



Using Touch Point Effectiveness Analysis to Improve the Customer Experience

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Each of us can recall good and bad customer experiences - whether an online buying experience, the responsiveness from a supplier or the encounter with someone on the front line. We remember and hopefully reward the stellar. And when it comes to the mediocre and downright terrible we react by taking our business elsewhere or not making a referral.

As business leaders we understand the importance of every single interaction a customer or prospect has with our company, especially in today's environment of intense competition, low switching costs, and increased commoditization. In the dynamic environment we're in right now, we need to recognize that customers are re-evaluating everything. Yet, we find that many companies continue to flounder when it comes to managing customer experience and engagement.

Customer experience and engagement have evolved from table stakes to points of differentiation. More and more evidence strongly suggests that there is a link between customer experience/engagement and the financial success of the company.

The vast number of touch points associated with the overall customer experience makes for a complex process. Therefore it is important to understand how each touch point contributes to the overall customer experience because an issue encountered at any one of these points can dramatically influence the overall experience.

So what are some things your company can do to begin to understand how to improve customer experience and engagement? We have found that companies truly focused on improving

customer engagement do at least three things: they identify all the key touch points a customer has with their company, measure the effectiveness of these touch points and use them to create a map of the customer experience.

It All Begins with Touch Points

A customer experience does not begin and end at a transaction, visit to a website, or conversation with customer service. The customer experience process encompasses the moment the customer becomes aware of your company and is comprised of multiple independent interactions, transactions, and contacts along the way. Ron Shevlin, author of *Everything They've Told You About Marketing Is Wrong* and an analyst at Aite Group, LLC, suggests the following definition for customer engagement: "Repeated interactions that strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in a brand."

All these repeated interactions are actually touch points. For our discussion, we will define a touch point as any customer interaction or encounter that can influence the customer's perception of your product, service, or brand. A touch point can be intentional (an email you send out) or unintentional (an online review of your product or company). As the stories at the beginning suggest, touch points begin long before the customer actually makes a purchase and long after they have made their first transaction. The goal of every company interested in leveraging customer experience as a competitive advantage is to create a positive and consistent experience at each touch point.

Your touch points need to include every encounter in the attraction process, such as your website, blog, email, newsletter, press coverage, articles, industry events, webinars, brochure, product literature, advertisements, etc to samples, white papers, product demos, initial calls, sales presentations and meetings, to your contract, product deployment or delivery process to your customer service, invoice, trouble ticket, to a loyalty card or referral program in your retention process. As you can see for most companies this is going to be a fairly long list.

Inventory Your Touch Points

Before you can begin measuring the effectiveness of each touch point we have found that it helps to take an inventory of all the touch points encountered by your customers. When you inventory your touch points you will want to know at least the following:

1. Where the touch point is typically encountered in the customer life cycle.
2. The operational purpose of the touch point. On the operational side a touch point may be designed to identify a prospect, resolve a problem, accelerate conversion or support executing a transaction.
3. The role of the touch point should in the customer experience such as influencing perception, building preference, or creating loyalty.
4. Who owns the touch point. For example, appointment scheduling may be owned by pre-sales, invoicing by accounting, and the website by marketing.
5. The touch point's value. While all touch points matter, they are not equal. A bad experience on one touch point may be enough to make a customer leave you but a bad experience on another while irritating and potentially damaging if fixed in time can be overlooked.

Assess Each Touch Point's Effectiveness

Now that you have a complete inventory of all of your touch points, and you understand the impact of each touch point in the experience as well as operational purpose and customer experience role for each touch point, you can assess the effectiveness of each touch point in terms of achieving its intended purpose against both operational and customer experience objectives.

Although overarching metrics such as customer satisfaction and customer advocacy are quickly becoming standard metrics today, attempting to measure the customer experience with a single metric can be overly simplistic and risky. Effectively managing the customer experience requires

effective measurement and management of a portfolio of metrics, including touch point effectiveness, to gain the insights into what is and isn't working.

We find it is worthwhile to actually plot this analysis on a 2X2 grid, with one axis labeled operational effectiveness and the other labeled customer experience effectiveness. Our analysis methodology enables us to map each touch point onto the grid and place it into one of four quadrants: high/high effectiveness, low/low effectiveness, high operational/low customer role effectiveness, low operational/high customer role effectiveness. The mapping will allow us visualize whether and where there are weak links in the overall experience.

Take Action

When we create a touch point inventory, we actually end up with three pieces of data for each touch point: an impact/importance score, an effectiveness score, and a point on the grid. For those touch points that were in low/low quadrant of the grid that have a rating of 8 or higher for importance (they are above the line) we recommend developing, publishing and implementing a corrective action plan. If you it has been awhile since your last acquired customer feedback, don't put off this type of research any longer. In today's environment it pays to be smart.

The goal of this type of effort is to enable you to use these touch points to reinforce your value proposition with customers and employees. EVERY interaction matters. Delivering great customer experience isn't something a few people in the company need to do. It's something that everyone in the company needs to do. Customer experience and engagement is a core competency and one that every company needs to cultivate.

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