

HOW MARKETERS CAN CREATE

A Smooth Customer Experience in 2020

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How Marketers Can Create a Smooth Customer Experience in 2020

We operate in a world where customer expectations for brands are high. [Shep Hyken writing for Forbes said,](#)



Your customers no longer compare you just to your direct competition. You are being compared to the best service they have ever received.

As a marketer, it can feel impossible to create a customer journey that rivals the best a customer has ever experienced. In order to accomplish that, marketers must reframe how they approach customer expectations so they can ease the customer journey.

One way to do that is through customer experience marketing, which is an approach that moves away from selling products and towards meeting customer expectations and delivering personalized experiences that offer true value.

What is the customer experience?

Before we talk about customer experience marketing, let's back up a little bit to discuss customer experience.

Customer experience (CX) is the sum of every interaction a customer has with a business, both pre- and post-sale. Marketing teams not only influence the customer experience, but essentially create the pre-sales customer experience journey.

While many marketing teams focus on capturing traffic and converting it to MQLs, they may not realize that they're shaping a customer's first impression of a brand. And the expectations customers have at that stage are high. [According to Salesforce](#), "About half of customers say most companies fall short of their expectations for great experiences... customers expect companies to understand and care about them as individuals and treat them accordingly."



Why should marketers make CX central to their strategy?

For marketing teams under pressure to deliver a target number of leads or generate a certain threshold of traffic, it can be difficult to really care about the impact they have on the customer journey.

However, the ability marketing teams have to influence the customer journey can directly impact the bottom line.

[According to a study from Temkin Group](#), a moderate increase in customer experience generates an average revenue increase of \$823 million over three years for a company with \$1 billion in annual revenues.

On top of that, [83% of CMOs](#) say delivering a customer experience that is seamless and consistent across all channels is key to future business success. But in order to achieve that, marketing teams need to rethink how CX fits into the larger marketing strategy.

Katie Howe, Dentsu Aegis' UK executive director of creative and commerce, explains that "CMOs are increasingly seeing that they need to transform their business and not just optimize what they've got today," she says.

But how can CMOs and their marketing teams transform their strategy to focus on generating more revenue through a better customer experience? Read on for actionable tips on how to get started.



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say delivering a customer experience that is **seamless and consistent across all channels** is key to future business success.

Establish a unified brand strategy across the company

Customers want consistent messaging, information, and service when they interact with a brand.

They may not know, and certainly don't care, if they're receiving information from a marketing team or an account manager.

They want your brand to feel like a consistent experience.

In order to create a feeling of a consistent brand, your entire company needs to be aligned on the brand strategy, which should be owned by marketing leadership. However, [according to a recent study by IDG and Siteimprove](#), 44% of companies say consistent messaging and brand compliance are a challenge, indicating that there's still work to be done.

What is a brand strategy?

Your brand strategy is the plan for how you solve your customers' needs with your unique capabilities as a company.

If you break that down, you can see a few concrete components:

Your brand strategy is **1 the plan for how you solve** **2 your customers' needs** with **3 your unique capabilities as a company** **4 now and in the future.**

Below, we'll dive into each of these four components and how marketing can work them into their strategy for creating a better digital customer experience.



1

This is what you, the customer, can expect from us when it comes to addressing your needs.

2

We understand who you are, what you want to solve, and what you're struggling with.

3

This is how we're positioned to do something about your problem now.

4

This is how we'll foster our relationship with you in the long run.

1 Setting customer expectations

Your plan for solving your customers' needs: what customers can expect from you as a brand.



Often, when we talk about customer experience, we talk about customer expectations, but we don't address the other side of the problem: what marketers do to set customer expectations.

How we experience a situation is the result of two things: the experience itself and our expectations about what that experience will be like. There have been many [studies](#) and [stories](#) about how our expectations shape our experiences as parents, patients, educators, and, especially, as consumers.

Dr. Breuning, Professor Emerita of Management at California State University, explains,

“

Expectations are the core of our brain's strategy for making sense of the world. Your brain is constantly generating an expectation and then comparing new inputs to it. When reality matches the expectation, dopamine is released, and you move on to the next expectation. If a mismatch is perceived, cortisol provokes closer inspection.”

When we, as businesses, are transparent with our customers about what they can expect in terms of wait times, product quality/features, levels of service, etc., [customers are actually more likely to value the service](#) (even if it takes longer).

According to Salesforce's global State of Marketing report, only half (49%) of the surveyed marketing leaders across both B2C and B2B brands believe they provide an experience completely aligned with their customer's expectations—leaving a lot of room for marketing teams to align expectations with customers.

Before we set about creating plans for a delightful CX, we have to be transparent with customers about what their experience will be like. We have to be honest and realistic in our marketing messaging.

Deliveroo's chief marketing officer Inés Ures commented on this, saying,

“

One of the most interesting things about customer experience is around expectation – generally the perception of a 'good' customer experience will depend on setting expectations rather than a defined standard of what 'good' is.”

Actionable tips for being transparent in marketing:



1

Set clear timelines. When it comes to delivery times or the time it takes for a sales rep to get in touch with a prospect, set a clear expectation for when customers can expect something.

2

Don't overstate how easy or fast it is to get started. Have you ever seen “three simple steps to get started,” then ended up using the better part of an hour getting an account setup? Avoid overstating the simplicity of account creation on your signup pages. When a customer sets up an account, show a numbered progress bar during the account set up. This keeps customers engaged and sets their expectations for how long account creation will take.

3

Set clear, actionable brand promises. In your website copy, taglines, email subject lines, etc. make your brand promise clear and actionable. Let customers know what to expect and don't over promise on the benefits (e.g. time or money saved, faster than average shipping times, etc.).

4

Use specific customer quotes or reviews that align with your brand promise in your marketing materials. This will reinforce a customer's expectations from their peers.

5

Use visuals to set expectations. Show a customer what they can expect in terms of your product or service. Use accurate product photos or screenshots. Don't over-edit or over-simplify.

6

Survey current customers about their experience, then use that data in your messaging. If you think your product or service significantly saves your customers money, but only 10% of them report that in the survey, then you need to revise your messaging to more honestly reflect the reality of your current customers.

2 Getting to know your customers

Your customers' needs: understanding what your audience want to solve

This element of the brand strategy puts CX at the heart of marketing by showing customers that your brand understands them, what they want to solve, and what they struggle with.

One of the key elements of creating a better CX is data.

“Customer data has become the key ingredient in providing a better customer experience,”

said Tom Davis, Chief Marketing Officer at Forbes Media.

“Those who fail to adapt to this will fall behind.”

While analytics and predictive data models are key to anticipating customer needs, it isn't enough to understand the nuances of what customers need and want. Effective customer experience marketing requires big customer data as well as personal meetings and 1-1 customer interactions.

Democratization of data

Customer data allows teams to see the previous customer touchpoints, including support tickets, purchases, behavior, consumed content, received emails, etc. While this type of data is invaluable for teams wishing to segment based on actions take or behavior, it is often inaccessible (only 21% of companies **report their data is accessible for the right people**).

Traditional company structures put data in the hands of IT teams or account management. Having a consolidated place for full customer journey data is rare: 94% of companies are currently not capable of seeing the entire breadth of their customers' experience, according to **a Forbes Insights study**.

In order for data to be the heart of customer experience, companies need to undergo the process of data democratization. Giving all teams access to appropriate



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of companies

are currently **not capable of seeing the entire breadth of their customers' experience.**

customer data will allow them to make data-driven decisions faster, segment customer engagement campaigns based on behavior, address a customer's question based on their previous touchpoints, provide customized content—and, ultimately, get to know the customer better and anticipate their needs.

[A study by Aberdeen Group found](#) that companies using analytics to craft customer engagement initiatives have significantly higher cross-sell and upsell revenues, better returns on marketing investment, and higher annual profits compared with those that don't.



Actionable tips for democratizing data:



1

Foster a data driven culture. Increase data literacy within the organization by training teams to read and understand the data that means the most for their departmental goals. Create measurable KPIs for business goals and track them on open and transparent dashboards. And, most importantly, make decisions based on your available data.

2

Create user permissions. This is key for a secure customer journey. GDPR and other data privacy legislation means that access to personal customer information should be restricted. Give teams access to data they need and will find useful, but don't give everyone blanket access to all information.

3

Elect an analytics rep for each team. Your company doesn't necessarily need a team of data analysts and data scientists to be data driven. Choose 1-2 natural data talents from each team and give them more training on how to set up automated dashboards, troubleshoot issues, and how to pull the rights kinds of data for their team.

4

Use a single source of truth. Marketing teams have long struggled with tool-fatigue. Ensure your marketing team (and wider business) has a common language for discussing data and a single, trusted source for your metrics.

Customer listening



While providing truly remarkable CX-based marketing now relies heavily on data and predictive analytics, it's still incredibly important for marketing teams (and the wider organization) to meet regularly with customers.

[According to Ryan Buell Professor at Harvard Business School](#), “it has long been believed that the more contact an operation has with its customers, the less efficiently it runs,” but that’s actually not the case at all. On the contrary,



the deliberate design of windows into and out of the organization’s operations help customers and employees alike understand and appreciate the value being created.”

One way to marry data and face-to-face customer interactions in a scalable way is to build customer segments based on behavior data, then talk to a representative group frequently. This allows marketing teams to get more context for behavioral trends directly from customers.

“Brands don’t communicate in one direction these days; it is a two-way conversation in real time with savvy and discerning customers,” [says Carolina Martinoli](#), director of brand and customer experience at British Airways.

Take a YOU-centric approach

By talking to your customers more, your marketing team can move away from traditional marketing, which is me-centric, towards you-centric marketing. Me-centric marketing focuses on me (the company), what we do, why we’re the best, and why you should buy from us.

You-centric marketing flips that dynamic on its head—it focuses on the customer completely. Shahla Hegets, Founder and CEO of Think Media Consulting, [describes you-centric marketing](#) like this: “it requires that the needs of your business are not the driving force of your customer interactions... It means

that this isn’t all about you. It is about your audience and their needs.”

When marketing teams meet with customers regularly, they understand how to approach marketing and messaging from the customers’ point of view and solve their needs. That, in turn, breeds brand trust and eases them along their customer journey—and that the essence of CX marketing.

On the other hand, “marketing that fails to account for the user’s mindset runs the risk of being disruptive and unhelpful,” says [Andrew Capland, director of growth at Wistia](#).

Actionable tips for better customer listening:



1

Focus on being useful. Your team should consistently ask “How can we be useful to people and not so product focused?” Instead of pushing your product, be valuable to your customers. Ask customers for specifics on the type of information they find genuinely helpful.

2

Meet with customers regularly. Create representative customer groups and have your marketing team meet with them regularly. Get feedback on messaging, content, and campaigns. Ask about their pain points and the problems they want to solve.

3

Sit with the CX team once a month. Have your marketing team members sit with the CX team one day out of every month or quarter. Have them listen in on calls, take notes on frequent complaints and questions. See if there are questions marketing can solve higher up in the funnel. Learn about the topics and formats customers are interested in.

4

Aggregate customer feedback. Your company should have a single source of customer truth. Aggregate customer feedback in that platform so your marketing team can see overall trends, then drill down into individual responses for more information and follow-up.

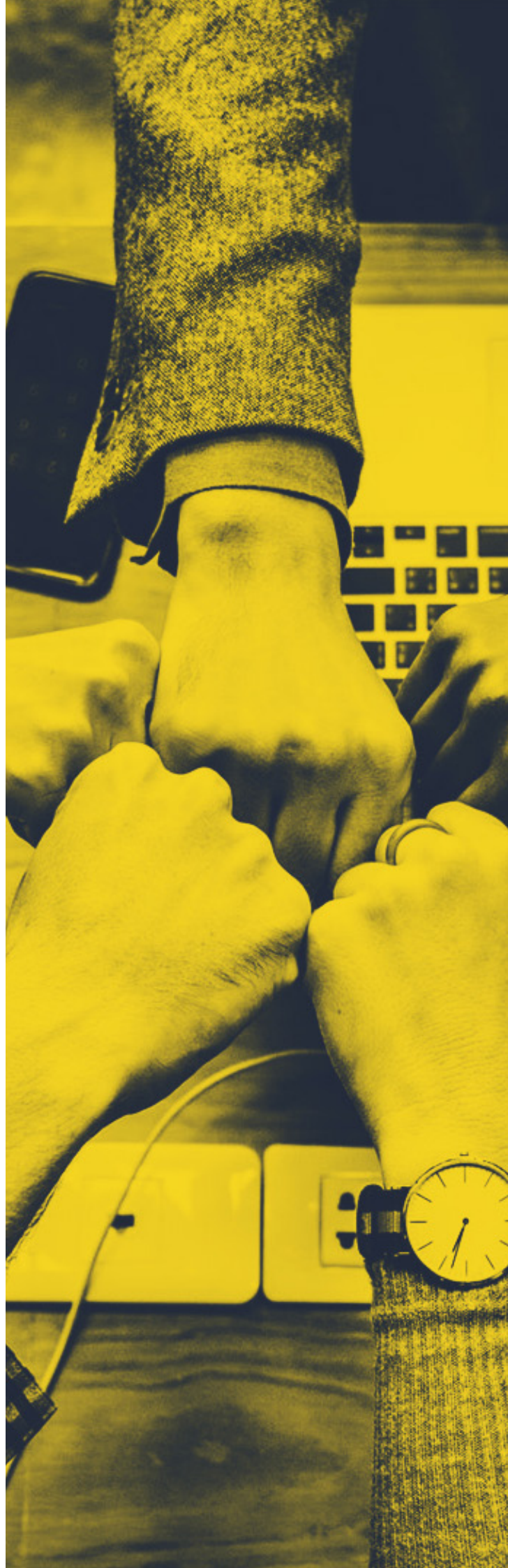
3 Empowering individuals and teams

Your capabilities as a company: this is how we're positioned to do something about your problem.

This is how we're positioned to do something about your problem.

One of the key components for marketing teams looking to create a smooth customer journey is their ability to quickly make decisions and react to changing customer circumstances.

As data becomes democratized and teams meet with customers regularly, individuals and teams have the insights to make informed decisions that give customers the right information quickly. When it comes to marketing's role in this process, there are two important aspects to cover: breaking down silos and social media.



Every department “owns” the customer journey



As [Maria Osipova](#), vice president of marketing at MediaValet, nicely puts it:

66

“The most effective strategy marketing leaders can drive is ensuring that everyone ‘owns’ the customer.”

Marketing has traditionally been further removed from the customer, and certainly hasn’t taken any type of ownership over the customer journey. But in order to create a truly seamless journey between different company touchpoints, every team and every employee must have a stake in the success of the customer journey.

Experts and data alike back this up:

- [Nearly 60% of respondents in a McKinsey study](#) from leader companies strongly agree that their customer service, sales, and marketing functions must work closely together to improve the customer experience.
- [According to Ryan Buell Professor at Harvard Business School](#), “Employees suffer when they are cut off from the business’s front lines, as they lose the motivation and enjoyment that comes from making a difference in people’s lives and are denied the opportunities to learn and improve that arise from interaction with customers.”
- [48% of businesses](#) say siloed working behavior is the greatest barrier to delivering a smooth customer experience.

When every department “owns” the customer journey, it’s easier to execute on cross-functional, collaborative, and agile marketing activities. The traditional bureaucracy that slows down customer engagement initiatives falls away, as the entire company works towards a single vision of the customer journey.

Companies that hope to survive must evolve to meet this challenge. The nature of how customers interact with brands is changing dramatically. According to research from Forrester, 95% of customers use three or more channels to connect with a company in a single service interaction, with 62% using more than one device. On top of that, Accenture found that 65% of customers expressed frustration over inconsistent experiences or information presented across channels.

Customers don't differentiate between channels or departments—they want a cohesive experience. In order to achieve that, the marketing team and entire organization must have a customer-centric approach. This keeps engagement initiatives customer-centric, responsive to changing demands, and encourages all departments to own the journey.



95%
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62%
of customers

use **more than one device** to contact a company.

65%
of customers

expressed **frustration over inconsistent experiences or information presented across channels**

Actionable tips for company-wide customer ownership:



1

Create cross-functional teams with members from marketing, CX, sales, and product in order to develop end-to-end customer initiatives that truly address the customer's needs. Encourage teams to sit together often.

2

Use sprints or agile methodology to execute on work quickly and respond to changing customer behavior and demands.

3

Get customer feedback consistently, so teams are able to iterate on their campaigns and gain a deeper understanding of the customer.

4

Use long-term metrics that are specific to each department's goals. This ensures each team is incentivized to achieve a better customer journey within a collaborative environment.

Social media: the frontlines for agile CX

According to The Harvard Business Review, “successful customer experiences are anchored on social media.” Why? “The speed at which social works and the ability and expectation to actually engage with customers is becoming greater every day,” [says Douglas Palmer, a principal at Deloitte](#).

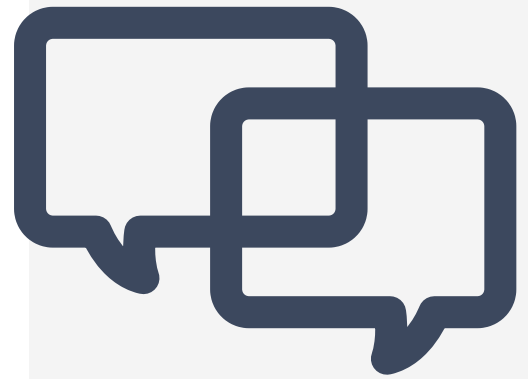
Customers are empowered with social media like never before to express their thoughts, feedback, and feelings. They can instantly interact with a brand in a private message or in a public post. Because of that, many companies put social media at the forefront of their customer experience investments.

For context, according to the same Harvard Business Review study, 42% of businesses think social media is extremely important for the customer experience now, and 75% think it will be extremely important by 2020.

Social media isn't simply for answering customer questions or offering support. Instead, leading companies use social channels for product awareness, lead gen, sales, and reputation management. These companies don't see social media as simply a technology or inexpensive marketing channel. Rather, social media is front and center in the personalized experience they provide customers.

And these businesses have the results to back up their approach: companies with integrated CX social media programs experience stronger revenue growth and much higher quality customer experiences.

The modern customer journey isn't linear. Customers look for product reviews, testimonials, guides, tips, and more at all stages of their journey, and they often turn to social for content and input.



42%
think

SoMe is **extremely**
important for CX now.



75%
think

it will be **extremely**
important by 2020.

Actionable tips for owning the social media customer journey:



1

Informed, empowered teams are everything. In order for CX and marketing teams to give customers what they need on social channels, they need transparent insight into the touchpoints that a customer or prospect has had with the company previously. Teams should be empowered to respond quickly, so customers get the information they need, when they need it.

2

Be proactive. Companies need to have social listening tools in place so teams can pick up on questions and trends before they land in a Facebook direct message. Be proactive by reaching out directly to users talking about your brand.

3

Become more comfortable with risk. The speed at which social media moves means teams must react quickly. It also means that mistakes will happen. Companies must create a culture that's more comfortable with risk. Employees should be thoroughly trained on brand voice, appropriate responses, and when to escalate a situation.

4

Use a transparent social platform. A unified platform where social messages can be seen across all channels is imperative for a smooth customer journey. In the face of system outages or a website going down, teams need to have the ability to stop scheduled social messages about unrelated activities.

4 Foster customer loyalty and never stop

Now and in the future: This is how we'll foster our relationship with you in the long run.

There's a very strong business case to be made for fostering customer loyalty in the long run. [Harvard Business School found](#) that increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25% to 95%.

It's also 16 times as expensive to build a long-term business relationship with a new client than to maintain the loyalty of an existing customer.

[According to Oracle](#), customers are loyal to brands for the following reasons:

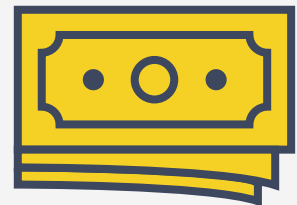
- Friendly employees or customer service representatives (73%)
- The ability to easily find the information or help they need (55%)
- Personalized experiences (36%)
- Brands with a good reputation (33%).

In the same study, when asked specifically how companies can better engage with consumers to spend more, respondents said the following:

- Improve the overall customer experience (54%)
- Make it easy to ask questions and access information before making a purchase (52%)
- Improve search functionality and overall website usability (36%).

It's clearly important for brands to offer value to customers: help, information, and personalization at the right time. And that isn't exactly rocket science. It's simply a matter of brands offering helpful, tailored information at the right time in the buying process and being available to help customers immediately.

To do that consistently, across all departments and all channels, remains hugely challenging for many brands.



it costs
16x
more

**to build a relationship
with a new client than
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of an existing one.**

Actionable tips for building customer loyalty:



1

Show appreciation. Your current customers keep your business afloat (and keep your team employed!). Show long-term customers that you appreciate them with loyalty programs, discounts, or invitations to in-person events.

2

Ask for feedback. There's always room for improvement. Ask customers for feedback on recent interactions with your team, the materials they received, an event you hosted, or a new product/service. When customers give feedback, they also become invested in the results.

3

Offer a thorough onboarding. The initial account creation or purchase is only the very beginning of your relationship with a customer. Invest in its longevity by offering a thorough onboarding program—complete with video tutorials, thorough and helpful information, and a nurture flow that lets customers know they're being looked after.

4

Personalize the experience. [70% of customers](#) say understanding how they use products and services is very important to winning their business. Tailor your offers and communications to each customer's behavior and preferences.

Learn more



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