How do you attract and retain customers in a world where they're writing the rules?

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In today's competitive global market, good customer experience isn't enough. From one industry to another, customers are demanding the 'wow' factor. They expect to be able to deal with organisations at any time, moving seamlessly between different channels, and they expect to encounter great customer experience at every point along the way.

So how do you gain customers' trust and loyalty in an environment where they are writing the rules? The first step is to place them at the centre of your organisation, where they belong. A sustainable corporate culture depends on listening to your customers and those who engage with them. This isn't a once-off program where you can tick the box and move on, but a seismic shift in organisational thinking.

Back in the day
When I started working in the exciting area of Customer Experience (CX), the phone and face-to-face channels overwhelmingly dominated customers' engagement with large organisations. Staff in contact centres handled queries in specialised workplaces where customers communicated almost exclusively over the phone, sometimes supplemented by faxes (remember them?).

Email was a relatively new channel. Customers were keen to use it, but it was time-consuming to administer. At first, unanswered emails simply piled up in staff members' inboxes, and customers' email communications were lost. The situation improved after email management systems became readily available, allowing staff to deal with the most

common enquiries from a prepared script, forward more complex enquiries to the best-skilled consultants, and record email exchanges in a customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Now, contact centres have evolved to offer a wider menu of communication channels. Although many customers still rely on contact by phone, a growing number prefer to use other channels, or at least begin in them. They will use search engines to locate suppliers and follow them up on the Internet, make enquiries through online chat or post questions and comments on social media. There is also much stronger demand for information to be incorporated into apps that can be accessed on mobile phones and tablets.

So how do you attract and retain customers in this technological age?
The simple answer is that you develop a comprehensive, proactive CX strategy that incorporates an omnichannel strategy providing a seamless customer experience across multiple channels and touchpoints. A robust CX strategy will help your organisation understand:

- who your customers are
- the journeys they undertake when they interact with your company
- the customer channels and touchpoints customers leverage to interact with your organisation
- who is responsible for designing that experience, and how others in the business can play a part
- what success looks like, and how it can be measured.

A robust CX strategy will enable your organisation to achieve:

- greater customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty
- lower customer churn and better retention
- higher referral rates and easier customer acquisition
- greater employee satisfaction
- competitive advantage, leading to higher revenue and growth.

When a CX strategy is achieving its objectives, customer experience will be transformed, allowing a point of differentiation.

Customer journey mapping is key
One invaluable tool in developing CX strategy, which I've introduced successfully in a number of Australian household name companies, is customer journey mapping. It is a key input into service design. It's especially useful when organisations want to provide a seamless, low-effort experience for customers across all contact channels, because it provides a consistent point of view from which to watch complex interactions unfold.

Put simply, customer journey mapping allows you to see your organisation through your customers' eyes. The idea of a customer journey map is that it traces how customers interact with an organisation, providing a view from their perspective. Creating it encourages people inside the organisation to put themselves in their customers' shoes and trace the stages through which customers pass as they interact with the organisation. It

also maps their sentiment at each of these stages. Empathising with a different person's perspective helps see the organisation's processes from another person's point of view and observe where they are out of kilter with customers' needs.

Remember that when customers are dealing with your organisation, they aren't aware of its internal processes, silos and communications. They only know what they can see and hear from outside, and that's what affects their emotional state and their opinion of your organisation. Following customers through their dealings with your organisation and understanding what they are going through helps to suggest where the organisation should focus its attention if it wants to make the experience better.

There's no set template for a journey map, but the central thread that holds it together is the series of steps customers take when they purposefully interact with an organisation to satisfy their wants or needs. The customer whose interactions are being followed is a human being who is constantly thinking, feeling and acting, and all these dimensions should play a part in mapping their contact as it unfolds over time. The steps they take will vary with the activity, though many interactions have common stages determined by the transaction itself. I include an entire chapter on journey mapping and a sample journey map in my new book Good to Great CX, which shows you how to assemble a journey may for your own organisation.

Testing and measuring

When you have mapped your customers' experience, you can't sit back and relax, you have to implement the CX strategy and measure its success. This is where what I call 'CX Metrics' comes into play. Measures can include:

- Customer satisfaction (CSAT)
- Customer loyalty
- Customer ease scores
- Customer retention levels
- Staff performance in rolling out the strategy
- Financial metrics – your bottom line.

I have been working in customer experience for almost 20 years. In Good to Great CX, I offer practical advice, case studies and templates to give you a head start in designing, implementing and sustaining a 'wow' customer experience. My 'how-to' approach leverages industry data and insights to help you build new approaches that will transform your organisation's CX from good to great. BFM