

7 moments when you can't afford to screw up the experience

Michele McGovern



Customers' perceptions of how good – or bad – you are evolve with every contact they have with you. The details at every touch point create the overall customer experience. How does yours stack up?

Those little day-to-day — or even minute-to-minute — moments customers come in contact with your company, its people, products and services likely provide the best opportunities you have to get people to try and buy — then come back again.

In fact, more than 70% of customer experience leaders believe that investing in the small details is more effective than investing in advertising and marketing communications to gain and retain customers, according to a recent [Chartered Institute of Marketing study](#).

Yet, many organizations aren't as willing to put the money where their mouths are. About half of the leaders in the Chartered Institute study admitted that they didn't have [customer experience guidelines](#) in place. That means, in many cases, employees are asked or told to deliver a great experience but aren't given enough or any guidance on how to do it.

Details worth watching

The good news: Some companies get the details right. They take the devil out of the details and make some the tiniest touch points with customers memorable.

"The mark of a great brand is not being obsessive compulsive," says Denise Lee Yohn, author of [What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand Building Principles That Separate The Best From The Rest](#). "It is being intentional. Great brands are purposeful in everything they do. They meticulously design the experiences of their ... touch points because that's how brand vision gets translated into customer reality."

Experts agree, from the moment a customer spots a product or seeks information on a company, service or product — regardless of whether it's online or in person — the experience starts. They will judge you from the initiation — whether you find them or they find you — and through every touch point moving forward. It can even go even beyond their own interactions, when they hear or see other customers or their friends, family and colleagues interact with your company.

We can all learn from companies that have made paying attention to the details in the customer experience hard-practice. Here's what the best ones do:

1. Take it seriously

We've all heard how important that first impression with customers is. Proctor & Gamble Co. takes it so seriously that about nine years ago, it created the position of Director of First Moment of Truth (FMOT) and an entire department of professionals stationed around the world devoted to ensuring P&G products wow customers from the start.

This is what they consider when they design the packaging for a product to put on the shelf or online:

- Who am I?
- What am I?
- Why am I right for you?

It's helped them design packages that intrigue customers to try products that end up being the right fit for them, Yohn says.

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2. Make it real

Brick-and-mortar retailers with consumer goods sometimes have an advantage over retailers that rely heavily or solely on online shopping. Customers sitting at their computer can't touch and experience products like they can when they visit a store or showroom. [The online experience](#) can be less real than the in-person experience.

But UncommonGoods has done things to make the initial and additional shopping experiences more sensual. Most items' descriptions include personable product stories that include information on the artist who created them and details that will enhance their use. Plus, videos show what products do once they're turned on or in use. For instance, you can hear what an alarm clock sounds like before you buy it.

3. Make it smell well

This idea will work for any brick-and-mortar establishment: Make your place smell good. It has a positive impact on customers visiting your establishment.

Consider this: H&R Block has found that when customers who are often anxious in anticipation of a meeting to talk taxes are relaxed somewhat by the smell of freshly brewed coffee in the reception area. Many physicians' offices have latched on to that concept, too, brewing coffee throughout the day right in their reception areas to put patients at some ease.

Any sense can be considered a touch point — and a profitable one. In [one study](#), gambling went up 50% at Las Vegas casino slot machines when a pleasant smell was pumped in around them. In another study, 84% more customers found a pair of shoes more attractive in a room with a pleasant smell than those who saw them in a odorless room.

It pays to pay attention to how well your establishment smells.

4. Give a feel for the future

If you can make the first moment customers experience your product or service helpful, do it. That kind of experience has proven right for REI, an outdoor sporting goods company. A sampling of the experiences the retail locations provide: Customers can step into freezers to test sleeping bags, use indoor climbing walls and a faux mountainside to test footwear. They can try gas cookers in special areas and practice setting up tents (to make sure they won't get tangled doing it in the wild!)

Why? Company leaders believe making sure products [fit customers' needs before they even buy](#) them will make the experiences that are out of their control — when customers actually use the products “in the wild” — positive, which will reflect well on the company.

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5. Make it inspirational

Some experiences last just a second, but can make a positive impact on customers all day long.

A couple of examples: Caribou Coffee puts fun, uplifting messages on the back of its re-loadable charge cards such as, "Hold hands, not grudges." Caribou also invites customers to join its ["What Do You Stay Awake For"](#) campaign. Their insightful, funny musings are sometimes featured on the cups.

Snapple has famously included interesting facts on the inside of its caps for years — and customers still flip their lids immediately and delight in the message.

6. Let customers know you pay attention

Some parts of business are so routine, nearly no one takes notice of them. That's especially true in the fast food industry where order-taking is usually quick and impersonal. But Chick-fil-A is the exception — and in some cases the company wants its customers to know it's trying to make every touch point positive.

Examples: Customers can expect to hear, "My pleasure," when they request something. Employees even check on customers as they dine, often offering to refill drinks. In addition, employees regularly fold back the corners of the toilet paper in the restrooms so customers know they've just been cleaned.

7. Get employees on board

Companies that excel at providing an exceptional customer experience have their employees "drinking the Kool-Aid." That hasn't happened because employees have been brainwashed into believing the company's products or services are above all others. It's because a customer-centric vision and attitude has come from the top, and employees have been thoroughly trained and empowered to do what's right for customers.

An example of this is [Singapore Airlines](#). While these practices may seem outdated and teetering on being legally sound for a U.S.-based company, they are an extension of the airline's commitment to create a positive, outstanding experience at every turn for customers. Singapore Airlines requires the face of their organization, flight attendants (known as Singapore Girls), to wear approved hairdos, make-up, simple earrings and elegant watches. It gives employees instructions on walking properly and moving in their form-fitting uniforms — and forbids them from using public transportation while in that uniform (taxis or limos only).

The Singapore Girls are a physical reminder that the airline is a provider of classy, comfortable and elegant service at every touch point, says the company's leaders.

Another example is Ritz-Carlton, a company well-known for employee empowerment that translates into consistently positive customer experiences. The motto employees work by: "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen."

Any [Ritz-Carlton employee has the authority to spend several thousand dollars](#) on the spot to make a customer happy. We aren't just talking about managers, either. The housekeeping staff can comp an upset customer a few night's stay, if it seems like the right thing to do.