Power Your CX with EX

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When retailers integrate and align employee experience (EX) and customer experience (CX), they benefit from employees who are committed to their organizations because they want to be a part of creating great experiences for their shoppers.

If great customer experiences lead to business results – and surely they do – why don't more companies deliver great CX?! Yes, organizational silos get in the way. Some companies don't want to make the investments in the systems and structures that CX improvements usually involve. And the lack of access to good metrics can hold your efforts back.

Despite these challenges, you can still excel at CX – the key is employee experience (EX). When you develop great EX and integrate and align your EX and CX, you can overcome the barriers between you and CX excellence.

What is EX?

Like CX, which is the sum of all interactions a customer has with your brand, EX is the sum of everything an employee experiences throughout his or her connection to your organization.

EX is comprised of every employee interaction, from the first contact people have as potential recruits to their last touchpoints after the end of their employment. Mark Levy, former head of Employee Experience at Airbnb, the lodging rental and hospitality company, provides a really helpful description of how his company defines EX: "Anything that sets employees up for success or improves our culture should be a part of EX."

You should deliberately, clearly, and carefully design and manage EX just as you would CX. In every employee interaction, you should express and/or reinforce the specific behaviors and mindsets that your organization requires to be successful. Use segmentation, journey mapping, and design models to develop EX, just as you would with CX. The goal is the same – an experience that's definitive and distinct, purposeful and profitable.

Align and Integrate CX & EX

Moreover, you should align and integrate CX and EX by creating for your employees the experiences you want them to create for your customers.

When employees have experiences that are clearly and distinctively on-brand, they're more likely to deliver experiences to customers that are as well. As your people experience the benefits of the brand themselves, they gain not only the motivation to deliver them to customers, but also the knowledge of what it takes to do so. And if they see a gap between their actions or capabilities and what it takes to deliver excellent CX, they usually develop an interest in closing that gap by learning new skills and working with others on new ways to do so. Ultimately, they feel more ownership for delivering on your company's brand promise.

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Directly connecting employees to customers also helps you integrate EX and CX. While your frontline employees interact with customers regularly, every employee in your organization should have an opportunity to interact with or at least observe customers in person and to experience what a customer does. After all, every employee impacts CX in some way.

Consider how Adobe Systems uses listening stations where employees can go either virtually online or physically in an Adobe office location to hear from customers directly and learn about their successes and challenges. These and other methods that close the gap between customers and employees have enabled the company to develop an industry-leading customer support function. There is nothing like a first-hand experience to help people understand what's important and why.

Also give employees the tools and insights to understand how they are performing on CX – access to dashboards and metrics, customer surveys, etc. When O2, the telecommunications business that is part of Madrid-based Telefónica, wanted to transform from a mobile service provider to a digital telecommunications brand, it published an employee dashboard that summarized customer results from activities related to the initiative and reported the results in weekly leadership team presentations. This produced employees who felt more engaged with the business – and these improved attitudes prompted them to want to develop innovations that advanced the company's new digital telecom identity. Employees at one store, for instance, introduced a near-field communication-enabled kiosk for mobile customers that allowed them to upload O2 apps on their phones as soon as they bought them.

Customer feedback empowers employees to understand how their day-to-day actions impact customers and to take ownership for delivering great CX.

EX Powers CX Success

"Creating a compelling employee experience" was named by _Forbes_ as the number one human resources trend in 2017. EX certainly deserves that attention given the war for talent that rages in many sectors.

But without combining EX and CX, you could end up with happy employees who have no idea how to serve your customers – or employees who care more about having a good time than about helping your company be successful. And if you try to improve CX without attending to EX, your CX could seem fine but behind the scenes, you're struggling with labor costs because you can't seem to hang on to employees. Or one day you wake up to find your company in the news because a disgruntled employee decided to post a video about the horrible working conditions they have to endure.

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When you integrate and align EX and CX, you get employees who are committed to your organization because they want to be a part of creating a great experience for your customers. Imagine having employees who aren't simply productive, but will produce the right results. And imagine employees who will go above and beyond what's expected of them and work around limitations in systems and processes because they feel connected to your brand promise and are driven to help fulfill it.

It's no coincidence that employees at companies that lead in CX are significantly more engaged than those at customer experience laggards. EX powers CX success.

About the writer: *Denise Lee Yohn is a leading authority on positioning great brands and building exceptional organizations, and has 25 years of experience working with world-class brands and retail leaders including Sony, Frito-Lay, Target, and Sprouts Farmers Market. Denise is a consultant, speaker, and author of the new book FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies.*
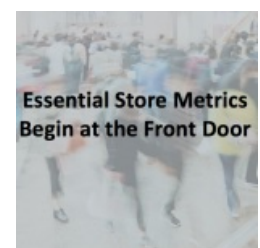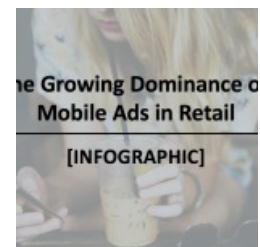
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