

Walgreens Expands Medication Disposal To 1,500 Stores In Opioid Battle

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By Lisa Wirthman

The most innovative businesses are shifting their focus from products and services to a customer-centric approach aimed at creating effortless consumer experiences.

Simplicity is key to this digital business transformation. Rather than trying to wow customers with unneeded bells and whistles, companies that make it painless for customers to use their products and services are more likely to win their loyalty.

“At the end of the day, what we’re trying to do is reinforce the importance of understanding customers,” said Aimee Lucas, vice president at Temkin Group. “What is that big thing they are trying to accomplish?”

Keeping It Simple

Companies that focus too heavily on whiz-bang product features may miss out on opportunities to simplify customers’ lives. In that category are technologies that add convenience or save time — for example, smartphones that allow event tickets to be scanned or digital deposits to be made to your bank account. Self-service options, including digital messaging and chatbots, provide alternatives to sitting on hold with customer service.

Companies that underestimate the customer experience do so at their own peril. Some 77 percent of U.S. adults say that valuing their time is the most important thing a company can do to provide them with good service, [according to Forrester Research](#).

“Customers need to be able to get the value they are looking for in as easy a way as possible,” said Rick Parrish, principal customer experience analyst at Forrester Research. “Making things easy is oftentimes about solving a bunch of tiny little pain points that individually might not seem like a big deal, but over a whole customer journey become a massive improvement.”

Research shows that customers who exerted minimal effort to get problems resolved [are 94 percent more likely](#) to repurchase items from an organization and 88 percent more likely to increase the amount they spend.

An Emotional Journey

Customers form their perceptions of their experience with an organization in three ways, Lucas said. First, whether the experience helps customers achieve their goals. Second, how easy the experience is for customers. Third, how it makes customers feel.

When Temkin Group asked U.S. consumers to rate their experiences with nearly 400 companies across 20 industries, a positive emotional response was the strongest driver of loyalty, Lucas said.

“When you look at behavioral economics, emotion is a fundamental way of how we make decisions; it is a fundamental part of how our memories are shaped,” she said. “It’s really about how we remember those experiences and the stories we tell others that impact the decisions we make in the future about doing business with that company again.”

Powered By Digital

From intelligent self-service options to mobile apps to voice-activated chatbots, digital technologies minimize customers’ effort and improve their emotional experiences. In 2016, Delta Air Lines launched a mobile tracking app to provide flyers with real-time updates about their baggage. It informs customers that a bag is successfully loaded on a plane and where in baggage claim to retrieve it. The app also notifies travelers if a bag is lost and connects them to customer service from the plane via in-flight Wi-Fi to resolve the problem.

The airline identified common travel frustrations and used digital technology in small ways to reassure flyers that their bags are being carefully monitored, and make it easier to resolve problems when something goes wrong, Lucas said.

Putting People First

[The trick to improving any customer experience with digital technologies is not to put the technology first](#), says Forrester’s Parrish. “You have to go into it by identifying where you can improve the ease, the emotion and the effectiveness of the customer experience,” he said.

The most innovative companies are designing and redesigning their products and services from a human-centric perspective, Parrish added. Customers don’t want just a digital experience, he said: “What they want is a better customer experience.” For example, [Amazon Go stores](#) enable customers to skip the hassle of checkout lines.



Companies can look across industries to find inspiration for how to resolve common pain points. That's because customers are no longer comparing experiences within a single product category, according to Lucas.

"I don't compare my banking experience only to other bank experiences," she said. "I am comparing my bank experience to my best experiences with [those of] my favorite airline, with my favorite restaurant and with my favorite retailer."

Digital technologies are great tools, but they aren't helpful unless they have a purpose. One of the best puts consumers first by creating a simple and easy customer experience.

Lisa Wirthman is a journalist who writes about business, public policy and women's issues.