

Safeguard your customer relationships this Black Friday

 By [Wynand Smit](#)

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Black Friday is here to stay: as part of a retail festival that entices consumers in their millions to part with their cash, it's another way of increasing revenue just before the festive season officially kicks in.



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One question the event raises is that of the effect on customer experience: crashed websites, stock shortfalls and lack of capacity in contact centres to cope with call volumes can damage your brand's reputation – how can you ensure that your business doesn't become a casualty of Black Friday and any other surge periods in the retail/e-commerce environment?

A promise to keep

The promise of “unbelievable savings” and “exclusive offers” creates an expectation that retailers really need to match – from the offer itself, to the purchase, delivery and after-sales service. If, for example, the retailer offers a flash sale of 25% on specific items, is that enough to really justify the hype?

The frequency of using flash online discounts within the South Africa e-commerce market has also set a new norm for consumers; making it harder to stand out and manage expectations in a crowded, challenging retail space competing for customers.

Customers also quickly see through an attempt to flog old stock or slow-moving items – if the promise is a “great offer” it needs to be on desirable items or services that are relevant to consumers. Offering heavily discounted wool coats at the end of November for a Black Friday promotion, for example, wouldn’t be seen as a particularly enticing or worthwhile offer.



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In an era where “authenticity” plays such a key role in establishing trust and loyalty in the market, any initiatives or aspects of a promotion that may derail this, need to be considered carefully and executed strategically and correctly. It will take some time to recover from brand damage or negative sentiment after a poorly executed promotion – it’s a breakdown of trust, customers will feel let down...and they will let everyone know about it!

Ultimately, a great customer experience is all about managing customer expectations and keeping customers informed of progress – particularly if the process is drawn out or complicated. If you make a promise, you simply need to keep it.

Broken telephone

The challenge in customer service and sales is that all aspects of the customer journey need to function efficiently and in concert. Placing elements of the customer journey into separate silos means that there’s a risk that the interaction may undergo a break in communication.

From start to finish, the interaction must be seamless, so all the boxes need to be ticked prior to a promotion going live: all departments need to be briefed to ensure that any cross-functional processes are efficient, marketed products must be available, pricing must be correct, enough skilled agents need to be available to assist with queries timeously, systems need to be able to cope with the increase in call volume, and contingency plans need to be in place to account for any potential CX hiccup.



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This can be a complex chain-of-service to deliver, so if any processes within the cycle can be automated or optimised, the number of touch points requiring contact centre agent input will be reduced, subsequently speeding up the likelihood of an efficient and satisfactory resolution.

Saving your customers time adds value to the customer relationship within the sales cycle, and identifying potential stress points in business processes or touchpoints (particularly during peak sales periods when resources are strained) is critical to ensuring the kind of customer experience that lives beyond the joy of the initial discount offered.

Clear objectives

What’s important to keep in mind is the objective of the promotion – even if it’s just to boost turnover before Christmas, short-term gains shouldn’t be at the expense of long-term goals. Beyond being “just another Black Friday promotion”, the marketing activity needs to make sense for your business and tie into the values of your brand.

Before embarking on a promotion such as Black Friday, think about the impact this will have on your customer relationship. In the absence of old-school loyalty, businesses need to think carefully about anything that will impact the customer experience. Cheap thrills are just that; it's whether you continue to deliver what you promise that really matters.

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