The Small Business Guide to Customer Experience

What is Customer Experience?

These days it seems like everyone's talking about "customer experience." But how do you know what it is and how to get it? It's not just how well your product works, whether or not prospects like your ad campaign, or if your support agent was polite. It's the way you engage with customers and the cumulation of every interaction they have with your company. Customer experience is becoming the single most important differentiator of successful businesses – both large and small. It's time to start thinking about how you can use it to drive your own business today.

89% of companies now expect to compete mostly on the basis of experience (versus 36% four years ago)

– Gartner

What does it mean to you?

Customer experience isn't just something that large companies need to pay attention to. Small businesses need to be thinking about it too. Why? Growing revenue is key for small businesses, so building a loyal customer base and increasing sales to that base is vital. Fostering positive word of mouth can also be invaluable for small businesses, who often have miniscule marketing budgets. And if you build a brand that customers like, you can outmaneuver your competition.

Offering an amazing customer experience helps you:
· Build a loyal customer base
· Sell more to your customers
· Gain positive word of mouth
· Outflank your competition

Read on to see five key ways that even the smallest of businesses can make the customer experience amazing.

Know your customers.

Today's customers expect fast, personalised experiences. To deliver, you need to know them whenever and wherever you meet them. It may sound hard, but it's easier than you think – and your customer support tool can help. Use it to see what a customer says about you on Twitter, track customer requests, and build a product roadmap that better meets their needs. And since today's cloud-based solutions are designed for easy integration, connect your systems so everyone at your company can share information and collaborate to help customers. When you bring sales and service systems together, your sales team will know when a customer has had a problem. Your support team will recognise high value customers, and know when there are open opportunities. With 360-degree views, everyone can deliver the five-star experiences customer reviews are made of.

CHECKLIST

- ☑ **Make experience central to your mission**
- ☑ **Make support part of everyone's job**
- ☑ **Empower your support teams**

Make customer experience part of your DNA.

It's not just enough to *talk* about offering an amazing customer experience. To be successful, you need to make it part of your company's DNA. Include it in your mission and make it an objective for every team. Everyone in your company – from the CEO to the receptionist – needs to play a role. Some startups train new employees in customer service as part of their onboarding processes. Not only does this help new employees learn about products and customers faster, it also ensures they'll keep customers at the center of everything they do. It's critical that you give your teams the power to go the extra mile with customers. These days there's no such thing as "that's not my job." You've got to give customers what they want, when they want it. That means empowering everyone on the front lines to go the extra mile to make unhappy customers happy, or manage opportunities to drive the business forward.

Watch every touchpoint.

Customer experience is the sum of every touchpoint you have through the lifecycle of a customer relationship. It includes advertisements and promotions, sales calls, product usage, and customer support. Building a strong, likeable brand is the first step. And it's critical that the brand flows through everything you do. A brand guide and messaging document are invaluable to small businesses who are moving fast but want consistent creative. It's also important to create messaging documents and share them across your business so everyone who's on the frontlines – in any capacity – uses the same speaking points whenever they engage with customers. Touchpoints also include the experience that customers have with your products, so it's essential that product and marketing teams talk to each other, and that quality is built in from the start.

CHECKLIST

- ☑ Create brand and style guidelines
- ☑ Share messaging documents across your company
- ☑ Regularly audit every checkpoint

CHECKLIST

- [x] Get a support tool with mobile capabilities
- [x] Share your knowledge base and offer self-service support
- [x] Be transparent and authentic

Be easy to do business with.

To create an awesome customer experience you need to truly engage with customers. When they have an inquiry, get them fast, helpful answers. You can do this with a support tool that makes it easy for agents (or anyone interacting with customers) to respond quickly. Today's customers also expect you to be available whenever they need you. Small businesses can do this by offering self-service support so customers can find solutions 24/7, or by giving agents mobile tools that let them answer questions from anywhere. Some companies are also offering proactive support – getting help to customers before they even know they need it. Transparency and authenticity are paramount when building customer relationships. Check out Salesforce.com's Trust site to see how one company is doing it.

Continually improve.

Customer experience is not "one and done." Providing an amazing experience is something that requires constant attention. You can use survey software to maintain a pulse on what customers are feeling and to measure their satisfaction. Your customer support tool can also give you invaluable information about how customers are using your products, whether they're having any issues, and what they'd like to see in the future. If you share this data regularly with your product team you can be sure that you are building the products that your customers really want. Another easy win? Take note of excellent service experiences you, personally, have with other companies; think about how you can share them with your team and integrate some of the same techniques.
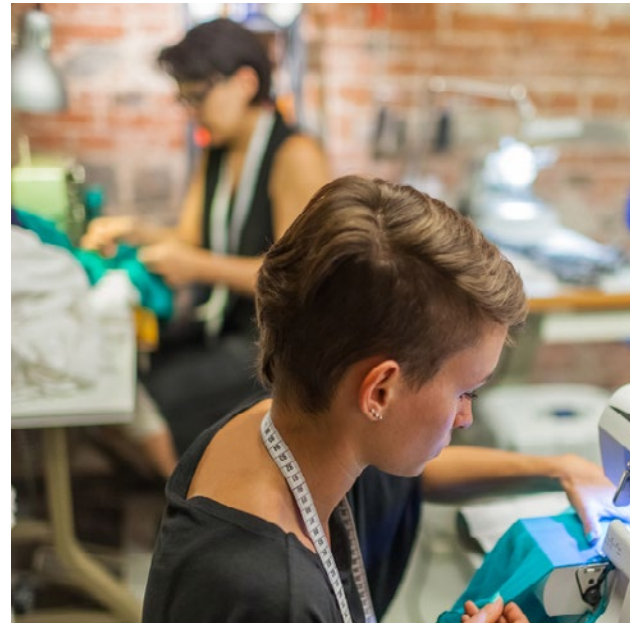
CHECKLIST

☑ Use survey data to monitor satisfaction

☑ Track and share customer feedback

☑ Use support data to build your roadmap

To be competitive in today's environment, every business needs to offer amazing customer experiences – from the tiniest start-up to the largest conglomerate. Start now with fast, awesome customer support from Desk.com.

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