

How customer communication will evolve in 2021

By  Brent Haumann

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By now, it's clear that 2020 was a year of managing the unexpected and looking for the silver lining. This is especially true when it comes to customer communication. After years of digital-led evolution, even the biggest laggards were forced to revolutionise their customer communications or risk becoming business dinosaurs.



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While the dust has settled somewhat, 2021 won't be much different - except that now, everyone knows to expect the unexpected.

The quick changes that organisations implemented to weather the storms of 2020 will be the foundations upon which they can build, to ensure success in 2021 and in the uncertain future ahead. With that in mind, it's worth looking at what 2021 might have in store when it comes to customer communication.

1. Customers will vote with their attention

Customer experience is a constantly moving target - just as organisations catch up, the expectations of their customers have already moved on. And with statistics identifying customer experience as being the key differentiator for organisations in the future, they have no option but to keep evolving in order to remain competitive.



Great customer experiences can be manufactured

Brent Haumann 18 Jan 2021



In 2021, customers will become more protective of their time and attention. As the volume of digital noise increases in their lives, customers will become more aware of which digital engagements add value to them, and which don't. And once triaged, it's very difficult to jump from the latter to the former.

As a result, 2021 will see customers judge the service of their providers more critically by the level of thought, usefulness and relevance that goes into each customer engagement. For digital customer communications, this means that customers will expect organisations to provide relevant information, presented in the ideal way and with the appropriate level of usefulness and functionality.

Customers will also vote with their virtual feet when it comes to organisations that don't communicate with them. Relationships cannot be built in silence, and a lack of communication will result in disengaged and disloyal customers that are easily lured to the sweet promises of competitors.

2. Digital customer communication will make an evolutionary leap

Over the past few years, organisations have steadily shifted their focus and budget towards improving customer experience. In 2020, the impact of COVID-19 saw this shift pushed into hyper-drive.

Organisations and customers were thrust from a world where going digital was optional and transformation was gradual, to one where going digital has become mandatory and transformation is a matter of survival. As a result, more resources, expertise, and technology has been directed towards building meaningful digital relationships with customers - and digital communication has been a key part of the strategy.

Going into 2021, this is likely to continue. As the world accepts and embraces the new normal, resources will continue to be pushed into creating the ideal digital experience across the customer journey. I believe that this influx of resources and brainpower will lay the foundation for an evolutionary leap in digital channels going forward. A broader base of the business will look to understand, support and fund the value of the digital customer experience, which will naturally flow into the organisation's digital communication strategy.

3. Consistency remains king

As more customers across the globe adopt digital platforms, they will expect companies to maintain a consistent voice and message across all of them. There is no doubt that companies have aimed to achieve this over the last few years, but it will now become an expectation rather than a nice to have.

Companies need to view various digital touchpoints as an extension of their business vision. Customers are observant and will easily take their money elsewhere if they are subject to disjointed messages across different platforms. Consistency is a key indicator of sound customer care, so it pays to integrate different divisions across the business to ensure transparency and unison in outgoing customer communications.

4. Increased focus on privacy and security

As customers become more accustomed to using digital platforms, they will start sharing more of their personal data with companies. This will create a far better understanding of the customer, their buying behaviour, propensity to buy, which will allow for the business to tailor-make its offers and communications to suit the customer on a more personal level.

However, due to the recent high profile data breaches, customers have become weary of the data they share and as a result, expect companies to make data privacy and security a key priority.

Organisations must take heed of this and invest in better data privacy and security, as well as ensure this is reflected in the way they handle data and how they treat sensitive customer information.

5. Authentic Personalisation

Personalisation is not a new concept, but in 2021 we'll see brands push this to the next level. Brands will have to connect with their customers on a human level, by generating personalised and human experiences. Artificial intelligence, behavioural segmentation, and dynamic content are all necessary tools which equip organisations to prioritise their client base.

6. Building Trust

If 2020 was all about survival, 2021 will be about rebuilding in a post-pandemic world. Businesses will have to take the learnings from 2020 and enhance customer experiences to build trust. This is because consumers have become far more digitally savvy and aware over the last 12 months, forcing brands to be more transparent about how they collect and store data.

People are usually happy to share their information and data with brands that they trust, but they need to be confident that their data is safe, secure and primarily used to manufacture the personalised and relevant experiences they expect.

Adapting to thrive

In 2020, adapting to these trends was a matter of survival. For the companies that made it through the year, 2021 will be about building on them to ensure that they thrive going forward.

The future is ripe with possibility as far as effective customer care goes. The brands which are set to thrive in an uncertain time are those which fearlessly embrace change and are unafraid to adopt technology practices which enhance the customer experience.

ABOUT BRENT HAUMANN

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