Bringing Best Practices to Business-to-Business Customer Journeys
Designing an Intelligent Approach to Customer Experience Management
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Business-to-consumer (B2C) industries shifted business paradigms to improve customer experience in the Internet age. Now, companies need to adjust their customer experience models to help retain business-to-business (B2B) customers. Your customers have the power to turn to your competitors with one click if dissatisfied with your service. An intelligent approach to customer experience management can focus your efforts to close deals by delivering the right product to the right customer at the right time.
So where do you start to make your company a customer-centric business? Jeff Bezos of Amazon.com has famously said:

“We see our customers as invited guests to the party, and we are the hosts. It’s our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.”

The transformation to being a “customer first” business calls on you to think about what you can do throughout your interactions with each customer to empower them and improve their experience. This includes examining business and production processes – what works, what doesn’t; building trusted relationships – including the ability to capture and share relevant data; understanding expectations – so you know what your customers are looking for and they know what they can expect to receive from you; and empowering customers – giving them qualitative customer feedback information along every point in the journey for optimal experience management. Additionally, customer-first interactions include consent-driven customer communications that take into account data privacy; and they consider the integration of qualitative customer experience information from every touch point, using operational data that informs existing processes.
**FIX BROKEN PROCESSES**
Attractive compensation is essential to recruiting and retaining talented staff, but a positive and productive work environment is also highly desirable. And the workplace is increasingly digitalized, underscoring the importance of a positive employee user experience. Companies must offer easy-to-use front ends, solid processes for collaboration, and effective tools to deliver context-specific insights.

**Make Data Readily Available**
Having grown up with computer technology, millennial and gen-Z workers bring not only new skills but also new expectations regarding workplace productivity tools. Better tools mean higher employee engagement and, ultimately, more revenue. And engaged service teams create a better customer service experience.

**Set Expectations**
You must also clarify current pricing, inventory availability, and delivery schedules with the customer – even as you work to continually improve them to meet the challenges of tight competition in the dynamic global marketplace. Is your delivery record equally strong across all geographical regions and product types? Remember that today’s digitally savvy customers have a wealth of other options at their fingertips.

You also need to understand and respect multiple customer journeys. Where and how do you first meet your customers? How do you capture and leverage their feedback about every step in their journey? Taking on a beginner’s mind-set can help you uncover potential improvements in interactions at every potential customer touch point.

**INTEGRATE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**
The right software in your back office can help empower customers. And IT and business need to have a comfortable partnership for such functions as customer portal management, updates to the database through online transactions, and logistics management. Pay-for-outcome models offer consumers a timely alternative to purchasing hardware outright, for example, but you’ll need IT buy-in to design intelligent processes for invoicing those services.
Six Key Steps on the Path to Becoming a Customer-First Business

To begin your journey, highlight the problem areas where you can improve the internal and external interactions between your systems and the users. For example, one way to begin may be reviewing both new equipment sales as well as aftermarket parts and services for process-related revenue leaks. Then define precisely what you want to do, develop internal support for your efforts, and build a team to implement the improvements. Finally, extend the local results across multiple lines of business and into a scalable enterprise model for sustainable growth.

1) FIND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

First, you must determine whether internal processes are efficient and accessible. Look at the availability of your customer data to everyone who relies on it to complete assigned tasks. Check for visibility into inventory and production scheduling. For example, are processes in place for using spec sheets and 3D drawings so you can automatically create the product information that sales requires? Can you find ways to shorten your typical response time to requests for quotes? The ultimate objective here is avoiding the cascading costs that arise from inefficient interfaces among lines of business.

Then you should examine the current customer journey in detail. The whole lead-to-cash process likely offers many opportunities for streamlining. Be sure you offer thorough product support and can manage field service and aftermarket sales efficiently as well. Next up is brainstorming potential customer journeys of the future. Are you ready to incorporate subscription services and pay-for-outcome business models? Also, consider the possibility of developing new sources of revenue throughout the product lifecycle, and not just in the early stages of a rollout.
2) DEFINE YOUR GOAL

Establishing a clear definition of your objectives helps the entire organization buy into your cause. Identify the external forces that are propelling your efforts. Have you carefully documented the compelling events, emerging regulations, and market pressures that force your hand to do this work now? Make sure your plan is fully backed by corporate resources and is not merely your pet project. Experience suggests you’ll have the best chance of winning advocates for your project if you target high-frequency, low-value transactions first, such as aftermarket parts, service, or consumables; but do not neglect other sources of lost revenue such as slow, highly manual quoting processes.

And be sure you know what success will look like. Identify behaviors you need to model and techniques you can borrow from other industries. Have you asked the “why” questions that define ways to judge performance against expectations for each business case? Know your “Net Promoter Score” and think about ways to reduce the number of detractors. Remember that it should be easy for people to do business with you – which means you want your solutions to be user-friendly and offer the best B2C operations, with seamless interactions and full transparency all along the customer journey.
When looking to nurture support within the business organization for your updates to customer experience management, ask yourself how other recent projects have succeeded. Increasingly, you’ll find that they have left waterfall development processes behind in favor of an agile methodology, for example.

Business leaders want to know what, when, and how much – and they usually pose the familiar question, “What’s in it for me?” Give them those pieces by clearly communicating your value assessment and explaining how each part of the organization benefits. Have you set their expectations carefully, playing off the unique needs of the business and aligning your goals with corporate initiatives? Use your new processes for a better customer experience to inspire cultural change. Perhaps you can build a branded center of excellence or put evangelists to work spreading your message, socializing your new processes, and discouraging reversion to old ways.

When seeking support from internal leaders, you need to demonstrate the following key things:
• You are listening.
• You are making progress.
• You can deliver.

3 PURSUE INTERNAL SUPPORT

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Your project ultimately succeeds or fails based on the strength of the team you put together. Are you keeping the internal conversation alive to interest good people in working with you? Check in frequently to make sure that customers and spokespeople in R&D, operations, supply chain, sales, marketing, and service all are actively participating in project planning.

Have you sent feelers out beyond mere staff augmentation? Look at all the likely sources of skills to execute on your plan, remembering that B2C teams may be far ahead of your B2B team in innovating for top-notch customer experience. And there’s no shame in turning to external full-service integrators as well, if they can perform essential functions in the most affordable fashion. Ideally, you can learn from them and then duplicate their methods and results on your own.
Once you’ve met the pressing needs for process improvement, update your support processes accordingly. Extend the new processes across the enterprise to support such end-to-end customer-facing processes as configure to quote and engineer to order.

Have you looked at the longer-range financial implications of your customer experience initiative? Help lower corporate exposure to financial risk by asking yourself this forward-facing question: “How can the business survive a downturn?” This will encourage leaders to consider building multiple online marketplaces and consider dealing in service and parts, consumables, and used equipment, for example.
Assets stay fresh in the digital world through crowdsourced feedback from forums and reviews. Make engineering and maintenance information readily available in the form of how-to articles, videos, and social media messaging. Can you keep both sales agents and customers interested in forthcoming improvements so they continue to participate in ongoing discussions?

Do you have mechanisms in place to keep your Web site fresh and healthy? Plan for frequent small releases, stay current on vendor software features, and include new support roles with new functionality. Deliver the ability to run useful tests and quantify results for comparison among time frames and contact points. The following three-step procedure for introducing innovation is simple:

1. **Experiment.** Try a variety of low-cost approaches under the “fail fast, fail often, and fail cheap” methodology and ensure you have the mechanisms in place to measure outcomes.

2. **Check.** Place your bets and verify the outcomes from each step against benchmarks or extrapolated expectations.

3. **Adjust.** Pivot fast to capture and feed lessons learned from every experiment back into the overall innovation program.
Learning from Industry Leaders

There are many examples we can pull from industry of brands that are improving their customer journeys from start to finish. For brands in the manufacturing space, for example, these improvements are often the “digital doorway” into their aftermarket parts business. Let’s look at a scenario from the automotive industry.

CREATE A PERSONALIZED, RESPONSIVE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

A manufacturer of custom automotive parts sets out to drive design and usability improvements in its B2B Web site. It needs to provide customers with a personalized shopping experience across multiple screens using the latest innovations in responsive design. With nearly two million products in its catalog, the company knows it is imperative to get the search and select capabilities right if the site is to help customer productivity.

ESTABLISH WELL-DEFINED BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

The company aims to open up and fully use a new digital sales channel. It understands that while e-commerce needs a powerful engine – one with extensible architecture, predefined functionality, and the ability to scale – accurate product information and digital assets are the fuel the engine burns to produce new revenue. Buyers can use product information on the company’s Web site to purchase repair and wear parts, and engineering technicians can use the Web site to understand how components from the manufacturer can work together with other OEM and third-party components. Getting product content management right is critical to this B2B company’s success.

The new B2B Web site simplifies access to the product catalog and enables both operators and integrators to understand how components work together.
BENEFIT FROM FAST GO-LIVE, PERSONALIZATION, AND EASE OF USE

With prebuilt integrations and an extensible architecture, a B2B company can quickly implement its Web store, powered by the SAP® Commerce solution, in just a few months. It can personalize its Web site experience based on the individual accounts and customers signed onto the site. By optimizing the Web site for mobile devices, an auto parts manufacturer can better serve the needs of the maintenance technicians working directly on automobiles. By tracking each user’s current install base as well as past purchase history, the site presents buyers with products that are relevant to their own inventory and customers.

Using the SAP Product Content Management solution, the company can merge product content and master data from several sources within its back-end and product development systems. The value related to this data is realized when customers are able to access detailed product specifications and imagery using the commerce site. By presenting accurate product information and content, returns due to incorrect parts being ordered and shipped to customers are greatly reduced.

By understanding the information needed by its customers, the company can focus on creating and curating content that meets each customer’s needs. By delivering a powerful engine and providing it with the right product data fuel, the company is able to shift its business from high-cost seller and call-center channels to cost-effective online channels.
SEIZE THE KEY TAKEAWAYS
As you initiate your “customer first” campaign, it is important to remember these key points:

• **You must understand your specific customer’s experience.** Spend time in the field with the procurement managers, operators, and technicians who rely on your Web store to maintain your equipment.

• **Your reputation is based on results.** Product quality, promises made and kept, and the overall customer experience provided by a brand are more important than price in the B2B space.

• **The search for opportunity never ends.** Don’t be afraid of deep infrastructure change, such as linking customer experience software to engineering management software.

FIND OUT MORE
To learn more about the SAP Customer Experience portfolio, visit us [online](https://www.sap.com/).