

Customer experiences that enable more

Brands need to think beyond the touchpoints that their customers “experience”, to helping them to achieve what they really want - to be the enabler of dreams and success.



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The most innovative brands do more than sell products or deliver services, they create and support an experience that immerses the brand into the customer's world, and focuses on helping them to achieve more - it's about customers, not about you!

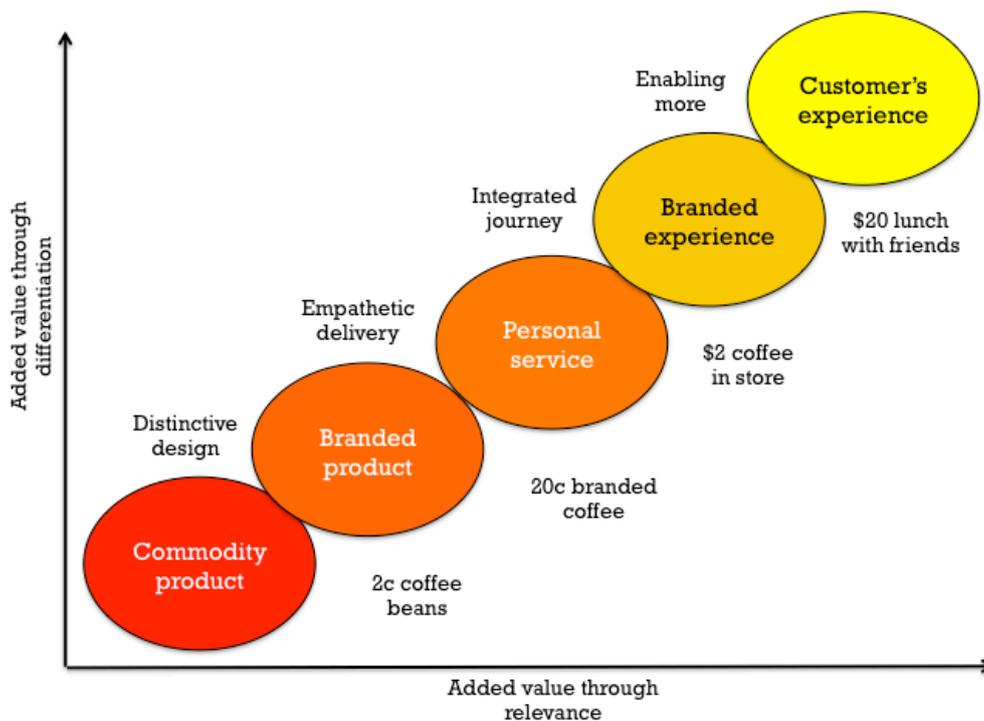
Experiences ... see me, feel me, thrill me

Harley Davidson's CEO eloquently describes the experience by which he seeks to bring his brand to life:

"It's one thing to have people buy your products, it's another for them to tattoo your name on their bodies ... What we sell is the ability for a 55 year old accountant to dress in black leather, ride through small towns and have people be afraid of him."

Brands and propositions are delivered through every possible medium that the organisation can utilise – from names and logos to leaders and buildings, products and services to advertising and brochures, colours and packaging to uniforms and interiors, culture and behaviours to training and rewards.

Jan Carlson, the former CEO of Scandinavian Airlines gave every one of his employees a little black book called Moments of Truth, where the few words inside spelt out incredibly simply, how every interaction is an opportunity to make or break a lifetime relationship with that customer.



From commodity products to the customer's experience

However customer “experiences” are much more than just consistent delivery across all the different touchpoints – it’s about ensuring that the journey (not just the flight, in the airline’s case, but from the first moment of need, until the mission is accomplished) is connected and coherent, consistent and complete. On top of this it’s about bringing it to life, making it distinctive and relevant, and ultimately adding value at every point along the way. It’s the customer’s experience, not the business’ experience.

Meaningful experiences are about relevant and distinctive interactions, rather than irrelevant and undifferentiated transactions. Instead of customers searching, selecting and buying, they are about helping customers to explore, play and learn. They are defined on customer’s terms, in customer’s language, by what customer’s see, feel, think and do.

A typical air traveller will have around 45 interactions with airline, real or perceived from the time he or she decides to travel, to the moment they arrive at their destination.

From dreaming of destinations to choosing flights, finding the best prices and buying tickets, car parking and checking-in, maybe visit a lounge before the crush to get on-board, glass of champagne and magazine of your choice, meals and drinks, time to watch a movie too, recline your seat or go to the stand-up bar, confident words from the captain and smiles from the crew, your baggage arrives hopefully, and then time for taxis and hotels, ready for that meeting, or to hit the beach.

Enabling ... it’s not what I buy, it’s what I do with it

Experiences are more than products and services, or purchase and delivery of the goods bought. That’s relatively unimportant compared to what the customer wants to achieve.

To achieve a personal best marathon with the new running shoes. To throw a great party with the ingredients bought. To write a novel with the new computer. To build the most amazing office with the construction materials just delivered. Clay Christensen calls these “jobs to be done”, the product application, the customer solution.

Whilst guiding the customer through awareness, selection and purchase is obviously important commercially, it is just the beginning for the customer. And for the brand. What matters more is what happens next – apply, using and achieving more.

Whilst it sounds obvious to say “People don’t want a drill, they want a hole in the wall” there are few DIY stores who really help people to do even the basics of home improvements.

The simplest way to “change the game” is “reframing” a proposition from product to customer. For example the pharma company that doesn’t just sell drugs, but helps doctors to deliver better care, and even manage their practice better – or the IT company that doesn’t just sell laptops and software, but also offers the training and support to help the client improve their productivity. The “enabling” customer experience delivers this bigger solution.

It is also about value – the real value to the customer, comes not from the product but in how it is effectively used – the return on investment which the customer gets from achieving more, time after time. Aligning that with a business model which charges the customer more in line with how they realise they value, then perceived value, and therefore price could be reframed too.

Whilst that might sound theoretical, it transformed IBM. Realising that clients valued its business advice on support much more than its hardware, IBM started charging for its consulting services. Customers paid much more for hours of support, than the original product, making IBM eventually realise that it was hardly even worth making the computers, and just provide the support experience. IBM Consulting was born.

Enhancing ... streamlining and elaborating the delivery

Jack Dorsey was inspired to create Square by small artisans like his glass-making brother, who missed out on many sales because they didn’t accept card payments. The incredibly simple dongle that transforms your tablet or phone into a card reader has helped some small business to double their sales. Add the simple financial accounting records that come with the reader, and the bookkeeping nightmares of many creative people are eliminated at a swipe

When mapping out your customer’s experience, try creatively removing all the value “destroyers” – the negative moments, the irrelevant points, the activities that do nothing for customers but are perhaps only there for the convenience or efficiency of the business. Consider whether, practically and commercially, it might be possible to still deliver this experience - now entirely consisting of positive value “creators” - without the eliminated activities.

Of course, you may now have eliminated negative steps that are still important for the business such as receiving the bill, making the payment, making the furniture, or disposing of the waste. Now consider replacing such essential steps with a different way of achieving them, that still fulfils the business need, but in a more positive way for customers. This is about

- **Streamlining:** making interactions that are unimportant, uninteresting or irrelevant to the customer shorter, simpler and faster.
- **Elaborating:** making interactions that are important, enjoyable and desirable to the customer longer, enhanced and memorable.

American Express recognised that its main communication with customers – the monthly statement of payments – was not an entirely positive one for its cardholders. Instead it sought to make it more positive by tying individual rewards and incentives to the transactions – “we hope you had a good meal at your local restaurant, and we’ve arranged with them for you to have a free bottle of champagne on your next visit, with our complements”.

Educating ... increasing the customer’s capacity to achieve

Tech Shop is an inspiring place. As “making” becomes back in vogue, either as a hobby or business pursuit, so too is the demand for tools. Except in today’s world of digital engineering and 3d printing, equipment is prohibitively expensive. TechShops are a branded network of urban workshops, where all the latest equipment is available to use, either to those with member subscriptions, or who pay per hour to use the facilities.

Once in the workshop, ambitions kick in, and you most probably seek some advice in how to operate the machines, or perfect your process. Informal advice evolves into structured workshops, with resident coaches delivering educational courses. Of course this is not dissimilar from many brands – witness the “learning space” at the back of the Apple Store where hourly tutorials are held, or the personal fitness coaching offered by sports shops, or the 30 day online support when you buy a new gadget.

Education is perhaps the valuable way to enhance your customers’ experience. Formal workshops or informal coaching, at the time of purchase or through the lifetime of the product, education enables people to achieve more, in a way that is valued, either as a source of tangible advantage and relationship, or a shift or addition to the business model. For the brand it can be a positive enhancement too – the Subaru Driving Experience both captures the expertise of tuition, and the credibility of the brand.

The more enlightened brand experience, and business model, therefore focuses on the “job to be done” - the product when it is used, not when it is bought – not as an afterthought, or an additional service, but as the core to the brand, the value proposition and the ongoing experience.

Enriching ... adding more emotion, human and personal

Whilst the benefits of education are tangible, customers are more emotional than ever. Enriching the experience is more subtle. It might be the sense of humour with which a brand communicates its proposition, the smell of freshly baked bread whilst shopping, the fun way in which a website is organised, or the premium clunk of the closing door of a well-made car. We are sensory, irrational beings, after all.

Juan Valdez Café has made the Colombian coffee growers far wealthier than if they had only ever sold their raw coffee beans to Starbucks and others. Instead they created their own packaged coffee brand, communicating the authenticity and richness of taste. Profits grew 10 times as they sold directly to consumers. But then they started building coffee shops, with local music and décor. The baristas wear ponchos and the farmer's donkey is tied up outside. This is far more than another globally franchised store brand, this is the real experience. Colombian coffee drunk as it should be. And worth 100 times what it would traditionally be to the growers.

Entertainment in its many forms is equally human. Live music in the local restaurant, the car brand that makes short movies about driving experiences, or turning boring transactions into must-play games. Drench is a soft drink brand. When it launched its own branded vending machines, they were fairly similar to others. Except they included a short on-screen game which buyers played before receiving their bottle. Pay your money. Play the game. But you don't get your drink until you win. It became addictive.

Intelligent ... big data transforms our ability to personalise

"MyMagic" gives Disney the ability to gather reams of personal data about the millions of people who flock to the resorts each year, tracking where they go across the resort, how they spend their money, and what they eat. There are visible sensors at every location, but also remote sensors tracking you around the park. It enables visitors to plan their trips in advance, and to enjoy a more personalised experience, eliminating queues, maximising the magic.

How does Mickey know your name? And how come Buzz Lightyear knows my previous best score? Browse the stores, and just wave your bracelet to make it yours. Personalised meals are waiting for you in the café, and if there is a spare moment, you might suddenly get a special offer, saying there's a spare seat waiting for you.

Rather than investing huge sums in new attractions each year, Disney can simply individualise every marketing proposition, highlighting the rides, hotels or characters that you missed last time. With parks generating over \$13 billion per year, a 10% increase in sales, of vacations and particularly within the park, would give an impressive return.

Disney has invested \$1 billion in a big data upgrade to its theme parks. By giving visitors rubber bracelets embedded with RFID microchips and encouraging them to plan minute details of their trips weeks ahead of time, the company expects to get a larger share of their total vacation spend.

Walmart handles more than 1 million customer transactions every hour, which is imported into databases estimated to contain more than 2.5 petabytes (2500

terabytes) of data – the equivalent of 167 times the information contained in all the books available worldwide on Amazon.com.

The volume of business data worldwide, across all companies, doubles every 1.2 years, according to estimates. The point of this is to enhance the customer experience. More intelligent, more personal, more effective and efficient.

“Big data” is defined by Gartner as being three-dimensional, i.e. increasing volume (amount of data), velocity (speed of data in and out), and variety (range of data types and sources). Gartner recently added: "Big data is high volume, high velocity, and/or high variety information assets that require new forms of processing to enable enhanced decision making, insight discovery and process optimization."

Digital ... social and mobile amplifies the ability to enable

CEO Mark Parker sees Nike's future as much in digital experiences, as in physical sports for which people buy his products. With a brand purpose to help people do better, Nike becomes more than a shoe or shirt, and an enabler of performance. Nike+ monitors your performance, from heartbeat to running pace, tracking and analysing performance, storing and sharing it with others, inspiring and helping you to do better.

The best experiences are hybrids, combining the best of physical and virtual worlds. Whilst Nike+ is digital, the performance is physical. Whilst you can buy customised editions online, you first check out the size instore. Whilst you share running routes virtually, and then come together on the start line of real events.

In the world of retail, most online plays are seeking to become more digital, and physical stores are enhanced digitally. This is partly about multi-channel, being able to buy online or instore, but also about the fusion of components within channels. Burberry's digital mirrors enable you to digitally superimpose yourself in different outfits whilst instore, whilst Net a Porter's premium packaging and glossy magazines compliment a sophisticated digital experience.

Most significant of all is mobile. Mobile lubricates hybrid experiences, providing continuity between different interactions, whilst also storing personal data, enabling payment, adding social influence of friends, providing GPS-fuelled information and incentives based on time and place, access to support in use, and ongoing. Mobile is less of a channel in its own right, but more the customer's navigation across a richer, continuous, personalised experience.

Integrated ... experiences as the brand's exo-skeleton

Organisationally, the customer experience becomes the backbone of the customer-centric organisation. In reality, more like an exoskeleton because it's the external customer's experience that then aligns the whole organisation internally. Whilst product-centric structures were driven from within, working in functional silos,

focused on products and selling, customer-centric businesses are designed from the outside in.

Delivering a seamless, integrated, learning experience requires people, processes and culture that are all aligned to deliver. It requires collaborative teams that work across functional boundaries, or even between partner organisations. It is fuelled by customer insight and information that is shared and applied to anticipate and personalise service. It requires shared purpose and rewards that encourage people to work in this way.

As the organisation becomes more intelligent, it adds more value by shaping and sharpening its propositions, solutions and experiences. One of the best examples of this is through curation – reducing the complexity, and increasing the relevance to customers. Brand curators cut through information overload and infinite choices which we are confronted with, providing more personal recommendations and expert guidance. Whilst online retailers like Fab and Positive Luxury excel at this, it is also possible physically. Fashion brand Jaeger recently unveiled a curated mix of latest fashion designs and trends from its own and competitor collections. Whilst this might seem counter-intuitive, Jaeger is putting its customers first, and drawing them into its store.

Enduring ... a positive spiral of achieving more together

Customer experiences are conventionally mapped as a linear flow, the reality of course is that they are much more complex. Most significantly, they become continuous loops of engagement as customers repurchase and do more with the brand. As the key resonance points are as much beyond the sale – in using the product, and choosing to repurchase or recommend to others – so marketing influence has shifted.

Mercedes Benz famously focus around 90% of their entire communication spend on people who have bought their car, rather than just thinking about it. Think about it. What they really want is for the customer to be so convinced that they have made the right choice that they not only do so next time, but tell all their friends too. One Mercedes driver probably knows 10 others with similar values, needs and spending power. And those 10 others are far more likely to listen to, and trust their friend's recommendation, than any form of impersonal advertising.

The experience therefore becomes a double loop – the purchase loop and the retention loop - or better still a positive spiral – achieving more together. The “positive spiral” experience is built on engagement, enablement and advocacy. Whilst this becomes more complex for organisations, it is fuelled by intelligence and hybrid interactions. As organisations shift from scale and average to focus and personalisation, it means that they have fewer spirals to manage, but potentially far more profitable.

LEADING THE FUTURE

In my Gamechangers book, I explore the challenge in developing better customer experiences as below, and provide a range of toolkits to support more inspired thinking and innovative delivery:

- More **enabling ... from selling products ... to enabling more** ... Innovators go beyond the sale to support people in applying and achieving more.
- More **immersive ... from functional journey ... to emotional experience** ... Innovators look beyond the process to engage people more deeply and usefully.
- More **participative ... from passive delivery ... to valued participation** ... Innovators work with customers, co-creation to collaboration and community.

Be bold, be brave, be brilliant.

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Peter Fisk is an expert advisor, keynote speaker, and bestselling author. He has over 25 years of experience working with business leaders in every sector across the world. He is professor of strategy, innovation and marketing at IE Business School. Explore more about his experience, insights and ideas, case studies and workshops at www.theGeniusWorks.com