rather than simply completing a transaction. Then think of the customer experience as an ecosystem that touches many groups: operations, employees, supply chain and customers.

The superior experience relies heavily on the user experience; it incorporates design thinking with simple, clear and relevant communications. It's an interconnected web of touchpoints, from personalized communications and order tracking to preference management and data security.

How does a company start its journey to superior customer service? Read on to find out.

Step 1: Find out what they want.

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It's data that holds all the cards in the customer service game. Because the more you know about your customer, the better you'll serve them. Extracting insights from data is the challenge. While the information is most certainly available, identifying the right data points that impact your operational strategy and improve the digital experience most is imperative. If you're collecting data but not using it to make informed decisions about reaching and keeping customers, then data is just sitting collecting dust.

Action plan: Dig deep into data and use it to develop a strategic platform to build your superior customer experience plan.

Step 2: Flatter them with personalization.

Now that data is your customer information secret sauce, it's time to put the "person" in personalization. This is where AI comes in. With AI-based platforms, you're showing your customers that you know who they are and what they want by providing personalized incentives and making certain you're easily accessible when they have questions.

Creating seamless omnichannel experiences and offering richer, two-way connections with customers works in two ways: It improves the experience the

customer has with your brand and allows even more data collection for you through communication avenues like a chat thread.

Action plan: Optimize every touchpoint with AI-powered data.

Step 3: Keep them coming back.

Now that you've gained customers, grow with them. Continuously refine digital experiences to keep customers engaged and part of the customer ecosystem you've created. Employ digital governance to help keep each new platform and application in sync. By establishing clear guidelines for all internal digital stakeholders, from the apps development team and IT to marketing and HR, all experiences should follow the same theme and align with common goals within and outside the organization.

Action plan: Keep investing in technology to grow with your customer and ensure digital experiences are part of a broad governance plan.

Remember that loyalty goes beyond a repeat purchase. Engaging with customers outside the transactional sphere includes many layers of retention. For example, customers following a brand on social media, engaging with a brand's content and signing up for regular communications are all part of the retention goal.

Superior customer service leads to greater revenue. Customers are craving more attention and ease when connecting with organizations, partners and retailers. It's time to give the customer what they want.

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