



Cultivating Customer Experience:

Differentiate — and Win —
in the New Competitive
Battlefield



Market Research | Brand Strategy | Content Marketing | Digital Marketing
We builds brands that meaningfully connect with customers to accelerate business growth.

Executive Summary

B2B brands that place customers at the center don't just grow, they thrive. Leading brands have recognized that customer experience (CX) drives growth and is essential for differentiation.



Digital transformation and mobile first customer experiences dictate the need for seamless customer experience across *all* channels—online and offline—which means putting customers at the center is critical for growth. Companies are heavily investing in the technology to support digital transformations, yet alone this is not transformative. The always-connected customer who has access to unprecedented amounts of information is more informed and discerning, making customer experience—in addition to technology—today's great differentiator.

A majority of companies recognize the critical role customer experience plays, but most do not actually make it a strategic priority. According to Accenture, “86 percent of B2B executives consider the customer experiences provided during sales and service interactions to be very

important, and 41 percent put the customer experience at the top of their list of strategic priorities.”²

Companies that want to bridge the gap from recognizing the importance of CX to prioritizing and executing effective CX strategies must start from the inside out:

1. Crystalize your brand's vision and value proposition. These define your customer experience.
2. Articulate an employee value proposition to attract and retain the best and most engaged people. They are your best asset.
3. Develop the programs and tools to support a customer-centric mindset by building relationships with your employees.



Companies making the strategic investment in CX are gaining a competitive advantage and reaping the benefits of building positive customer relationships, improving loyalty, and boosting top line growth. Creating and maintaining a strong brand that is contemporary, relevant and connects with customers takes time and expertise, but if you don't execute, your competitors will. In 2020 and beyond, B2B companies must make the strategic decision to invest in their customer experience. Those that do will reap the advantages.



Introduction

Why do winning B2B companies invest in Customer Experience?

Digital transformation is redefining customers' expectations as big data, new technology, and artificial intelligence connect people to more devices and more choices.

While companies are rapidly investing in digital technologies — these alone cannot drive strong returns. Access to unprecedented amounts of information is shaping customers' decisions and putting them in charge.

Serving customers in today's omni-channel environment entails offering a unified experience, not just a digital one. It's about delivering a consistent and seamless experience, even when a customer begins researching a product or solution online and then continues their journey via their tablet or phone.



Putting people at the heart of an experience transforms a mere transaction into a meaningful interaction — one that is more engaging.

Putting people at the heart of an experience transforms a mere transaction into a meaningful interaction—one that is more engaging and, in turn, positively impacts satisfaction and loyalty. Marketplace dynamics suggest brands can no longer differentiate solely on products or technology.

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Why differentiate with CX?

1. Brands with a strong CX grow revenue 4-8x faster ¹
2. Superior CX drives customer loyalty and purchase intent ²
3. Companies with a stronger experience can command a premium ³

What Are Three Steps You Can Take, Now?

While bridging the gap between recognizing the importance of CX and executing an effective CX strategy can seem daunting, these three strategic imperatives are based on our experience working with globally recognized companies and addressing some of their fundamental challenges.

1. Crystalize your brand vision and value proposition.
2. Articulate an employee value proposition.
3. Improve your customer experience by improving the employee experience.

Imperative #1: Crystalize your brand vision and value proposition.

Your brand—defined by both its rational and emotional offering—is at the heart of any customer experience. Brands are central to successful digital transformations since they define the experience and ensure it resonates with a company's customer segments.

You wouldn't put a new roof on a house that doesn't yet have a foundation in place. It's the same with a brand and its experience. The building blocks—the brand pillars, values, promise, purpose and vision—must be established before it's possible to create authentic and compelling experiences that make connections and accelerate business growth. This is just one of the reasons why it is so important for leaders to create a brand vision and identify what a brand stands for, in addition to articulating its unique value proposition.



What you can do: Define your brand and its promise.

It's important to invest the time and resources in defining your brand. This will enable all stakeholders to operate from the same playbook.

First, articulate your brand's point of difference (who you are), key benefits (what you offer), and current target and evolving customer targets (to whom). Second, crystalize your company's "why" to determine the reason your customers (and employees) should care and communicate it in ways that resonate with each customer or employee persona.

Imperative #2: Articulate an employee value proposition.

The majority of brands have a clearly articulated value proposition for why customers should choose them over their competitors, but many companies overlook the importance of aligning employees to support it. Ask, what is your company offering employees in exchange for their skills, expertise and time? In other words, why would someone work at your company?

Aligning employees with the brand's value proposition and offering them one of their own are essential for attracting and retaining a company's

most valuable asset—the people who run the company day in and day out. Forrester reports that “Customers who experience disgust, anger, or a feeling of neglect during a brand interaction are about



eight times more likely not to forgive that company.”⁴

Additionally, as companies redefine and shape their multigenerational work environments, the employee value proposition should be broad enough to appeal to the different employee personas. Not only should it articulate a common appeal, such as the brand’s purpose, its value beyond profits, but it should also offer something that appeals to each employee segment.

What you can do: Create listening mechanisms.

Setting a vision and articulating compelling value propositions—for both the customer and employee—that are defendable, authentic and true rely on the use of effective data-based listening mechanisms.

Listening tools, such as surveys, online bulletin boards and in-depth interviews, capture valuable and actionable customer and employee data. Most customers and employees prefer anonymously expressing their opinions about the good, the bad and the ugly with an outside partner. This can be a good thing. Anonymity will ensure you get to where the real insights are found. “Verbatims” derived from open-ended qualitative data—both what’s stated and what isn’t—are particularly valuable for identifying gaps based on current beliefs.

Imperative #3: Improve your customer experience by improving the employee experience.

While a vision helps steer the brand, it is essential to start internally by defining how company culture aligns with delivering the right customer experience. Attracting and retaining the right talent is critical, but improving customer satisfaction and loyalty starts by building a relationship with your employees. B2B brands should take a cue from one of the world’s most valuable B2C brands. Angela Ahrends, senior vice president of retail at

Companies with engaged employees outperform those without. According to Dale Carnegie, they outperform by up to 200%.⁶ It's critical to provide employees with the guidance and tools to deliver an end-user experience that is positive and differentiating.

Apple, articulates it best, “Everyone talks about building a relationship with your customer. I think you build one with your employees first.”⁵

Build relationships and engage employees.

Differentiating experiences are naturally enhanced by inspired, educated and engaged employees. Companies that want to prioritize customer experience understand that those on the front line hold tremendous potential to influence the customer interaction, yet this often remains an area ripe for significant improvement. Bain & Company surveyed companies and their performance in 60 areas and found the largest gap



between high and low performing brands was “a front line that understands and passionately executes the brand’s strategy.”¹

Leading B2B brands invest in employee training that communicates the company’s values, explains how employee behaviors influence the customer experience, and helps them understand the distinct customer segments and align them with the company’s brand vision and value proposition. Doing so shapes the customer experience and provides a currency well beyond the actual transaction.

What you can do: Engage employees by making them part of the brand.

Companies with engaged employees outperform those without. According to Dale Carnegie, they outperform by up to 200%.⁶ It’s critical to provide



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Training should be developed for all employees, but front line employees in particular must understand they are an extremely important part

of the brand experience. One effective way of delivering this message is to invest in educational tools that are delivered in an engaging in-person format on a regular basis, such as virtual or in-person workshops, summits or retreats. .

Employees must truly understand who they are serving. Customer personas are an effective way to communicate and train internal stakeholders and employees on the target audience segments.

Specifically, personas help them understand customers and how best to interact with them based on their stage in the buying journey and differing purchase motivations.

Are you ready to differentiate and win?

Today customers choose who they conduct business with based on experiences. One lackluster or poor experience can push your customer to the competitor.

Don't delay in differentiating your brand's customer experience. Invest in your customer experience by establishing your brand's foundational assets, building relationships with employees and empowering them to fuel the best experiences, and listening to customers is key to competing in today's B2B marketplace.

If you don't, your competitors will. Is that a risk worth taking?



ABOUT C.E.K. & PARTNERS

C.E.K. & Partners is a branding and strategy firm that the world's most notable brands – across payments, financial services, healthcare and manufacturing – depend on when they seek market research, brand strategy, content marketing and digital marketing. We develop programs that build brands and meaningfully connect them to customers in order to accelerate business growth.

Building a brand is an investment that requires energy and expertise — that's why we're here to help.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW WE CAN HELP, VISIT,
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