How to Become A Customer Centric Business

Customer-centric is an approach to doing business that focuses on providing a positive **customer** experience both at the point of sale and after the sale in order to drive profit and gain competitive advantage.

Customer-centricity begins with your company's culture. If you want to be customer-centric, then your business needs to make a company-wide commitment to your customers' success. The steps below explain what your organization can do to make that commitment to your customers.

1. Anticipate Customer Needs

There's a great quote from Henry Ford that says: "If I had asked people what they wanted; they would have said faster horses." So, why is this mentioned when it seems counter-intuitive to the concept of customer-centricity.

Ford is saying that if he had only listened to what customers thought he could build he wouldn't have produced a car. He was thinking light-years ahead of his competition, and for that reason he created a product that anticipated the market's future needs. Ford knew what the customer wanted before the customer knew they even wanted it — that's a game-changing business move.

We can see similar styles of future-forecasting in Steve Jobs and Elon Musk. These visionary CEOs pushed the envelopes on what people would want in the future, giving the world the iPhone, iPad and the Model X — and companies with valuations of $1.08 trillion and $48 billion, respectively.

While most customers are able to accurately provide an account of what they want today, gauging what they want on a longer time horizon is extremely difficult for most people. They rely on companies to do that work for them to anticipate their needs — and make helpful suggestions accordingly.

2. Collect Customer Feedback

It may seem obvious, but to create a great, customer-centric company, you need to communicate frequently and regularly with your customers. In today's digital world, there are countless opportunities where you can collect feedback. Here are a few touchpoints that you might already use to communicate with customers:

- ✓ Chat
- ✓ Email
- ✓ SMS (text messaging)
- ✓ Phone calls
- ✓ In-app messages
- ✓ FB Messenger
- ✓ Message boards

Today, valuable communication can occur on so many different platforms. Every department should be using all of the communication channels available to them to learn about customers — and the sheer volume of measurable insight you receive from these messages can help you greatly as you adjust the direction of your product.

But there's also a level of qualitative feedback that you need to be proactive about collecting. While the aforementioned communication is likely already occurring at your company, user research is something you might be ignoring.

If you're not already doing so, here are three customer research techniques to consider:

<u>Conduct a Survey</u>
By telling your customers that you're not perfect, you can gain insight and track your performance. The most successful companies in the world already know the value of surveys, and by conducting a regular customer satisfaction survey or product survey, you can provide an avenue for great feedback.

<u>Launch User Testing</u>
Modern digital marketing tools such as Usertesting.com and Hotjar provide a simple framework to collect feedback from real people about your product. In the quest to build a customer-centric organization, this can help validate your ideas and guide your work towards the highest-impact projects.

<u>Make Direct Calls</u>
Many folks prefer talking vs. texting. There's something more personal about a conversation outside of the digital realm — by simply picking up the phone, you're able to get a more robust form of feedback from customers. And you can adjust your line of questioning in real-time to adapt to each situation.

"Talking to customers is probably the most important thing I do all week. While there's a level of product development that requires you to take a stance and anticipate needs — it's impossible to do that without an understanding of your customer's current situation." CTO J.P. Morgan

3. Be Easily Accessible

We all know the concept: make it difficult to contact support, and you'll spend less time servicing those difficult customers. There's a huge financial and time expenditure used in servicing customers, so many brands (especially digitally built businesses) hide their support behind many layers of pages.

For example, try to find a phone number on Facebook's Help Page. It's nearly impossible. They'd rather communicate through help articles and live chat before giving out their number.

On the other hand, there's Zappos, the online shoe retailer with a completely opposite approach to customer success. Zappos identifies that when a customer wants to talk to them, they should make it as easy as possible. Note how they include their phone number prominently on the top bar of every page with the note "Available 24/7."

"A lot of people may think it's strange that an internet company would be so focused on the telephone, when only about 5% of our sales happen by phone. But we've found that on average, our customers telephone us at least once at some point, and if we handle the call well, we have an opportunity to create an emotional impact and a lasting memory … Our philosophy has been that most of the money we might ordinarily have spent on advertising should be invested in customer service, so that our customers will do the marketing for us through word of mouth." …Tony Hsieh, the CEO of Zappos

Make sure your 'Contact Us' page is highly visible and easy to access — and that it actually answers common customer questions you see crop up time and time again.

4. Meet with Customers In-Person

One of the biggest trends facing modern organizations is the loss of feedback from in-person meetings. Before the arrival of the Internet and our diversified global economy, it was far easier for a business to interact directly with a customer. Direct, human contact happened on a daily basis simply because it was a necessary part of commerce. If you wanted an item, you went to a store, talked to a salesperson, and bought it in-person. That feedback could be used by a business to improve the consumer experience.

Today, in most businesses, this is not the case. While the number of your potential touchpoints for feedback are far greater due to technology, there is less in-depth contact. You can prevent this by bringing back the in-person experience. It may seem old school; but hosting in-person events can be beneficial to achieve your goal to be customer-centric. By hosting an event, you provide value to two parties: the customers and the business.

5. Provide Proactive Customer Service

One of the best ways to differentiate your business from its competitors is to provide your customers with added value that extends beyond the point of purchase. This shows them that you're truly invested in creating a positive customer experience and will go above-and-beyond to deliver it to them.

One way to provide added value is to include proactive customer service features. Proactive customer service gives your customers resources that help them solve problems on their own, without having to reach out to your business for support. This way they can resolve simple issues and avoid waiting on hold for your customer service team.

One example, WashCard Systems is one company that has profited immensely from adopting proactive customer service. They used HubSpot to create a pricing page so customers wouldn't have to reach out to a live rep to see how much its products cost. This accelerated the company's sales process as customers knew immediately whether or not WashCard Systems would fit their budget.

A pricing page may seem like a simple addition, but it completely changed WashCard Systems' lead generation process. Rather than dissuading customers, the pricing page encouraged them to reach out to WashCard Systems and learn more about what the business had to offer. This type of proactive customer service demonstrated the business's customer-centric approach to improving the buying experience.

6. Adopt Customer Service Tools

The customer's experience with your business is just as important as the product or service you're providing. Customers don't just want a sale; they want to enjoy the entire buying experience. Even if your product is great, you'll lose customers to competitors who are able to make their customer interactions enjoyable and productive.

Adopting the right customer service tools plays a major role in creating a customer-centric experience. These tools help customer service teams create seamless, multi-channel support systems that provide customers with immediate solutions to their problems. By doing so, customers are more satisfied because the business is investing in their short- and long-term success.

One company that does an excellent job of utilizing customer service tools is the insurance company, Lemonade. Lemonade recognized that one of its most difficult challenges was changing the customer's perception of its industry. Most people loathe speaking with insurance companies because the customer experience is typically dull and frustrating. So, Lemonade invested in chatbots to help change that experience for its customers; making the interaction more "playful and instantaneous".

7. Look Beyond the Purchase

At the end of the day, your business's goal is to get customers to purchase your product or service. However, when customers buy once, you'll want to ensure they buy again. After all, studies show that it costs nearly five times more to make a new customer than to retain an existing one.

How do you motivate your current customers to purchase from you again? The best way is to provide them with added benefits that extend beyond the point of purchase. These benefits should help customers achieve their goals and create a more memorable customer experience. By doing so, customers will begin to associate their success with your company's products and services.

One example of this can be seen with the industrial clothing company, Rocky Mountain Industrial Supply, or RMI. RMI sells flame-resistant clothing to labor crews operating in industrial worksites like oilfields and mines. In addition to its clothing, RMI creates added value for its customers by providing them with free safety certification courses. Customers take these courses to receive credible certifications that will qualify them to operate a product or piece of machinery. This not only helps customers avoid costly mistakes but also gives them the tools needed to excel in their careers. As they take more courses and enhance their skill set, customers begin to rely on RMI to assist with their long-term goals.

8. Create an Onboarding Process

If you want to create a customer-centric culture, your team can't abandon customers after you make a sale. Instead, make sure your customers get the most from your product and services. That way they'll be more inclined to return to your business when they're ready for an additional purchase.

One of the best methods for optimizing your product's value in the eyes of the customer is setting up a detailed onboarding process. An onboarding process introduces your products and services to the customer and explains how to use them to fulfill their specific needs. Each customer's needs will be unique, so your team should personalize this process to ensure every customer is properly set up for success.

The Sales rep can assist during the onboarding process. The benefit of this was that the sales reps could reference customer needs outlined during their previous interactions with the customer. Then, the onboarding rep could identify products and features that would help the customer fulfill those needs. This ensures your customers are getting the most value possible from their purchases.

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