Customer Experience Success Relies On More Than Marketing

In the fight to win the customer experience battlefield, most organizations put their marketing departments in charge. But it takes much more than marketing expertise and impact to succeed in customer experience. Operations, human resources, and finance must also take responsibility and undergo fundamental transformations.

It’s understandable to think that marketing should drive customer experience. Marketers usually know the customer best and they also usually have the best handle on how developments in technology and other trends impact customers. So, marketing is well-positioned to set the customer experience vision and lead the thinking about customer experience design.

But since most marketing departments’ responsibilities are focused on advertising, promotions, and other elements in the last mile of customer engagement, they only have limited involvement in and influence on the more
upstream, organization-wide, and fundamental
types that customer experience delivery
requires. Customer experience success relies on
operations, human resources, and finance as
much as it does on marketing.

**Operations: Breakdown Silos**

Operations must break down the silos between
departments and integrate their functions. Take
retailers, for example. Most retail organizations
are set up by function — merchandising, buying,
supply chain, store operations, marketing, etc.
These departments used to work with each other
in a sequential semi-annual or quarterly process,
handing off the product to the next function
when their responsibilities were complete.

But today’s retail environment requires a more
agile, flexible, and integrated approach. To
execute the tailored local assortments, fast (or at
least faster) fashion, new and varied store
formats, and careful inventory management that
distinguish the leading customer experiences,
different departments must share data, develop
new processes, and collaborate on product design
and delivery.

Moreover, retailers can no longer operate with
their channels separate from their product and
digital channels cannot be divorced from physical
operations. Customers expect the same product,
pricing, promotions, and availability across a
company, so operations must establish the
structure and processes to deliver on this
expectation.

**Human Resources: Cultivate Culture and
New Mindsets & Skill Sets**

Human resources must take responsibility for
shaping the culture and developing the mindsets
and skill sets that customer experience excellence
requires. In order for employees to understand
and embrace an organization’s desired customer
experience, the employee experience should be
designed with the same values. For example, if a
company wants to distinguish its customer
experience with automation and speed, then the
employees’ workplace environment, benefits,
performance reviews, etc. should be technology-
enabled and fast. If personalization and personal
care is what’s important in the customer
experience, then the employee experience should
deliver on those values.
Recruiting, training, and development must produce employees who have different skills and new ways of thinking. Customer experience design and management requires all people in an organization to be focused on the customer. Customer intimacy cannot be only a marketing skill. Likewise, companies are more likely to successfully implement the technology solutions necessary to excel in customer experience if everyone in the organization has some level of technology proficiency. Human resources must take the lead in preparing the workforce with customer experience competencies.

**Finance: Use New Customer Metrics**

Finance can make or break customer experience through the measurements and accounting it chooses to apply. Different metrics and ways of attributing results are needed in order for customer experience to be valued by organizations and their investors. Most balance sheets are organized like operations, by function or by business unit. This involves tracking and reporting discrete inputs and usually leads to misattribution.

Customer experience, on the other hand, is best measured by customer outcomes, which are usually shared by several groups within the organization. And customers themselves can be considered assets and liabilities. Finance must innovate new methods like algorithmic models to parse out the complexity of customer experience results and to focus the organization on customer, not operating, results. Specifically for retailers, when customer experience becomes the product, finance managers must re-classify metrics like sales per square foot, labor costs, product margins, and shipping costs.

If the rest of an organization is waiting for marketing to deliver customer experience success, it will likely fail. Only when the core functions of a company spearhead necessary changes in their areas will it be ready to fight and win.


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