

How businesses can create lasting impressions, retain customers for a long time

By  Mark Wilson

25 Oct 2019

Customer engagement has become a top priority for many companies, but no two customers are the same, so it becomes hard to define. Companies need to rather take a step back and understand the fundamentals of what customer engagement actually means, looping back to customer intimacy as a starting point.



Image credit: Joshua Rodriguez on Unsplash.

Before organisations can start building an engagement model, they need to build customer intimacy – which is an advanced form of a customer-centric organisation. Customer intimacy results in enhanced customer experiences which leads to higher engagement. It is about making lasting connections with customers.

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This will have a direct impact on a company's bottom line. A Walker [study](#) found that by 2020, customer experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator.

To survive today's competitive environment, companies need to become customer-centric placing focus on customer intimacy. This is where companies can set themselves apart from their competition, by going the extra mile in the customer journey, past the point-of-sale.

Instead of thinking how much I can sell to this customer, companies need to think how can I best meet the customers' needs and wants by tailoring products or services accordingly, adding extra value to their customers' businesses.

Yet, too often companies still experience a disconnect, where they tout the latest design or technology but have not placed any focus on the meaningful aspects of customer engagement. They do not understand the value of customer relationships beyond a measure of revenue.



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A company can no longer rely on its product or service, it needs to delve deeper and go beyond that and look at the emotional element to build a long-lasting relationship with its customers if it is to see success.

Companies that successfully cultivate customer-centricity and intimacy generate increased business through referrals and have a high product adoption rate and a low churn. Not to mention, see growth.

Understanding your customers

Companies need to take a step back and determine who exactly are their customers, which industries they operate in, and identify the main drivers within those industries.

In fact, according to PwC's [Global Consumer Insights Survey 2019](#), customers share behavioural and attitudinal attributes across different industries.

So, overlaying these traits with demographics can help companies yield a more richly detailed customer profile than looking at demographics alone.



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Understanding customers challenges

When embarking on the customer engagement journey, companies must always look at things from a customer viewpoint, understanding what their challenges are and then re-engineering everything back.

For companies to truly understand their customers, they need to understand both their macro and micro-challenges. For example, a macro-level challenge in the food and beverage industry would be traceability whereas in the automotive space it may be about the recalling of products when defects occur.

Customers' micro-challenges are usually centred around new trends. Take the listeriosis outbreak, for example. Companies need to look at how customers are gearing for these types of reputational damage issues.



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Level of intimacy

Next on the list is understanding what level of intimacy customers are looking for. This is often aligned with their organisational goals and transformational agenda.

Some customers are satisfied with just being in maintenance mode, receiving support when and as they need it, while others are on an aggressive digitalisation path, requiring a high level of engagement. Others are only interested in optimising their current systems, introducing additional functionality to get better working capital.

So, it is important to gain clarity into the level of intimacy each customer expects from you as an organisation if the relationship is to last going forward.

Industry language

Customer intimacy goes beyond just talking to customers, it is a two-way connection while talking their language and being seen as a trusted advisor.

Companies that display their knowledge of their customers' industries by talking the industry language show they have an in-depth understanding and knowledge not only of their customer but their business too.

According to a PwC [report](#), 46% of customers will take their business elsewhere if faced with an experience where employees lack knowledge. Companies need to continuously ask themselves, are we able to speak the customer or industry language?



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Innovative

Customer-centric organisations understand the fundamental needs of their customers, seeing the world through their eyes. Companies that can successfully achieve a high level of customer engagement will see even greater results, and a result brings innovative services and products to the market.

Creating a competitive advantage from customer engagement and intimacy is a journey, not a destination. It is a long-term process that involves a commitment from organisations to create an intimate and deep understanding of their customers and to then use this in-depth understanding to guide strategic decisions at all levels.

ABOUT MARK WILSON

Mark Wilson is the Managing Director of SYSPRO Africa, who defines and oversees the go-to-market and channel strategies, identifies key growth areas and develops new partnerships across the continent. Mark believes strongly in a customer-centric approach and the importance of recognising and understanding a customer's specific business needs.

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