

Delivering a true omnichannel experience: what you need to know

 By [Lynette Hundermark](#)

23 Aug 2017

Two years ago I wrote an article, '[Evolving from multichannel to true omni-channel experiences](#)' in which I outlined that while omnichannel is a frequently used term, very few South African brands truly understood how to execute on a true-omnichannel strategy.



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My findings then were that many brands, while thinking they were on the omnichannel path, were actually executing fragmented multichannel experiences that often left the consumer with a disconnected experience.

Fast forward two years and unfortunately there still seems to be confusion about what omnichannel really means. With so many buzz words being thrown around, omnichannel amongst them, it seems that retailers in particular have completely lost sight on what a shopping experience is about. What is critical here is the customer and the fact there is only really one experience.

Let's recap on what has taken place over the last two years.

Smart phones have become significantly cheaper and are the go-to devices for the customer as a first port-of-call

communication channel. Data is still expensive so customers are paying attention to their data consumption and switching between apps or mobile websites as per their need. The consumer has grown increasingly demanding, and has an expectation that there will be some brand presence on their phone.

Social media has become the choice of channel for brand communication via Twitter or Facebook and is commonly used before email or calling a call centre. Nevertheless, should these communication mediums get used, there is the expectation (and rightfully so) that the messaging will be consistent – two years later, this is not unjust to expect.

What is really happening?

Retail brands, unfortunately, have still not been able to connect the digital dots and some still believe a website is the holy-grail, the be-all and end-all of their online presence. While by all means it is vitally important to have a website, this however becomes fruitless if not supported by actual people, i.e the help desk or call centre people.

Secondly, social media is not being integrated into the digital strategy. It's true that social media has many purposes and brand awareness and influencer marketing is hugely successful but this is one such purpose for the medium. When, however, a channel with the ability to allow two-way communication between customer and brand – such as posts on a company Facebook page – the brand needs to be able to support this with consistent, timely and reliable response and consistent brand messaging across all the channels (digital or not).



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Going back to the human side

All the technology in the world is great, but sometimes it does not give you the information you require, and as a customer you are forced at some point in the user experience (be it a product query, order query, store opening time, directions, etc) to turn to the human interaction, which is usually in the form of the call centre. These people are critical to the running of a business as the face and voice of the brand and are often times the only people that the consumer can gain access to.

Forget the fancy apps with VR, implementing a shared basket across your multiple brands or having a click and collect option, if this front-facing team representing your brand are unable to provide the consumer with the relevant information they require, you have unfortunately delivered a poor and negative customer experience. Not to mention the unimaginable frustration for the poor person at the call centre stuck dealing with unhappy customers and low levels of job satisfaction – which is probably one of the major factors contributing to high staff turnover at call centres.

So what do you do?

Go back to basics. Start with the human beings who are critical to the customer interaction. Understand what their pain points are in dealing with customer queries and help them to ensure they are able to provide a great customer experience, especially if the call centre number is the primary contact point in all your communications.

Embrace an omnichannel strategy but understand what that actually means, i.e. it's not just the inclusion of a website with some links to Facebook and Twitter (and if you are even cooler, maybe Instagram). Omnichannel in a nutshell is one consistent and seamless experience across all channels, i.e. digital which includes: web, apps, social media and physical, including print and stores. Actually don't even use the term omnichannel, rather think one brand, one customer experience.

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Understand what the social media channels are and what they are best used for. Facebook is more than just a blogging channel. If you are opening it up for customers to post queries, be there to listen and respond. If you are choosing to have it as a blogging channel, then don't allow comments to be posted – it really is that simple.

Last but not least, if you are a true omnichannel brand and are really embracing digital, then allow for more than just the happy path of the shopping experience to be digital. You need to take into consideration the user journeys that a customer would undertake in the physical world which includes returns and exchanges. Some brands have managed to execute these really well so use these as benchmarks.

In conclusion

As I learnt from Raymond Ackerman during my Pick n Pay training when I had a part-time job at university: "The customer is queen." There is no reason why this should not translate for the digital consumer. Treat your customer like royalty by providing the best possible customer experience they deserve, rather than talking up a storm about executing an omnichannel or customer-centric approach when in reality you are nowhere close.

Those brands that do take customer-centric experiences seriously and execute well have seen the results. It's no longer about the cheapest price, at the expense of a shoddy experience, customer retention now reigns supreme.

ABOUT LYNETTE HUNDERMARK

With over 15 years of experience in the tech, digital marketing and mobile solutions space, Hundermark co-founded specialist mobile solutions consultancy Useful & Beautiful. With a passion for developing mobile products that are aligned to business goals, Hundermark's appetite for keeping abreast of the latest industry trends is fast establishing her as an expert tech commentator and opinion leader in South Africa. Follow @lynetteanthony on Twitter.

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