

Digital experiences customers want

By [Dipuo Tshoagong](#), issued by [Wunderman Thompson](#)

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I recently watched a [video](#) that got me thinking about the kinds of digital experiences customers want from brands they choose to give their hard-earned money to. Granted, the video is a couple of years old, but it is still relevant. In the video, a guy is inside a shop buying items on his list. Still, he keeps getting interrupted by "cookie monsters". The "cookie monsters" are trying to sell him random things he has no interest in. "People who bought that also bought this," one of the "cookie monsters" says to him. At one point, one of them puts an item in his basket without his approval which he takes out and gives back to her. She retorts with an "are you sure you want to remove this item from your basket?" much to the shopper's annoyance. The video successfully sheds light on horrible digital experiences too many of us can relate to.



Dipuo Tshoagong

A common misconception is that digital refers to social media, but it's not that simple. The digital experience talks to all digital touchpoints where consumers interact with a brand's messages, products, and services. Social media channels are just one part of it – but websites, online banking platforms, touchscreens in-store all qualify as digital touchpoints, and Covid has fast-tracked the need to offer a seamless, intuitive and easy navigation path through those 'journeys'.

When a customer visits a website, can they find what they are looking for in the shortest possible time? If they are making a purchase, are they able to make payments seamlessly? Are they given different payment options to manage anxieties they might have about online payment risks? Can they make changes to their order before delivery, and if so, how? Are expectations about the delivery of goods or services managed? Do they have an opportunity to choose if they want updates from the company or track progress themselves? Are there systems in place internally to flag if there will be a delay in delivering the product or service, and how quickly can the company get this communication out? The list of what we call user experience considerations is almost endless. The backend of the site needs to support what the front-end looks like and displays to customers, which means it likely needs to pull information from a range of different sources and databases. Getting this right involves, at minimum, a mix of skills that straddles learnt behaviour, neuropsychology, retail psychology and service design.

Jeff Bezos once said, "the best customer service is if the customer doesn't need to call you, doesn't need to talk to you, it just works", there's a lot of truth to this. Everything should just work. Little details go a long way towards giving customers the digital experiences they have come to expect. One bad experience can mean a lost sale or customer.

When it comes to service, brands are increasingly finding that the erstwhile call-centre has morphed into full-blown

customer care offered through their social media channels. The days of using these platforms to simply push out brand and product messages are over - consumers have and will use what they deem to be a direct line to comment, complain and ask questions, and they expect to get a response within an hour of posting. This makes social media an important touchpoint in the digital customer service experience. The reality is that companies are better off not having a social media presence if they cannot respond to customer posts and issues. Excellent social media customer service is more than just the “Hi, sorry to hear that, please DM us your details”. Community managers who add value need to do a whole lot more than turn frowns into smiles in just a few characters. They should also be able to respond in a customers’ preferred language and should stay true to the brand’s personality and tone – it’s a crucial part of the marketing mix that has been sorely undervalued and misunderstood by too many brands who have found themselves managing a crisis as a result of poor community management.

It was Nelson Mandela who said, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.” It begs the question - are companies getting to the hearts of their customers by not just giving them a superior digital experience but by also engaging with them in their own language?

There’s a South African telco that has mastered this art of social media customer service. One of their great successes is their investment into servicing customer queries and complaints across social media – they run a full-blown command centre – and their biggest successes include moments when they have shifted sentiment from negative to positive by using local vernacular languages to interact with irate customers. The principles applied to build this immensely successful customer offering are all founded on best practice digital experiences.

Ultimately it boils down to the right balance between human skillset, technology, and tools; and knowing how to implement these elements to guide consumers through their purchasing decision or customer care journey. Analysing and tracking usage and patterns of behaviour are a crucial part of the mix and requires a shift in service design priority from sales to optimising customer experiences. Of course, sales keep businesses going, but poor customer experiences can drive sales out the door, sometimes permanently. It’s a risk any forward-looking business should not take.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dipuo Tshoagong is the head of social media community management at Wunderman Thompson SA.

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