

Exceptional customer experience: How to turn customers into advocates

Customer expectations have never been higher. Is your organization delivering the experiences required to acquire, keep, and cultivate your customer base?

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Over time, your organization decided what kind of relationship it wanted to have with the people it serves. Probably this decision took shape over a series of projects. It's the cumulative effect of how user-friendly your website turned out to be, what transactional services you offer online, how much you invested in customer support and training, and which channels of communication are best equipped to scale. Maybe you have a loyalty program that enables you to extend the best quality service—with the fastest response times—to a subset of your most valued customers. Because you can't take care of everyone, right?

Or, maybe you can. What if you could offer the best quality service to all of your customers—without ripping out or replacing any of your current IT systems? What if service personnel across your organization had an accurate, up-to-the-minute view of the customer—even if they'd never spoken before? And, what if providing excellent customer experiences means you keep loyal customers happy? What if it means your team can save the day for a customer, delivering just the right services or solving a dire problem, and earn not only their thanks but also their trust and reliance? Then, of course, you'd need to be able to do that again the next time, and every time after that.

That's where Adobe can elevate your customer experience to a new level. Adobe is an expert at creating ways for people to interact and engage with one another, with rich media self-service experiences and live person-to-person interactions that can be customized for an audience of one. These days, it's a business imperative to exceed your customers' expectations and anticipate their future needs, so you're never a step behind. Our goal is to go a step further: to help you cultivate your customers from passive adopters of your products and services, to active business advocates who recommend you to their peers, without reservations.

At Adobe, we know the best customer experiences are possible today using the core technology you already have. We specialize in making data in your enterprise systems more widely available to a variety of customizable applications that are simple and easy for customers to use. We believe your best practices can be deployed company-wide, that key business processes can be flexible, consistent, fast, and intuitive, and that IT systems can support how people work and build relationships—not get in the way. Most importantly, we don't want you to settle for anything less than having your customer at the very center of your business.

The new standard for service won't just be happy, loyal customers; it will be customers who depend on you to be there for them for their personal or professional needs. These savvy people will think twice before looking at a competitor's offer, because of the value inherent in the premium level of service you deliver.



Why the status quo won't work

Keeping pace with rising service levels year over year is vitally important. However, effectively raising service levels proves to be difficult in implementation. According to a Forrester Research report, 80% of companies surveyed intend to use customer experience as a differentiator, and 90% said customer experience was very important. Yet companies still are not delivering great experiences. In Forrester's 2010 Customer Experience Index, only 13 of 133 firms received excellent ratings, while 45 firms were ranked poor or very poor. That's one-third of the companies surveyed providing mediocre service, even at firms that recognize its importance.

In addition, increasing choice and rising customer expectations make it challenging to keep your customers returning. Competitive pressures are higher than ever. Social networking, mobile applications, and consumer retail websites have raised customer expectations for the services that businesses and other organizations can provide online.

The Internet also means transparency between your pricing and your competitors'—with competing offers just a click away. To top it off, the bar for acceptable levels of service gets pushed higher each year. According to one survey, services that customers deemed acceptable last year and gave high satisfaction ratings are now average. Next year, the same service level might evoke a negative customer response.

All these factors mean that every interaction you have with a customer matters. If they walk into an office, phone a call center, seek online support, or email a sales representative, they'll expect consistently high-quality, personalized responses to their needs.

Clearly there are tremendous opportunities to be gained by improving customer experience. Companies that understand this are designing experiences that satisfy both rational needs and emotional ones. Using Adobe products and solutions, these experience leaders are making it easier for customers to become loyal evangelists by providing interactions that are innovative and visual, and building stronger emotional relationships with customers at every step.

A multichannel approach

Your marketing and sales groups can build consistent and appropriate content for multiple channels that is compelling and interactive, guiding and influencing customers as they move toward a purchasing decision. Monitoring online behavior enables you to refine the experience, guiding product selection to shorten the sales cycle and simplifying product purchase or account enrollment. Real-time sales agents can be available to deal with questions and deliver personalized recommendations, taking the opportunity to increase wallet share. The impact is a sustainable competitive advantage that leads to higher conversion rates. For example, after Urban Outfitters introduced an innovative, pageless checkout solution on its website, the average sale per customer is larger and overall checkout rates are up 19%.

Your customer service organizations can provide personalized interactions with intuitive support options for clear dialogue and rapid resolution of requests and problems. Integrating information from multiple back-end systems and providing high-value, consistent, and timely communication enhances customer satisfaction while reducing your costs. Web conferencing and online chat give your real-time service options when needed. The impact is customer loyalty that goes beyond satisfaction. For example, Janus Health deployed a solution that lets housecall doctors access electronic patient records and forms, making it faster and more cost-effective to provide acute care to patients in their homes. A single electronic file replaces 26 pages of paper, streamlining administration and Medicare reimbursements, and it can be secured to comply with patient privacy laws.

The goal is attainable. Better customer experience makes better customers. How good are yours?

How good is your service?

Your customers expect superior service, but most of the time, they're not receiving it. Disjointed organizations and technology infrastructures could be getting in your way. Maybe your business is focusing on automation and cost reductions while your customers want tailored services and greater responsiveness to their needs. One survey, however, points to another cause: some organizations think they already provide superior service. That means that up to 92% of customers are what McKinsey calls "passive loyalists" who make repeat purchases out of habit and are open to offers from competitors that give them a reason to change.



Bain & Company survey of 400 companies and their customers highlights the gap between company and customer perceptions of superior service.

How can your company successfully gain and retain customers in this environment and develop them into more than passive loyalists? Many companies offer loyalty programs to encourage repeat business, but these only reward the frequency and volume of transactions, and the number of points in an account is a poor measure of loyalty. When companies perceived that customers wanted only lower prices, automation and online services helped reduce costs and improve productivity. But these changes did little to foster loyalty or enhance the overall experience, and competitors quickly copied the successful improvements.

Select companies are finding that exceptional customer experience provides the opportunity to retain customers and even charge premium prices that improve revenue and profitability and stay ahead of the competition. The potential impact to your top and bottom line is significant. For example, Virtual Wallet, a new offering at PNC Financial Services Group, is experiencing rapid growth, with 80% of account holders in the target Generation Y demographic (ages 17-34) using the service.. Online customers have increased 500% at custom publisher Herff Jones. And manufacturing, engineering, and construction firms, including Atrus, Bureau Veritas, Virtual Architec, and 3DE, are reducing design review cycles with customers by 50% to 95%, with up to 95% reduction in costly change orders.

Your company does not have to change everything or spend a fortune to win customers. The companies listed above, along with many others, are transforming the way they acquire, serve, and communicate with customers while leveraging existing systems and processes. This paper outlines three specific actions you can take to develop customer experiences that align with customer expectations and improve your competitive position: design enduring personal experiences with customers at the center, meet and exceed their expectations, and anticipate their changing needs. Successfully combining all three can lead to passionate customers, reduced costs, and market advantage.

Designing exceptional customer experiences

Everything you do to put a more compelling face to your business helps create customer loyalty. Loyalty builds on the emotional response from every direct and indirect interaction and experience that customers have with your products, services, and agents, beginning before the customer develops an intent to purchase and continuing long after the initial sale. For maximum effect, customer interactions need to be relevant, personalized, and consistent, but also appropriate for different channels, including in-store, phone, web, and mobile.

According to a recent McKinsey study on consumer decision-making, 40% of customers change their mind at the moment of purchase, with sales agents a highly influential factor at this crucial moment. But increasingly, consumers make decisions in a self-service environment as many companies turn to online, unassisted channels to save money and reduce staffing. When self-service functions are poorly designed, they push the burden of complexity onto customers, making them take on more of the workload for a successful interaction or, worse, requiring them to piece together information from different sources and applications.

When they deliver an exceptional customer experience, however, unassisted interactions can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer-centric design can provide relevant, easy-to-navigate, compelling experiences, supported by applications that simplify complex but high-value processes. When processes are redesigned with the customer in mind, self-service functions provide value, not frustration. These intuitive, visual experiences make it easier for customers to build their relationship when and how they want.

Use case: Outservico

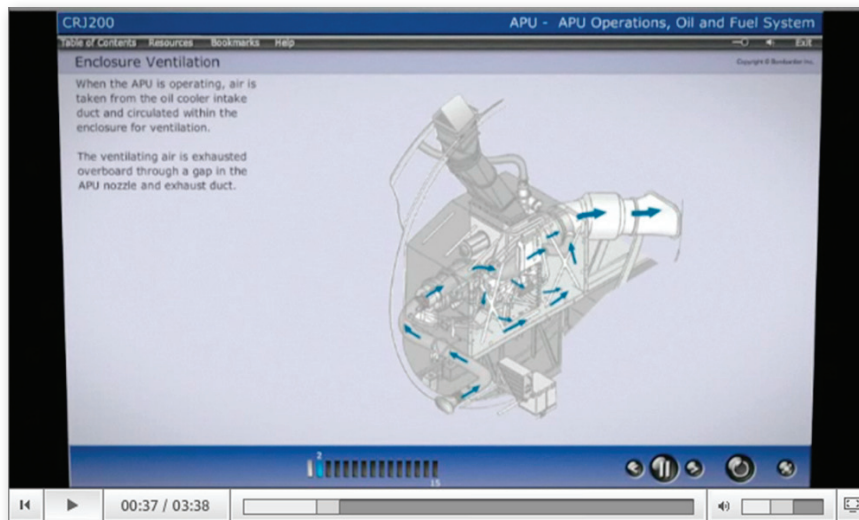
Online services provide information in multiple ways, allowing customers to choose the format they prefer. To meet the needs of customers who need immediate attention, the Spanish outsourcing group Outservico developed Whisbi, a web conferencing solution that enables real-time access to a live agent. In this way, they can help customers who are having difficulty completing a form, have additional questions, or want reassurance about the security of their payment, without requiring any additional software. Agents can share slides, brochures, work with customers to complete a form, and even include real-time video, all in the web browser. The impact of this personalized experience is a 50% increase in customer acquisitions, along with 15% cost savings by keeping the interaction online.



Whisbi uses Adobe® Connect™ Pro to provide customers with the option of a richer visual experience, if and when they need it.

Use case: Bombardier Aerospace

High-value customer communications are essential to creating exceptional customer experiences. Bombardier Aerospace transformed its training materials by using electronic manuals that automatically receive updates each time they are opened. Incorporating interactive 3D graphics, video, and animation, these manuals improve communication and collaboration between pilots, mechanics, and aircraft designers. Rights management capabilities control who can open and print the documents, protecting confidential and sensitive information. The impact is instant dissemination of critical information and improved responsiveness to customers.



Adobe LiveCycle® and Adobe Acrobat® graphics and animation provide customers with greater insight into complex products and services.

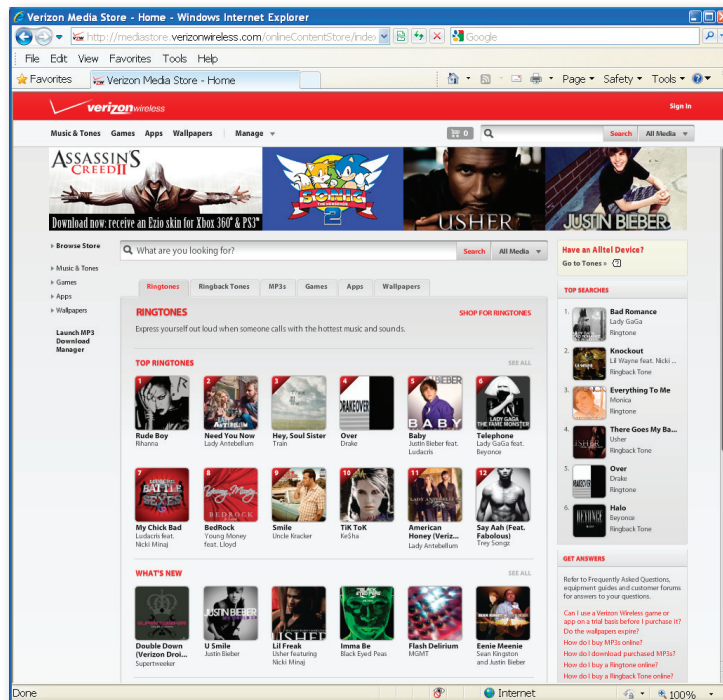
Exceeding customer expectations

If you hope to turn your customers into more than passive loyalists, it's essential to continuously evolve your offerings as your relationship with your customers grows and deepens. Falling short of expectations will obviously have a negative impact on your reputation, but simply meeting them is rarely enough. Only by improving customer experiences beyond expectations in critical areas will customers exceed your goals of loyalty and revenue. The first step is identifying which activities are critical to the experience and avoiding behavior that customers find unnecessary or inappropriate. For example, sending personalized birthday greetings to your customers might seem like an easy way to score some points, but it could be considered intrusive if their birth date has nothing to do with your product or service.

Digital channels, such as online and mobile, are becoming a preferred method of interacting for many customers, creating an opportunity to transform customer experiences while improving margins. Design from the customer in, not the enterprise out, becomes an important element of these interactions as emphasis shifts from increasing the productivity of internal processes and systems to crafting exceptional customer experiences. Behind-the-scenes integration of enterprise systems and enhanced business processes significantly reduce duplication and errors caused by manual steps and alleviate customer (and employee) frustration.

Use case: Verizon Wireless

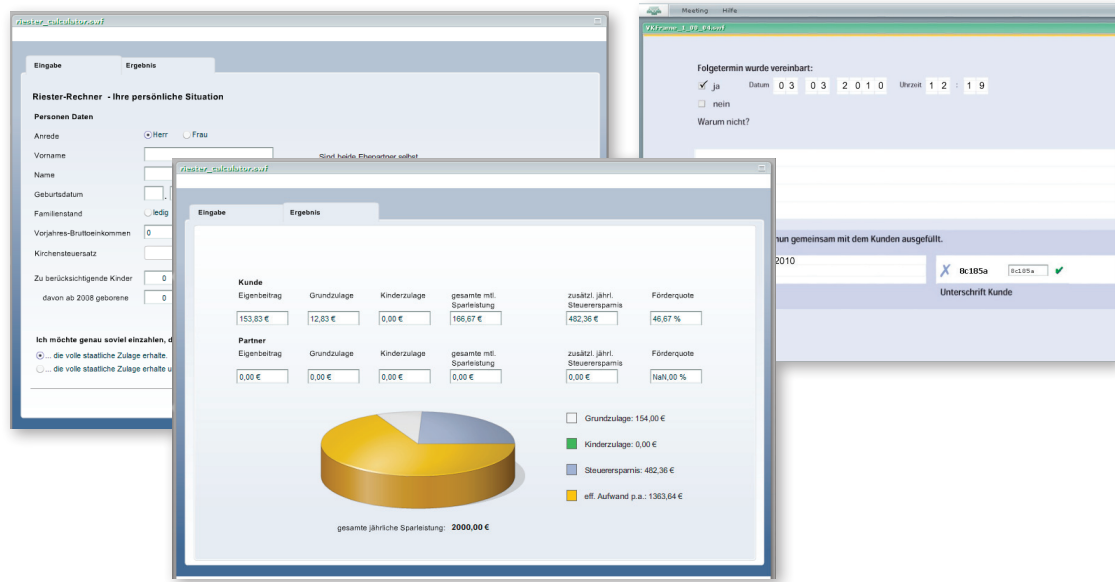
Consumers use their cell phones for much more than just phone calls: they text friends, play games, watch videos, and listen to music. To make those activities more satisfying for its customers, Verizon Wireless developed an online media store that provides an outstanding experience for customers interested in shopping for custom ringtones, music, games, and apps. The media store extends Verizon's core cellular service business and provides Verizon customers with an integrated way to browse, purchase, and manage their mobile environment, without having to engage in multiple transactions with different partners. Clear and simple ways of selecting ringtones, tracking downloads, and importing other applications increase customer confidence and usage. The impact is higher revenue for Verizon and a lower risk of losing customers to competitors.



Verizon Wireless offers a one-stop entertainment shop for mobile phone customers.

Use case: impuls systems

Sometimes automation and online services enhance personal interactions instead of replacing them. Impuls is a German health insurance consultant that represents 40 different insurance companies with over 20,000 variations in fees and coverage. Impuls wanted customers to have an easier way to view, discuss, and complete health insurance contracts, without requiring in-person meetings. The impuls solution integrates a back-end document management system with editable forms and web conferencing. Insurance advisers interact with potential customers online, giving presentations and answering questions. Customers fill out their contracts online, digitally sign them, and send them for processing. Updates are handled the same way so that contract details are always up to date. Personal medical and lifestyle information is protected to help ensure privacy and regulatory compliance. The impact is double the number of online engagements and a corresponding reduction in demand on the mobile sales force.



Impuls delivers a range of online forms and interactions for more productive interactions with customers.

Anticipating customer needs

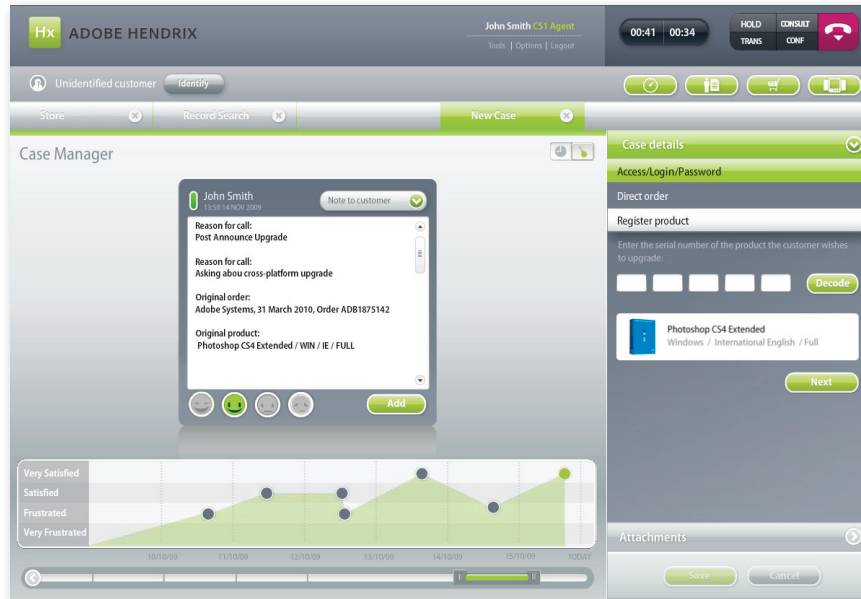
Imagine the impact on your business if you could pleasantly surprise your customers, anticipating and responding to their changing needs. By providing targeted customized experiences, you reap the benefits of significantly enhanced loyalty, increased wallet share, and reduced frustration. Tracking and analyzing application metrics and customer behavior provide valuable clues to identify and fix problem areas and to discover new growth opportunities.

Once you know how customer expectations are changing, how do you redesign your processes to meet and exceed those needs? Enterprise applications do a great job supporting large numbers of transactions or increasing efficiencies in specific functions. But they're not nimble enough to adapt to moving targets. New devices, platforms, and trends come on the scene quickly and continuously. They all represent openings—for you or for your competitors.

Increasingly, customers are demanding consistent functionality across multiple channels and devices so that they can easily do what they want, when and where they want. Fast and flexible application development that integrates existing enterprise platforms and cost-effectively reaches a wide array of customer communication channels and devices is essential to grab these opportunities.

Use case: Adobe Case Manager

Every interaction contributes to how your customer feels about your business. What if you could capture customer feedback, needs, and attitudes so that each time a customer comes to you, you have a picture of what their experience has been? Adobe developed a customer service application, Case Manager, that provides visual cues about the customer's satisfaction with previous service interactions. Call center agents can quickly adjust their communications and actions to deliver the best possible outcome and add their results for the next agent.



Adobe displays a visual view of previous customer interactions, enabling customer service agents to anticipate reactions and provide better service.

Use case: PNC Financial Services Group

Capturing opportunities in emerging trends and changing demographics requires not only flexible applications, but also tailored experiences. PNC Financial Services Group saw an opening to address an underserved market for checking and savings accounts—young, technically savvy people either in college or starting their first jobs. The solution is Virtual Wallet, a visual and engaging way of managing finances. The Money Bar provides an intuitive graphical summary of money that is allocated for bills, put aside for savings, and free to spend. A calendar view of paydays, bills, and even “danger days” warning of potential overdrafts makes it easy to schedule payments and learn budgeting. Savings rules and wish lists help customers identify goals and put money aside for future purchases or activities. And students (and their parents) can be notified when balances are low and cash infusions from Mom or Dad are needed. PNC monitors and analyzes usage to develop meaningful new features and improvements that keep the service growing with its customers. The impact is 14,000 new accounts in the first two months, with 80% usage within Generation Y, a group that previously represented only a tiny fraction of PNC customers.



PNC Financial Services Group offers Virtual Wallet, an online banking system that works the way Generation Y thinks about money.

Summary

The cost of not delighting customers, or worse, frustrating them with impersonal services can be the difference between having a business that thrives and one with static growth, or worse—a business that fails. Purchase decisions become increasingly price dependent, driving a downward spiral of profitability. Loyalty extends only as far as the next discount or promotion, and referrals are weak.

We believe that customers want something more than just your product or service. They want to feel good when they interact with your product and your company. They want experiences and relationships with your organization that affirm a partnership, one that feels personal, supportive, and mutually enriching. Exceptional interactions build the brand of your company or organization, generating positive buzz and tapping into a powerful word-of-mouth network. Great experiences make happy customers who talk about the products they love, a service that really helps them do their job, or a problem that was resolved with individual consideration and flexibility. In effect, these loyalists become a virtual sales force for your company.

The interaction between companies and customers is the last mile of innovation. Companies that are reinventing themselves and adapting to this change are increasing revenue and profitability and capturing market share. They appreciate that customer loyalty stems from a combination of emotion and reason. And they are shifting emphasis to customer design over systems and reaching across internal and external boundaries. Interactions must be flexible and ubiquitous as customers dictate how and when they want to work with you.

Adobe understands how you can go beyond customer satisfaction to achieve customer advocacy. It's streamlining processes that make everyone's life easier. Communicating with customers when and how they want. Solving problems with flexibility and individuality. Making every touch point an engaging, optimal experience. Let Adobe help you place the customer at the center and elevate customer experiences.

For more information

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