

Revving up the customer experience

Top-notch CX is a digital business imperative. Here's how to ensure your organization's customer and client experience is hassle-free.

BY BOB VIOLINO



In today's business market, companies need to provide high-quality products and services—and deliver positive experiences for their customers.

One key to delivering a better customer experience is to reduce or eliminate friction wherever pos-

sible. This might include reducing wait times before speaking with a support representative or ensuring client information is entered correctly on an order form.

“Customers are rarely looking to be delighted or wowed by vendors,” says Bill Lee, founder of the Cen-

ter for Customer Engagement, an organization that provides consulting and research services related to strategic customer engagement. “They want hassle-free.”

Here are some suggestions on how IT can help reduce friction and enhance customer experiences.

1 Optimize technologies

Friction can often be a result of technology not working optimally, especially when it comes to conducting transactions.

Healthcare provider Allied Physicians Group recently overhauled its website to enhance user experience,

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adding services such as the ability to request appointments, pay bills, and access telehealth online. With more than 30 pediatric practices and more than 150 practitioners, this was a significant undertaking.

“It was important to us that there be online scheduling and that patients could do their pre-visit check-ins with data collection [forms] before they arrive,” says Ricardo Santiago, CIO of Adjuvant.Health, powered by Allied Physicians Group. “This allows the patient to go directly to see the doctor upon arrival. This improves efficiency, and patients are seen more rapidly and receive the care that they deserve and expect.”

2 Provide training

Employees who deal directly with customers, such as support agents, need to know how to use tools as effectively as possible. If an agent doesn’t fully understand how to access and use data from a customer relationship management (CRM) platform, for example, the technology won’t be of much help for customer service.

“We are strong believers in training. Training is constantly being enhanced, and we work with all practitioners and staff to ensure that they are not only familiar with the technology that we have, but also know how to use it,” Santiago says. “When staff understands how

to use technology, this allows them to better serve patients as well as show patients how they can leverage technology to make their experiences and interactions better.”

3 Foster collaboration

A typical customer interaction with a company can involve multiple people, and if everyone in the chain is not informed and up to date, the customer can fall through the cracks.

Professional services firm Grant Thornton uses a variety of technologies to promote better sharing of information and ultimately deliver better customer experience.

“By linking client contacts

directly to our CRM system, client teams are instantly notified and can respond quickly and appropriately, showing the client or potential client that we are responsive, easy to do business with and invested in helping them solve their business problems,” says Nichole Jordan, national managing partner of markets, clients and industry at Grant Thornton.

In the past, follow-up on digital interactions with clients could be inconsistent because the firm lacked a universal process to ensure that information or insights gleaned from interactions were shared with the right people internally.

“Today, we have a technology-enabled process to ensure that follow-up is timely and meaningful,” Jordan says.

4 Automate processes

Companies can deploy tools such as robotic process automation (RPA) to speed up processing, resulting in faster response times

for customer interactions.

Two years ago, health insurance provider Laya Healthcare deployed an RPA platform from Blue Prism to automate back-office tasks, with the goal of processing claims more quickly. The RPA software mirrors the activities of employees on a particular system, interacting with as many applications as needed.

“It does a huge amount of the mundane processing, which ensures all processing is done error-free and on time, and also frees up the time of Laya Healthcare employees to focus on more complex cases,” says Ian Brennan, director of IT. “As a result, we’ve drastically improved the patient experience, data privacy and safety.”

5 Build a community

Companies have been providing online platforms for customers to meet and share experiences for years, and it’s a tried and true way for clients to resolve issues quickly

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and get the most out of the products they’ve purchased.

Enterprise software provider IFS recently created a community for its customers, offering self-service capabilities, access to how-to content, and the opportunity to share best practices, knowledge, and expertise.

“Our customers told us they wanted a place where they could help themselves,” as well as the ability to have tailored interactions to help them get more value out of the company’s products, says Michael Ouissi, chief customer officer at IFS. “Within a few days, we

had more than 1,000 people registered to the platform, and [we] have appointed a full-time resource to manage the community.”

6 Leverage the cloud

Cloud services can provide benefits as well. Financial services company PPS is using a combination of software as a service (SaaS), platform as a service (PaaS), and infrastructure as a service (IaaS) to add and remove technologies as needed more effectively.

“This means more system stability, scalability on demand,



improved project [return on investment] and elasticity,” says Derik Scheepers, head of IT operations. “These benefits then filter to our customers and members in the form of more cost-effective products, faster claims processing and more innovations.”

The cloud has enabled a current project in which PPS is changing its main underwriting application from being a complex, inefficient process to a more streamlined one that uses microservices. The cloud is also enabling the firm to implement omni-channel capabilities that will give customers the

ability to access its systems from a variety of platforms and devices.

7 Listen to customers

Reducing friction is not just about relying on technology to enhance processes and interactions. Sometimes it comes down to hearing what customers want and making changes to accommodate them.

CIOs should partner with marketing, sales, services and other areas of the company that touch customer experience, to map out the customer journey as customers want to experience it, Lee says.

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“You can drive your business crazy looking for every possible way to reduce friction—and new technologies tend to introduce frustrations of their own,” Lee says. “So, start with what your customers value most about their customer journey.”

Otherwise, the CIO is “part of the frequent problem we see of companies throwing too many resources toward [customer experience] initiatives that don’t make a dent in the customer’s actual experience.” ♦

Bob Violino is a contributor to CIO.com.

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