

Building the right foundation for exceptional customer experiences

By [Richard Mullins](#)

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Customer experience is the most important differentiator for brands in a world where it's becoming increasingly difficult to compete on cost and features alone. To win in today's market, brands need to be able to offer customers engaging, consistent and relevant experiences at every touchpoint, digital channels and those in the real world alike.



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Yet the environment in which marketers operate is complex, and delivering customer experiences that meet consumers' expectations is challenging. The amount of customer data we have at our fingertips is growing exponentially, but it is often not stored in a centralised or standardised manner.

We're seeing the number of devices, screens and channels that customers use multiply, meaning more data and more data sources. That trend will only accelerate as new Internet of Things devices like Amazon's Alexa become a feature in more and more homes.

The result is that customer journeys are fragmenting across multiple channels, which may be powered by different databases and systems in your marketing environment. For example, someone might begin researching a holiday on a smartphone in a waiting room, ask your social team a question on Twitter, book from a PC and then manage the trip on a mobile app.

Currently, it is a challenge for most companies to tie the customer's booking back to the social query or to the search ad that converted them.

Demographics



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What's more, digital and physical channels are starting to blur together, thanks to technologies such as facial recognition, beacons and augmented reality. We have already seen some retailers in the UK experiment with in-store facial recognition technology. They can use demographic factors like age and gender to tailor in-store ads to people; they can even tie facial recognition to loyalty card data for personalisation at an individual customer level.

To make sense of this world of big data and fragmented channels, companies need to invest in putting a robust customer experience architecture into place. This is all about mapping the various elements of your digital marketing and sales environment – the systems, the databases, the channels, the assets, the processes and more – to your customer journey and to the experiences you wish to offer at each point.

A customer-centric architecture gives you a view of the customer engagement environment, from acquisition, to retention, to content and experience management, to analytics and reporting, to customer data management and marketing automation. It also helps you to understand where you need integrated data and systems and workflow to get a complete view of customer engagement.

Another benefit is the alignment of technology, touchpoints and operations, as different people and teams are involved in the customer experience delivery — your IT team, marketing, the content producers, call centre and the analytics and insight teams.

Architecture

A good architecture maps your organisation's customer data, technical and operational requirements across all channels. This allows you to start understanding who your customers are and identify them in different channels, whether these are the retail point of sale, your website, social media or paid media. It also helps you to gain a view of how they engage with your brand at different touchpoints and in different parts of the customer journey.

You can achieve more granular and detailed understanding of customers' needs and behaviour so that you can use each touchpoint and each piece of content to deliver more meaningful engagements with your audience in an automated manner.

This turns customer data analysis and insight into the driver for content and experience management. It maps all of this back to the return on investment and this in turn, this gives you the insight to deliver the right experience for every context, at every touch point and at every step of the journey.

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