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Augmenting Customer Service

1. Create Memorable Customer Experiences

Unique customer experiences are a key element of getting people to trust your brand and buy from you. A Wunderman study reveals that around 79% of consumers prefer to only do business with a brand that shows it actually cares about them.

Moreover, by 2020, customer experience will have an even bigger impact on customer satisfaction, given that it will overtake price and product as the main brand differentiator, meaning it's best to start focusing on offering amazing experiences to your clients.

So, let's get started:

1. Address Your Customers by Name

One of the best ways to offer a more personal customer experience is using the customer's name when talking with them – in person, over the phone, through email, or when coming up with customer surveys. A friendlier approach that doesn't feel forced humanises the consumer-business interaction.

Keep in mind that, according to research, people normally become ecstatic when they hear their name called. And let's not forget Dale Carnegie's famous advice from his book "How to Win Friends and Influence People" (a very popular book on business communications skills):

"Names are the sweetest and most important sound in any language."

2. Always Send personalised Messages/Replies

When a customer signs up for your free trial or purchases your product, do you reach out with a personalised email or send a generic onboarding sequence?

Automated onboarding sequences are fantastic for helping users become familiar with the product, especially if it has a steep learning curve. But they're far from personal, and they don't welcome users as a personal message can.

When a customer purchases your product, signs up for your free trial or sends an inquiry, reach out personally to ask how you can help them. Even if most customers don't take up your offer of help, they'll appreciate the gesture and form a more positive impression of your business.

Research led by Experian Marketing Services shows that personalised emails:

- Have 29% higher open rates;
- Have 41% higher click rates;
- Deliver 6 times more transaction rates.

Also, around 96% of marketers say that this kind of personalisation improves customer relationships.

So, how do you personalise messages you send to customers?

Obviously, first of all, is to use the recipient's name when addressing them. You could also send the message in the customer's native language if you know they're based in a different country. Though, you should only do that if you're sending out a message the customer isn't expected to reply to, or if you have a resident translator at your company.

Other ways you should consider:

- Using a friendly, informal, or familiar tone and style of writing;
- Using a personalised email to send the message instead of a generic corporate one ("john@business.com" instead of just "brandname@business.com").

3. Give clients personal, old-fashioned contact

In the age of automated everything, being a little old fashioned can have huge benefits for your business.

Paul Graham's famous advice to do things that don't scale is just as valuable for improving your customer satisfaction as it is for acquiring customers. From phone support for your top customers to letters, holiday cards, your customers will notice when you offer service that doesn't scale.

You should never underestimate the power of thanking your customers for doing business with you – and we’re not talking about setting up a banner on your homepage saying that. Don’t forget – around 60% of businesses lose a customer because he/she felt the brand was too “indifferent” towards them.

Thank-you notes help you show clients how much you value them and that your brand views them as people, not just a source of profit.

That’s why you should send out thank-you notes to customers whenever you can. If your budget allows it, consider shipping your products alongside individual thank-you notes. In case your business has a subscription-based model, you can just mail the notes to your customers.

And make sure that the notes are customised and hand signed – don’t just send out emails or print out a generic note that was typed into Microsoft Word. Be sure to personalise the cards – hand write the customer’s name and make the signature follow the same logic, and customise the tone, look, and writing style of the card to reflect your brand.

Keep in mind that thank-you notes done right can generate word of mouth advertising for your business. How? Pretty simple – customers get the notes, are pleasantly surprised, and they post a picture (or more) of it online for all their social media followers to see.

One last idea – consider sending out holiday cards too, especially during more “unique” holidays like Groundhog Day. It makes you stand out more.

4. Turn Customer Mistakes Into Unforgettable Experiences

Sometimes, it’s not the company that makes a mistake, but the customer. It happens, and even though it’s the client’s fault, that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try to come up with a solution. It shows people how much your brand cares about consumers, and it really takes the customer who made the mistake by surprise in a pleasant way.

Warby Parker is a great example of turning a customer mistake into a great customer success story. Basically, a client forgot their pair of glasses on a train, and the person who sat across from them recovered

the glasses. That person – Anjali Kumar – also happened to be a Senior Executive at Warby Parker.

Besides just retrieving the glasses, Anjali went the extra mile and sent over an extra pair of new glasses (saying they noticed the original lenses were a bit scratched), and a personalized note.

The result? The customer in question wrote about this event online, and it got so popular it ended up being a hit story on Forbes.

So, let your employees know that if they ever see an opportunity to fix a client's mistake in a way that would really benefit the company's image, they should go ahead and do it – even if it's not during work hours. Just be sure to set a budget for things like that.

5. Reward Loyal Customers

Modern consumers want personalization. It's what drives more sales and customer loyalty. Generally, the best way to offer them a personalized experience is to run a loyalty program since it makes it easier for you to collect relevant data. And if we analyze data from client loyalty programs, we shall find out that around 79% of consumers are more satisfied with programs that offer a high degree of personalisation. So, the idea is to wow loyal clients with an experience they won't forget any time soon, something that is really relevant to their tastes.

For example, say you run a brewery. You could reward long-term customers who promote your brand online with free beer shipped right to their doorstep, but why not surprise them with a tour of your brewery instead?

Alternatively, you could offer them free beer, but you could make the whole experience more meaningful by customising the labels with each customer's photos, names, or other relevant information.

The end result would likely be the same in both cases – you'd get to enjoy word of mouth advertising online that would greatly improve the image of your brand.

That's just an example, and you can approach this however you think it's more suited to your business.

2. Provide Fast, Convenient Customer Support

When consumers encounter a problem with your products/services or have a question about your brand nowadays, they expect you to offer a quick, decent response. Think about it – people today don't usually get to enjoy a lot of free time. Thus, having to spend even half an hour on dealing with customer support can seriously harm customer satisfaction levels.

Speculations aside, though, the research backs up this claim. According to Forrester, 73% of online adults in the US claim that the best thing a brand can do to offer them great customer support is to “value their time.”

So, here are a few pointers for that:

6. Offer Omnichannel Support

How easy is it for your customers to contact you? One of the most common complaints of SaaS customers is that getting in touch with support – particularly a real, live person – can take days, after which they've already searched and found an answer to their question or either canceled the service.

If you're not familiar with the idea of omnichannel support, it basically means having a presence and a customer experience strategy in place on any channel where your clients are active.

Consumers nowadays use multiple channels and devices to shop around. It's just more convenient and easy for them and your support strategy needs to cover all of that.

For example, if you were to run a chain of retail stores, your strategy should cover:

- In-person interactions with the staff
- Social media support (the exact platform/platforms your customers use)
- Email support
- Phone support
- Live chat support

All of that to ensure the customer has a seamless experience no matter the channel they use.

About 64% of consumers expect you to offer them access to real-time support no matter the channel they use. Another study shows that, during holidays, 90% of consumers want a consistent experience across all channels and devices.

In terms of profitability, a strong omnichannel approach has the potential to increase your revenue year-over-year by approximately 9.5%.

Make it as easy as possible for your customers to contact you and you'll notice an improvement in their perception of you. Email software provider ONTRAPORT does a fantastic job of this by listing their 800 support number right at the top of their support page.

If you offer live chat support, list the hours on your website so that users always know when they can and can't contact you. If it takes you 24+ hours to respond to emails, let users know as soon as they contact you so that there's no confusion.

Most customers will tolerate a slower-than-average response and understand that it takes time to solve problems, but only if you let them know. Make your support process as transparent and easy as possible and you'll have happier customers that feel like they're truly cared for.

7. Respond on Social Media

When customers contact your brand on social media – either to ask for support, leave a complaint, or ask a question – they're not doing it only because it's easy and convenient. They're also doing it because they expect a fast response.

According to various data, around 42% of consumers expect a response from your brand within 60 minutes once they post a complaint. 32% of them expect a response within 30 minutes! Hubspot's data says something similar – approximately 72% of customers who complain on Twitter want a response from the company within an hour.

If you don't respond on time, people will most likely complain about that to their friends and social media followers. What's more, platforms like

Facebook make it easy for users to see what your average response time is.

Overall, it's in your best interest to either have an employee focused only on tracking and responding to social media comments, or an entire department if possible. It will clearly boost customer satisfaction, and can apparently increase customer advocacy by up to 25%.

8. Use Non-Generic Auto-Replies

Auto-replies are a good idea because they give customers a clear confirmation that their message has been received. Some people might think their request or question didn't go through if they don't receive such a confirmation.

However, don't fall into the trap of using plain auto-replies. Make them more interesting and engaging by adding some personality to the mix. Instead of having the subject line be "We received your support request," make it more friendly, like "Hi – thanks for getting in touch. We're on it."

Also, if the software allows it, have the reply use your customer's first name. Oh, and be sure to thank clients for the emails – either in the subject line or the email body.

Afterward, make sure one of your employees follows up with the customer. Ideally, he/she should follow up before the deadline promised by the auto-reply. So, for example, if the reply says you'll get back to your clients in 24 hours, do it in 3-5 hours instead.

Basically, the idea is to use software to under-promise, and then have a human employee over-deliver. That's definitely a sure way to improve customer satisfaction and trust in your brand.

And when possible, use auto-replies on social media too, and follow the same strategy. Facebook offers such a feature, for instance.

9. Provide Self-Help Options

Some modern consumers prefer helping themselves than going through a customer support rep or process. According to a Zendesk survey of 7,000 respondents, around 53% of people considered it was more

important to be able to resolve their own service-related problems by themselves.

One way to offer self-help features is to provide access to an in-depth Knowledge Base or FAQ section. See what the most common complaints and questions are, and answer them in thorough articles and step-by-step tutorials.

After all, 91% of people would be happy to use a single, online Knowledge Base if it's tailored to their needs. Also, the use of help and FAQ sections increased to 81% among US adults back in 2015.

You could even combine the FAQ/Knowledge Base section with the auto-reply we discussed above. Link it in the email body, so that customers can check it out if they want to until you get back to them. They might actually find the solution they need.

Another thing you can try is using a support chatbot. Approximately 57% of respondents to a Hubspot survey confirmed they were interested in the idea of dealing with a chatbot. Plus, chatbots can help reduce customer service costs by up to 30%, according to IBM.

10. Offer 24/7 Customer Support

Given how important it is to offer consumers fast response rates, it's clear the only way you can do that is by having a dedicated customer support team or department that works 24/7 – especially if you have a large customer base.

The best way to offer such support is to hire multiple customer reps and have them work in shifts. If you don't have a big enough budget, you should also consider outsourcing customer support positions to freelancers – either in your country or abroad – since it lets you save money on renting office space.

Using a support chatbot can help with this, though you shouldn't rely on it all the time. The Knowledge Base/FAQ sections we previously discussed can help with the "24/7 feel" as well.

Live chat features come in handy too since they allow customer reps to work remotely so that they can be available more often.

Besides that, consumers like the idea of live chat, and it has the potential to increase your company's revenue. In fact, according to ICMI, website visitors who use live chat are worth 4.5 times more than the ones who don't.

3. Make an Irresistible Offer

One mistake many business owners make when it comes to the things we'll be discussing in this section is thinking they are making compromises and sacrifices that are hurting the brand financially.

In reality, offering consumers an "irresistible offer" is all about reducing purchasing anxiety through various means to help them have an easier time trusting your services and products so that they will be much more likely to buy from you instead of your competitors.

So, here are a few pointers to help you out with that:

11. Offer a Lenient, Straightforward Refund Policy

It's usually a good idea to offer a money-back guarantee to consumers since it increases their trust levels in your brand. It also makes the whole purchasing experience feel more risk-free, so people are more likely to try your products and services.

But most businesses nowadays offer some sort of refund policy, so just advertising that isn't always enough to stand out from the competition.

That's why you should strive to, first and foremost, make your refund policy more easy to understand for the average consumer. We recommend leaving out complicated legal jargon, which is just more likely to confuse customers. Use bulleted lists to showcase the eligibility requirements, and clearly outline any deadlines or options people need to keep in mind.

Ideally, you should have the complicated refund terms and legal jargon on your Terms of Services page, and have a separate landing page or FAQ article discussing how your refund policy works in plain terms.

Besides that, aim to keep your money-back guarantee flexible and lenient. A 30-day guarantee is always great, but you could always go the extra mile to wow your customers with a 60 or 90-day guarantee. Offering a "no-questions-asked guarantee" is also a nice touch.

Essentially, whatever helps you meet or exceed your competitors' refund policies from your customers' perspective is always a smart move.

12. Offer a bulletproof guarantee

The riskier it is for a customer to buy your product, the more a guarantee can help you assure your customers that you care about their experience.

If you sell a physical product, you can reduce the risk for customers by offering a guarantee that the product you sell will meet their expectations. The more customers feel they're protected against risks, the more positively they're likely to view your brand (and by extension, your product).

Brands like JanSport have taken this to the extreme by offering lifetime warranties on many of their products. While your guarantee doesn't need to last a lifetime, demonstrating that you're there for your customers goes a long way towards creating a positive sentiment.

We already talked about making the refund policy easier to understand by using basic terms. But, if you want, you can do something extra and add your own brand's voice in the text.

For instance, if your target audience is average, laid back people in the 20-40 age bracket, you could use a friendlier, more direct and personal tone when describing the money-back guarantee terms.

At the same time, you should consider adding extra text on the refund policy page letting people know that if they ever encounter an issue they can always rely on your customer support and link the appropriate pages. You can even have a customer support or live chat prompt pop up when people want to request a refund.

Another thing you can try is directly linking your money-back guarantee to customer satisfaction – basically, stating outright that if a client isn't 100% satisfied with your products/services, they can request a refund. This adds an extra level of trust in your brand and shows consumers just how much you care about helping them, not just selling them a product or a service.

13. Provide a Trial Period

In the early days of the SaaS world, businesses quickly discovered that a free trial took the guesswork and risk out of buying a product. Today, startups don't debate the value of a free trial – they debate which trial period is the most effective.

With a free trial, potential customers are less worried about buyer's remorse and risky investments because there's no upfront fee.

A couple of things to note about free trials:

- Don't ask people for credit card details when registering a trial account.
- Let consumers use their social media accounts to register a trial account if possible – it's much easier for them.
- Don't impose any limitations – let trial users enjoy as many features as possible, so that they can experience the real value of your product/service.
- Don't be too aggressive with promoting your subscriptions during the trial period. You can have a "Pricing/Upgrade" tab present in the trial version, or just notify users about upgrading to the paid version when their trial is almost over.
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Combine a properly-done free trial with a decent refund policy, and you've got quite a powerful way to motivate people to try out your products and services.

Oh, and in the case of eCommerce products, you can offer clear demo videos of the items you sell – since trials don't really work. Make sure the videos showcase everything – how the product looks from different angles, how it works, how to assemble it, how big it is, and other relevant information.

14. Try to Offer Free Return Shipping

Many retailers are often uncertain about this because they feel like they will be losing money by having to cover or refund shipping costs for the customer.

But the reality is completely different – according to research, 88% of consumers claim that free return shipping has a big influence on their purchase decisions. Also, 67% respondents to a survey said that free returns would encourage them to purchase more online.

Some people feel this policy can easily be abused. However, that can be counteracted by having a proper refund policy in place that clearly states the eligibility requirements.

Worst case scenario, if you are a smaller business or on a tighter budget, you can just offer free return shipping for specific products, not all of them. After all, not even Amazon offers free return shipping for every product they sell.

15. Experiment with Discounts

Discounts are always a great incentive to get people to buy from you. According to Shopify's own research, merchants that offer an active discount code are 8 times more likely to make a sale.

You can just have a page on your website where you display the first-time buyer discount code, as well as the monthly code – or any other discount codes for that matter. You could also send customers emails to let them know about the various discounts.

Another thing you could try is running giveaways. That can really work well if you offer a subscription-based service – customers could win a free extra month of service, for instance, or a subscription to share with their friends and family. Plus, you'd be able to drive a lot of social media engagement by having users share giveaway-related posts.

Free shipping is another thing consumers tend to perceive as a “discount” – given they the overall price will be lower with it. Don't forget – 9 out of 10 consumers say that free shipping is the #1 incentive to shop online even more.

4. Make Feedback Part of Your Brand

Customer feedback is one of the most important assets your business can have. It can tell you a lot about your customer satisfaction levels since feedback is a clear indicator of how happy consumers are with your brand, services, and products overall.

Plus, customer feedback can also help you improve your services and products, and offer you data that makes it easier to make the right business decisions. Also, taking it seriously shows consumers how much you value their opinions.

What's more, according to a Gartner survey, companies that implemented customer experience-focused projects back in 2015 started out by collecting and analysing consumer feedback. So, to offer customers a great experience, you need to know their opinions, complaints, and suggestions first.

With that out of the way, here's how you can make your business more feedback-centric:

16. Actively Ask Customers for Feedback

Don't just wait for clients to leave feedback – be proactive and ask them for it whenever you get an opportunity. Send them a survey after the purchase or an interaction with your support team to find how satisfied they were with your business.

You could also run social media polls asking customers to rate which part of their interaction with your brand they like the most and to comment what improvements they'd like to see. Make sure to run surveys to gauge customers' reactions and expectations whenever you want to introduce a new feature, product, or service. Why? Because it's a sure way to boost customer satisfaction levels once you deploy it.

Think about it – you'll know for sure that people will be willing to pay for what you will be offering, so the risk of a new investment is reduced on your behalf. And your clients will be happy not only that they will be getting something that's truly tailored to their needs, but also because you're also recognising how valuable their input is.

In this context, the term Voice of the Customer worths being mentioned, as it represents your target clients' needs, desires, and dislikes. It's basically data that helps you offer customers a solution they really need, not just an average product or service.

Net Promoter Score surveys are an also great way to ask for valuable feedback. If you're not familiar with them, they are basically 1-question surveys that ask clients how willing they are, on a scale from 1 to 10, to recommend your business, products, and services to other people. The questions can also be open-ended if you want to ask customers for more in-depth feedback.

Depending on how people answer, they can be segmented into:

- Detractors (lost and upset customers)
- Passives (customers who need an extra push to become loyal)
- Promoters (loyal customers who promote your brand)

With that kind of info, you can collect even more relevant feedback. For instance, Detractors and Passives are a great source of constructive criticism (sometimes, it can be rough, but it's still useful information), while Promoters can provide you with excellent suggestions for potential features and products.

17. Share Feedback Across All Departments

It's not enough to just have your frontline employees collect customer feedback, analyse and respond to it. That kind of info must be shared with all employee departments – including management.

After all, if the main customer complaints are related to a problem that can only be solved if management gives the product development team the go-ahead to work on it, you will never address the customers' needs if you don't escalate the feedback to the higher-ups in the company.

Besides that, you should also consider encouraging people in management positions – or at the very least employees in senior positions – to put some time aside each month or each week to analyse the customer feedback that's gathered, and extract the main pain points and suggestions from it.

Afterward, the main data can be structured in different formats (like infographics, videos, pdfs, and so on), and shared with the other departments through company emails or newsletters. We recommend sticking with more visual content since it makes it more engaging for employees.

What's the payoff, you ask? Well, pretty much all your departments will know exactly what your customers expect from you, and will thus have an easier time coordinating their efforts.

18. Reply to All Feedback (Both Positive and Negative)

Getting positive reviews is always great for any business, but you're not making the most of them if you don't take the time to reply to those

reviews as well. After all, reviews and how you respond to them can influence your search engine ranking.

After all, Google itself says that responding to reviews enhances your business' visibility online, and makes potential clients much more likely to visit or do business with you.

Also, it's best if you or someone in management does that, as a reply from one of the higher-ups means more to consumers. Apparently, 78% of consumers say that if management responds to their online reviews, it makes them feel like the brand cares more about them.

Be sure to respond to both positive and negative reviews. In both cases, you should thank the customer at the end for taking the time to give you valuable feedback. And when dealing with negative reviews, make sure you apologise too – it can double customer satisfaction than just offering them compensation.

19. Focus on Common Complaints & Provide Solutions

This is something your management team should primarily handle. The idea is for them to take a really close look at your customers' feedback, and identify the main 3-5 common, recurring complaints people have.

NPS surveys are really useful in this case since, to get the best results, you should look at the common complaints both Detractors (angry customer) and Passives (customers who like your brand, but don't "love" it) have.

Once the most common complaints have been identified, it's time to prioritise them according to the frequency of mention. It's obviously better to fix the problem most people are complaining about and mentioning the most first. However, you can also prioritise complaints that overlap both Passive and Detractor groups.