



# Customizing the Customer Experience

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## Customizing a Customer Experience

Almost three years after JoAnn and her family last experienced the magic of Disneyland, she still remembers the ecstasy that lit up her children's faces as they entered and participated in the attractions at the theme park of their dreams. Paul, her husband, remembers the anticipation that built up over the preceding weeks as their children reminisced over the excitement of waiting in line for their favorite ride and the euphoria of finally reaching the front.

Since their last trip, JoAnn and Paul estimate that they've visited a local amusement park two or three times. However, when asked about these family outings, their memory is vague. What differentiates the family's experience at Disneyland from their experiences at the local amusement park? Why was one ingrained in their memory and the other quickly forgotten?

### The Magic of CX

According to Lewis P. Carbone, an expert in experience engineering, the differentiating factor here is the customer experience. He claims that "businesses must elevate the consumers' experience to the prominence they give to products and services" to succeed.<sup>1</sup>

In the last 20 years, customer experience (CX) has become a central focus of businesses in every industry. CX is defined as "a customer's multidimensional—cognitive, emotional, sensorial, behavioral, and relational—responses to a firm's service."<sup>2</sup> This includes every touchpoint, or interaction, between the customer and the business—from the first time they hear about the brand name to the tenth time they make an order.

Therefore, CX should be intentionally designed by the company and not merely haphazard. This should allow the company to impact the customer's decisions for future wants and needs through high-quality interactions with the customer. To better understand the process and benefits of intentionally designing a complete customer experience, it is necessary to consider the customers' and business' perspectives alongside the possible types of experiences that a company can design based on industry and business models.

### CX from the Customer Perspective

Companies that successfully create a complete and positive experience for their target market design each touchpoint, starting from the moment customers first hear of the company. As the customer both consciously and subconsciously evaluates the high quality of the tangible and intangible aspects of their experience, they begin to associate the company brand with a positive, happy feeling.<sup>3</sup>

However, the customer's view of the company brand can be inversely impacted by negative experiences, which are often remembered for much longer. Since emotion is directly linked with a customer's memory and perception, positive feelings can promote loyalty and increase purchasing behaviors, whereas negative interactions can eliminate brand loyalty and turn away potential repeat customers.

### **CX from the Business Perspective**

Naturally, a direct correlation exists between increased customer satisfaction, positive brand perception, and increased profits. With higher customer loyalty, customer acquisition expenses can be reallocated to more efficient customer retention costs, leading to an increase in profit margins. According to *Customers 2020: A Progress Report*, customers make financial decisions in accordance with the customer experience provided.<sup>4</sup> When businesses meet the experiential needs and wants of their customers, they benefit from higher profits.

### **Classifying CX**

As mentioned above, different types of experiences yield unique results in certain industries and business models. For example, it would hardly seem advantageous to apply Disneyland's time-consuming customer experience design to a fast-food restaurant. While designing a positive experience is important, a more appropriate experience design in this situation might include a strict emphasis on quick service and accuracy.

Regardless of the industry, companies must also avoid designing "subconscious" experiences to have an impact on the customer. A subconscious experience can be defined as "an experience where the objective elements fail to attract and hold an individual's attention sufficiently to produce a subjective reaction."<sup>5</sup> If an experience does not stimulate a conscious response from the customer, it will soon be forgotten and might as well not have existed.

### **Memorable or Frictionless CX**

CX teams also classify experiences as being memorable or frictionless.<sup>6</sup> Memorable experiences are exemplified by the "magical" moments at Disneyland while frictionless experiences are more adequately represented by a quick service car wash that offers a quick "in-and-out" experience. Memorable experiences may appear more successful and beneficial than frictionless experiences based on these examples, but to truly understand which is preferable requires an understanding of the industry.

Typically, CX teams focus on designing memorable experiences; however, some businesses attempt to create an optimal combination of both frictionless and memorable experiences. Chick-fil-A is an example of this quest for a new experience as they combine rapid, effortless drive-thru service and meaningful, polite interaction with employees. Many retailers attempt to create this same experience, even online, as shown by Amazon.com and their intuitive purchase suggestions mixed with their quick, easy ordering database and delivery.

## Loyalty or Novelty in CX

A related distinction of CX types is also made between “loyalty loops” and “involvement spirals” in an article titled *Customer Experience Journeys: Loyalty Loops Versus Involvement Spirals*.<sup>7</sup> In the article, habitual experiences the customer expects and appreciates are compared to novel experiences that hook the customer and create a desire for continued adventure.

Since continued interactions with loyal customers is one of the principal goals of CX, loyalty loops and involvement spirals are central to designing an experience. Both strategies have potential for success, as is proven by the dynamically adventurous appeal of Pokémon Go and the contrastingly reliable consistency of Starbucks, but one must be decided upon in order to design and implement a positive customer experience.

## The Bottom Line

As companies like Disney demonstrate, designing a customer experience is the blueprint for successful growth. CX not only differentiates a business from their competition, but also leads to increases in customer loyalty and positive brand perception. Companies seeking success will undoubtedly need to focus on the customer experience.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Lewis Carbone, “Total Customer Experience Drives Value,” *Management Review* 87, no. 7 (1998): 62, <http://search.ebscohost.com.eri.lib.byu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=910867&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>2</sup> Siebert, Anton, Ahir Gopaldas, Andrew Lindridge, and Cláudia Simões. “Customer Experience Journeys: Loyalty Loops Versus Involvement Spirals.” *Journal of Marketing* 84, no. 4 (2020): 45–66, doi:10.1177/0022242920920262.

<sup>3</sup> Carbone, “Total Customer,” 62.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, *Customers 2020: A Progress Report: 10*, <https://www.walkerinfo.com/knowledge-center/featured-research-reports/customers-2020-a-progress-report>.

<sup>5</sup> Matt D. Duerden, Neil R. Lundberg, Peter Ward, Stacy T. Taniguchi, Brian Hill, Mark A. Widmer, and Ramon Zabriskie, “From Ordinary to Extraordinary: A Framework of Experience Types,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 49, no. 3-5 (2018): 196-216, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.eri.lib.byu.edu/10.1080/00222216.2018.1528779>.

<sup>6</sup> Luke Williams, Alexander Buoye, Timothy L. Keiningham, and Lerzan Aksoy, “The Practitioners’ Path to Customer Loyalty: Memorable Experiences or Frictionless Experiences?” *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services* 57, (2020): n.p., doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102215.

<sup>7</sup> Siebert, “Customer Experience,” 45-66.