

7 things great customer experience companies do better than you

Michele
McGovern



Most great customer experiences don't happen by chance. They're the result of much bigger principles and practices that happen behind the scenes every day.

"These experiences don't just happen; nor do they result only from excellent operations," says Denise Lee Yohn, author of *Extraordinary Experiences*. "They stem from the strong cultural foundations, deliberate planning decisions, and integrity in execution that our favorite companies emphasize. Extraordinary experiences demonstrate brand-building at its best."

Yohn's research led her to companies that consistently deliver outstanding experiences and have the reputation and loyalty to prove that putting customers first will lead to business success.

Here's what the outstanding companies Yohn studied had in common, plus real-world examples of how to execute those very same principles:

1. Start inside

The companies delivering the best customer experiences cultivate a strong internal culture that's focused on employees and customers. They know that treating employees well and creating an environment that encourages them grow and make good decisions results in customers being treated well.

For instance, wholesaler Costco pays employees an average of \$20 an hour, while many of its competitors pay minimum wage. The idea is to create a happier workforce, which will result in a more profitable company, according to former CEO Jim Sinegal. Rather than refer to a company culture, Sinegal says they operate on values similar to the experience customers want: simplicity, clear communication, respect and frugality.

2. Don't sell

The best use emotions to connect with customers on a deeper level.

For instance, Jeffrey Sears, founder and CEO of luxury appliance store PIRCH, tells employees that they don't sell bathtubs: They give a working mom 45 minutes of sanity. They don't sell washers and dryers: They give a family a gentle caretaker for their child's first blanket. Instead of focusing on the product, they focus on what the customer

needs and the moments the product can create for them.

3. Ignore trends

The best are also leaders in more than one way. They don't follow the rules and jump on the bandwagon to satisfy the most current trend. Instead, they recognize what customers need before they even ask for it.

For instance, fried chicken fast food chain Popeyes' CEO Cheryl Bachelder was once told her several years ago: People weren't eating fried chicken like they used to eat it. The business was doomed — or at least in for a decline.

But she didn't see it that way. She felt that their service and customer experience was an extension of really great food. And people would come to Popeyes for that. She was right.

4. Don't chase customers

To offer the best customer experiences, the best companies recognize they can't be all things to all people. There are certain customers who will benefit from their products, services and experiences. If they try to sell to those who aren't the right fit, they will not satisfy them.

Example: At the fast food chain Sweetgreen, some customers are shocked to find out that the restaurant doesn't serve diet soda. Co-founder Nicolas Jammet has even admitted that some customers freak out ... at first, at least. But the company is focused on selling all-natural products, and they stand by the mission by only serving all-natural beverages. So customers who really want diet soda might find that sweetgreen isn't a fit for them — or they might find they really like trying something different.

5. Sweat the small stuff

The best companies know that the devil's in the details when it comes to the customer experience. They pay attention to every touch point with precision and allow front-line employees plenty of leeway to make sure that things go the way of customers.

For instance, when chicken wing chain Buffalo Wild Wings aimed to provide "the ultimate social experience for sports fans," it had its work cut out for itself. The restaurant chain knew it would have to pay close attention to every detail in a customers' visit. To that end, it added "guest experience managers" who create a more personal, interactive experience for customers while relieving servers of responsibilities outside of service. For instance, they talk about sports, change television channels, offer beer and sauce samples, and encourage customers to play trivia games to make every experience personal.

6. Commit and stay committed

Great companies stick to their values and principles — and expect that their employees do, too — even when doing that is difficult, such as when they may stand to make less money.

For instance, Texas grocer H-E-B takes a conservative expansion pace. Leaders at the 110-year-old family-owned company say they focus on being better, not necessarily bigger. That way they can stand by their principles to serve their loyal customers and do what's best for them. They expand only when they're sure all customers are more than satisfied.

7. Give back naturally

The top experience companies don't tend to have traditional corporate social responsibility programs. That's because they make a more valuable impact on their communities and customers through their informal strategies to build up

employees.

An example is Jason's Deli. It's always been committed to improving people's health, and focused on reducing the amount of processed and sugared items on its menu. More recently, it partnered with University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center to create recipes and promote foods that help in the fight against cancer.