

Get connected in 2021, or else...

 By [Wynand Smit](#)

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The world has certainly changed and so have customers. But as a business, have you?

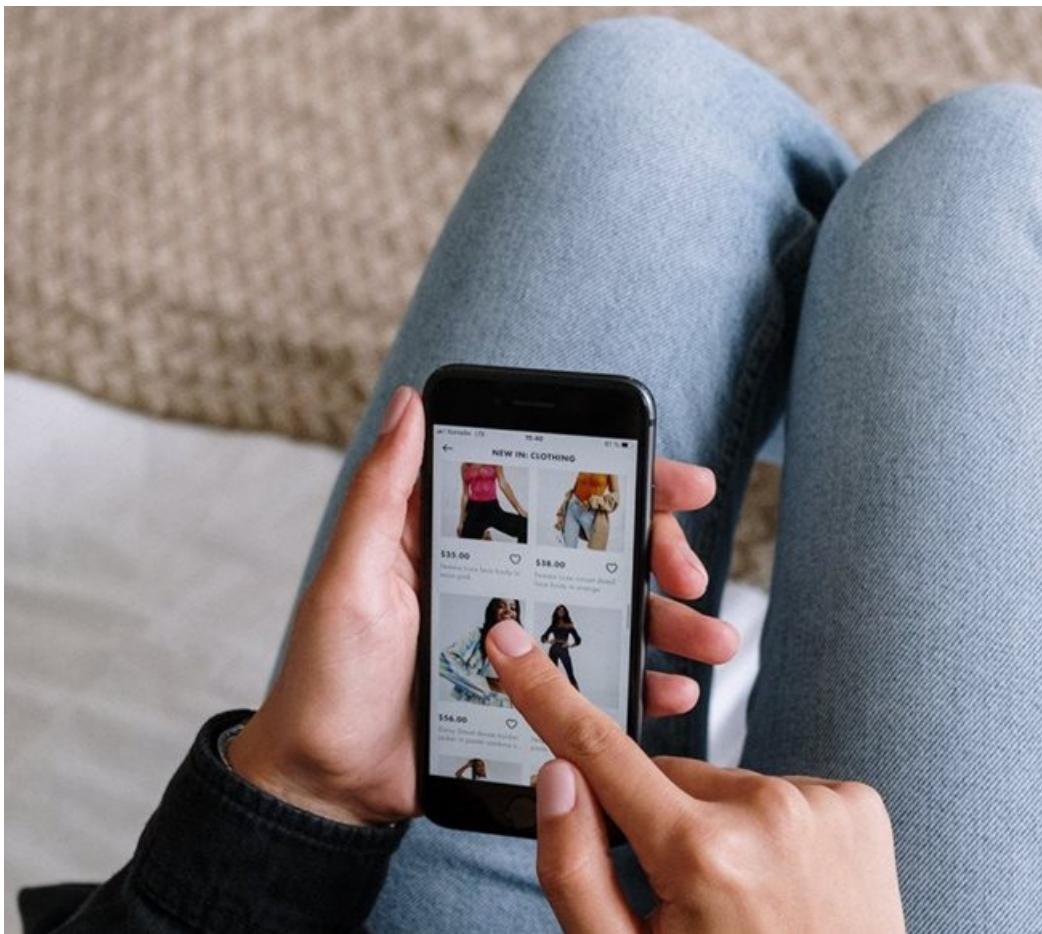


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Forrester predicts that 2021 will be the year that companies accelerate digital transformation while focusing on customer experiences (CX) and the platforms and technologies designed to enhance them. This is a view shared by many.

The Gartner Top 10 Strategic Predictions for 2021 and Beyond emphasises how the pandemic has forced companies to adopt new ways of engaging with customers. And the reports and statistics keep coming. If you want to keep hold of that constantly changing customer and market, you need to offer relevant content, targeted support and engaging, well, engagement. People want more from brands than just emailers, sparkly newsletters and half-hearted support in a world defined by closed doors, masks, social distancing and isolation.

So what does define customer experience (CX) in 2021?

Self-service is essential

First off, self-service isn't the remit of the lazy company that throws up a Q&A and an email address and expects the customer to be happy. No. Self-service is intelligent, automated, self-learning and multi-directional. Your customer needs to be able to check their bank balance, their loyalty rewards or their purchases in one simple step. But if that step isn't simple, then your self-service has to be capable of getting them to the right place and right person at the right time. Don't expect your customers to stick around if you don't put effort into your self-service solutions.

In 2021, self-service is defined by: artificial intelligence (AI), chatbots (good ones), responsiveness, relevance and speed. If your self-service options are powered by technology and driven by speed to resolution, then you're moving into 2021 with the right tools in place.

Create a better journey

One thing that 2020 put in the customer pocket was a deeper reliance on digital and mobile. Your customers have changed. Their expectations are much higher. Think you can do a grocery delivery service that drops off the goods in 5-7 days? Your competition does it in 37 minutes. Think that your customer support can vaguely wave in the direction of an answer? Your competition will not just answer the question, it will give a clear timeline. You have to build a better journey. You must meet customer expectations. Otherwise, you will be left behind by those that do.

In 2021 the customer journey is defined by: richly layered support; transparency, automation and speed.

Understand your customer

You will need to provide the customer with channels and support that match their behaviour and interests. It is vital to have visibility into all customer interactions across multiple business channels and their preferences to use this data to personalise the customer journey. This will deliver remarkably better experiences and it will also allow for the business to use its data more effectively. Knowing your customer in 2021 goes beyond having a record of payment and account information and into preferences, behaviour, and environmental influences.

In 2021 knowing your customer is defined by: understanding, insight, analytics, intelligence, and relevance.

Intelligent deployment

When it comes to investing in new technologies and solutions the carrot is the CX and the stick is the competition. Customers want better self-service, they want improved interactions during calls, they want to get the information and get out. So, invest in the right technology enablers, but make sure your investment is smart and relevant.

If cloud, for example, can make your services and CX investments cheaper, faster and better, go for it...but don't just buy something because it's the next big thing and everyone is talking about it. Also pay attention to data because this will help you to refine deployment, investment and strategy.

Finally, note the three themes that stand out for 2021: Speed. Relevance. Technology. These are the trends that will define how a business thrives in the uncertain future that lies ahead, and that will ensure that customers keep coming back.

Wynand Smit is CEO at INOVO, a leading contact centre business solutions provider.

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