

MAKING OF A HAPPY CUSTOMER

Customer obsession is a new phenomenon. For the longest time people just needed to have factories. Legend has it that Henry Ford, when asked by a Model T customer if he could get the car in the colour of his choice, told him: "You can have any colour car as long as it's black." Later companies like Unilever and P&G believed in controlling distribution. That's not the case anymore.

Globally, companies are focussed to attract new customers and retain them for life. Ritz-Carlton wants to build its business around personalised experiences and emotional connections for its guests. Harley Davidson wants its buyers to join the

Harley Owners Group, or HOG. Amazon offers free two-day shipping and ad-free movies and music. Netflix collects customer data to create hyper-personalised recommendations. So, is that the way forward? A panel of experts who deal with customers on a day-to-day basis, share their thoughts on why companies are obsessing over customers, and how they can retain them for life.

At the core of customer-centricity is listening to them. "One way to have your customer stick to you is to listen to those who are not happy," said Akhil Gupta of NoBroker, an online real estate platform. "All the founders at NoBroker get every complaint on their email... When a



(L-R) David Thompson, Anurag Saran, Sundar Subramanian, Sarvesh Deshmukh and Akhil Gupta

grieving customer gets a response shortly after writing his complaint, he feels better."

An unhappy customer is more dangerous than any product failure. With artificial intelligence, machine learning, big data, among other new technologies, following the customer where he is, staying relevant to him through their life journey, and

understanding their requirements, has become easier. But, can personalisation be delivered at scale? The answer perhaps lies in the nature of the company. As Anurag Saran of Quirk, the online classified platform, puts it, "It's critical for a diversified platform as ours with such a varied user base as if we don't personalise we may fade out." With more than 30

million users, Quirk tries to customise its home page for the customer.

To serve the customer better one needs to understand him and engage with him, feels Sarvesh Deshmukh of Happiest Minds Technologies. "I recently read a survey that 76 per cent customers feel that sellers don't meet their expectations. The issue is when we are trying to improve one aspect of the spectrum, the dynamics change so it is an ongoing process," he says.

It is also important to keep innovating. "We think for our customers and give them a set of solutions after identifying their problems," says Sundar Subramanian of Mphasis, a technology firm.

For Subramanian, two things really matter: Data insights and contextual information. Both should complement. "We use data insights to get upfront benefits through contextual

information of the customer," he says. It helps in understanding the end consumer and allows brands to engage with the customer for a longer span.

To sum it up, there are four basic rules to engage with customers better, believes David Thompson of Freshworks: collaborative engagement, predictive engagement, contextual engagement and anywhere engagement. "Depending on the business one or the other rule can have more prominence." For example, if a company is bleeding customers because of a product issue, collaborative engagement is the best thing to do. "It's an emergency and you need all hands-on deck. One can apply that one strategy tactically and the problem is fixed, and you can look at getting new customers through social media, etc., applying anywhere engagement," he explains.

DAVID THOMPSON

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, FRESHWORKS

Today's customer has all the power. And, they will leave you if they have one bad experience. In fact, close to 74 per cent of companies are grappling to go multi-channel and develop several mediums of communication with the customer to provide a seamless experience. But, are they successful in doing so? Perhaps not.

So, what really should be a strategic approach towards creating a 'wow' experience for your customer? Let's begin with collaborative engagement.

You have to be there with your customer when they need you. So, rely on your people the most (though these days' bots too can be relied upon in certain cases). Second is contextual engagement. You cannot personalise an experience unless you have all the data and you are able to leverage that in an algorithm. Utilising that data and applying predictive algorithm to that is the next key strategy. Finally, be anywhere your customer is – on any platform, social media or even physically if possible. If you have these strategies in place, you may just earn a customer for life.

We also need to understand the real strategic value of AI and ML. It literally means being available 24/7. So, if a business cannot afford a 24/7 customer care centre, an automated bot can help you remain connected with your customers all the time.



ENGAGE WITH HIM
Be there for your customer all the time, especially when he needs you. Rely on your people the most

STAYING AHEAD
A customer with one bad experience will leave you so, be ahead of him, know him better

LOYALTY IS PASSE

Consumer behaviour has changed. They know what they want, and their loyalty has shifted to user experience rather than a particular product or service

CONSTANT INNOVATION

Following the consumer and understanding his expectations needs constant innovation. It's also the only way to stay afloat

UTILISING DATA

Analysing customer data and utilising it for a more personalised user experience is the way forward. Without infringing their privacy, quite obviously

AKHIL GUPTA

FOUNDER, CHIEF TECH & PRODUCT OFFICER
NOBROKER



LIVING IN MOMENTS

We are a C2C real estate search platform that is completely technology-enabled, so much that we absolutely have no feet on streets. For us, moving along and living the moments of a consumer is an important aspect because of which we try and catch him early on in his lifecycle.

The need for a place to stay comes up when the customer is out of college and entering a job, he either needs a PG or a shared accommodation. Once he moves ahead in life, he may opt for a 1BHK or a 2BHK, rented apartment. He may even choose to buy a house. Earlier, we only used to do the matchmaking.

soon we started providing services for getting the legal documents/rent agreements prepared. Then, many of our customers expected us to help them move. So, we brought in the services of movers and packers. We ask the user a set of questions and the size of the house and then quote a fee that needs to be paid.

Getting on WhatsApp helped us expand further. We have a deep learning algorithm that checks and uploads the pictures of properties that we receive through WhatsApp. We also introduced a rent-payment option via credit card on our platform that enabled people pay their rent of time and also earn reward points.

SARVESH DESHMUKH

DIRECTOR
NATIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
HAPPIEST MINDS TECHNOLOGIES



ENGAGE, INFORM, IMPROVE

If we talk about engagement, it begins with the first interaction you have with the customer, as that is the time they start gauging you as a potential partner. It helps if you engage early on as it gives you time to understand his needs. What is the best channel of engagement? I being a sales guy, in my 20 years of work life, has understood there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction.

You need to think of ways of how technology can empower your interaction with the customer. How do you connect emotionally? Do your objective align with

theirs? Next is how do you inform them and what do you inform them about? Firstly, be well informed about yourself in terms of what is the best that you can offer him. A sales guy may not know the many technologies that we work on but he must know what the customer wants.

Improvement comes up next. We need to know whether we are engaging enough with the customer and understanding what he wants more from us. Are we using technology in a way that helps the customer realise what he wants? All of this needs to be ascertained all the time.

WHERE CUSTOMER IS THE KING

Today's customer is very different from his counterpart from the past decade. He is more informed, he has more options and he has social media. The customer of today really is the king. The 2019 edition of Customer For Life, presented by the Economic Times and Freshworks, witnessed a burst of thoughts on why today's customer is at the helm of things and how companies need to work strategically to retain him for life

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ANURAG SARAN

CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER, QUIRK INDIA

India is not one but a collection of markets. Segmenting these diverse group of users and their needs is critical, particularly for a platform such as Quirk, whose classifieds are sometimes hyper-local. Innovation, therefore, is at our core which helps us safeguard against getting disrupted.

Quirk addresses a customer's three main pain points: Access, discovery and transaction. We connect seekers and buyers for a specific need, once that is met we stay in their journey by offering them various products and services, and see that the transaction is completed smoothly.

One of the key innovation that we did was the launch of the missed call service in 2012, wherein we asked seekers to give us a missed call and we would post the ad for them. The response was

overwhelming as it gave us access to many users who were not yet online. We also went for internal verticalisation by adding more layers of technology and reorganising five key verticals that have massive supply and demand. We created specific experiences for these particular verticals to ensure holistic experience for users. We also leveraged AI and ML; for our alert notifications we have a ML algorithm.

Two key activities that we are driving to push cross-category usage is cross-category recommendation modules. We analyse data over the years and use it to better consumer experience. Second is Qcash, which is basically an earn and burn loyalty programme. Our first instance has been very encouraging.



freshworks
CUSTOMER FOR LIFE

SUNDAR SUBRAMANIAN

PRESIDENT, GLOBAL DELIVERY, MPHASIS

We stand at a point in time when the pace of change is extremely fast. The tenure of large companies that have stayed in the S&P 500 index is constantly declining. If you look at 2017, all top five companies are technology giants, with many of them not even been around before 20 years back.

So, whenever there is a collision between the digital and the physical world, the digital world wins. Which is why 52 per cent of all Fortune 500 companies have gone bankrupt. If we look at one minute of the internet in the past three years, for example Netflix, in 2017 it had 70,000 hour views, in 2018 it jumped to 2,66,000 hours view in 2018 and in 2019 it is 6,94,000. What has declined? Emails, twitter, even Facebook. The crux is, yesterday's

disrupters are getting disrupted today. Consumer behaviour has changed: they know what they want, their loyalty to a particular product or company is passé, in fact, their loyalty has shifted to user experience and that is the deciding factor for them to stick around.

We are a B2B company and work with large banks, insurance companies, logistics companies, etc. but they are not our only point of focus. For us, the focus is on the customer's customer. We build our solutions based on data insights and that helps us understand them better.

BUILDING AROUND THE CUSTOMER



freshworks
CUSTOMER FOR LIFE

FOLLOWING THE USER