

Creating competitive advantage through CX

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28 Jun 2019

Globally, the shift towards automation is being driven by the need to increase agility and provide customers with a greater sense of immediacy. In the South African context, particularly in the tough economic environment businesses currently find themselves in, these drivers are coupled with a greater need to retain customers and gain market share. After all, a great customer experience can lead to a substantial competitive advantage.



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Traditionally, businesses have focused their efforts in this regard on improving communication channels and creating a culture where customer experience truly matters. However, the role of technology in influencing the customer experience must never be underestimated.

This is especially true of those technologies that can define the customer experience – like an AI-enabled bot, for example. Given this reality, CMOs and sales executives are increasingly concerning themselves with how to effectively leverage technology to deliver a better customer experience.

This is seen throughout the South African context, with customer experience considerations increasingly taking a front seat within digital innovation programmes. As an example, research firm International Data Corporation (IDC) predicts that at least 15% of a business's standard customer experience decisions will be handled by algorithms by 2020.

Digital innovation priorities of local organisations

Customer experience encompasses two perspectives: the experience the company seeks to provide, and the experience

the customer actually has. An effective implementation of technology can be used to bridge the gap between these perspectives. With this in mind, the four key characteristics of great customer experience are immediacy, reliability, scalability, and convenience.

Focusing on areas of maximum impact

Technology can positively impact the customer experience in the following ways:

- AI-supported data management ensures that companies have a true picture of the customer's profile, while predictive analytics allows for suggestions of what the customer's next actions might be (or what the company's next actions should be).

This means that marketers are able to push relevant messages to the right customers, and sales teams are able to position the right products at the right time (and can be proactive in trying to prevent churn).

- Automation (supported by analytics) across both the sales and marketing processes can improve quote-to-cash turnaround times and reduce administrative workloads. This provides much-needed agility in servicing customers and reaching the right audience with a particular message.
- The use of technologies like AI-driven chatbots and the provision of online self-service channels can improve the speed of service to customers as well as the variety of channels a customer might choose, while simultaneously reducing the load on the organisation for certain mundane tasks.

Immediacy, reliability, and scalability: evolving the customer experience in practice

The use of technology to improve customer experience is flourishing across South Africa. For example, organisations within the banking and financial sector have been proactively implementing chatbots, not simply for the sake of implementing the technology, but rather to provide customers with immediate access to services in a scalable, reliable way.

Immediate access is important as customers, regardless of industry, require organisations to improve their speed of service to near-real-time levels. Reliability and scalability are equally important – a client's experience must be repeatable, for it to be valuable to the organisation. By utilising an AI-driven chatbot that learns through its interactions, each of these criteria is met and an exceptional experience can be delivered.

Convenience: creating a comfortable customer experience

Similarly, governments can utilise technology to improve service delivery by expanding their touchpoints with citizens. Round-the-clock, omnichannel engagement with online services is becoming increasingly prevalent, such as with the advent of online filing of taxes and applications for documents such as ID cards and passports.

By crafting experiences that are immediate, reliable, scalable, and convenient, CMOs and sales executives alike can ensure that the customer experience is genuinely perceived as valuable. And a valuable experience is one that keeps clients perpetually engaged with your organisation and unlocks the door to a sustainable competitive advantage.

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