

Mission-Driven Customer Experiences (CX): A Guide

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January 15, 2021



By Nate Brown, Chief Experience Officer

So much has changed in the world of customer experience. Over the past many years, the concept of *convenience* has been the undisputed focus of most CX professionals. By saving the customer time and reducing effort, we earn their loyalty. While this is certainly still true, there is another disruptive evolution on the horizon. Something that customers consider more important than even their time. *Their core beliefs.*

Enter “**mission-driven CX.**” This is the principle that customers are going to do business with organizations that *actively embody the core values most important to them.*

Ultimately, we all want to develop relationships with companies in the same way we do with other people. We gravitate towards those we can trust and who act in a manner consistent with our own values. Many companies, having seen an aspect of this trend, have slapped a promise statement up on their website, proclaiming to the world who they are and what they believe. *This is no longer enough.* CX is what makes these proclamations more than just marketing copy. **In the words of Denise Lee Yohn from Fusion:**

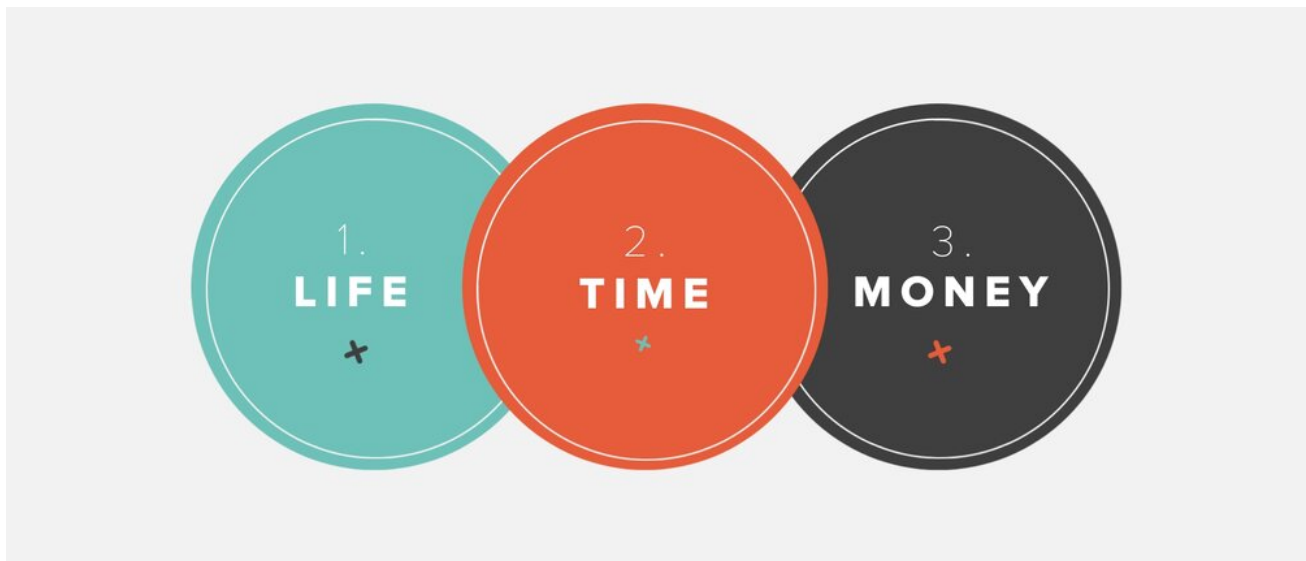
“Customers are more savvy today. They see advertising rhetoric for what it is, and they no longer accept brands at face value. They are skeptical about the claims companies make. They want authenticity—brands that live up to their promises and stated ideals.”

— Denise Lee Yohn, Fusion

The experience, delivered consistently, is what builds loyalty. Prior to “The Age of the Customer,” an organization would not need to publish a set of ideals. Now, if an organization is failing to embody a unique identity, it forfeits one of its greatest competitive differentiators. Purchasing decisions in today’s marketplace are often less about *what*, and more about *who*.

Just the other night my wife and I were in the kitchen wrestling through a variety of purchasing decisions. Everything from what to get for our kids’ teachers, to should we buy a robot vacuum, to our next house project. She made a statement that shut me right up with the reality of it. (Amazing, right?) “It’s just so hard to know what to do with our life, our time, and our money.” Ain’t that the truth? As consumers, we have an overwhelming number of options—a myriad of organizations offering essentially the same thing. How is an organization supposed to break through all this noise?

It’s the order of my wife’s statement that I find so fascinating and true: **life, time, and money**. She just summarized the mind of the modern customer! In descending order of importance:



Life: Does this brand encourage me and give me life by treating me like a person? Do they encourage a type of lifestyle among their employees and customers that aligns to my values? Do they give life back to the community in meaningful ways?

Time: Does this brand care about my time and make it easy for me to do business with them? Can I trust them to deliver without making me jump through hoops?

Money: Is this a good value for the resources I’m investing? Could I get the same thing elsewhere for a better price?

For today's consumers, "life" is replacing money and even time as the thing that matters most. Feather is an organization on the forefront of "mission-riven CX." When I first met Jinal Shah, their VP of marketing and growth, I was blown away by her knowledge, enthusiasm and sincerity. She quickly made me care about a term that was brand new to me—"fast furniture"—and the harm it was causing to all of us:

"City renters move on average every 1-2 years. Tastes evolve, living arrangements change, budgets fluctuate, and many can't afford or don't want to commit to quality furniture so they end up resorting to cheaper alternatives that aren't built to last. As a result, 20 billion pounds of furniture end up in landfills annually (that's about the same amount of plastic that ends up in the oceans every year). This pattern isn't sustainable." - Livefeather.com

Feather has made a way for people to live their core values and rent beautiful furniture pieces. Twenty-year-old Nate could not fathom spending hundreds of dollars on furniture he didn't even own. Current Nate cannot imagine spending hundreds of dollars on furniture that will be in a landfill in two years. What a difference these past ten years have made.

And I am not the only one. This generation of customers has strong convictions and is willing to act on them. Research conducted by Net Impact with graduate students found that 67 percent of respondents were willing to earn a salary that was 15 percent lower than they might otherwise make in order to get a job that seeks to make a social or environmental difference.

Tom Smith is one such convicted customer. *"I'm a huge fan of Chipotle because of their commitment to serving #FoodWithIntegrity. I've been eating Chipotle six days a week for 14 years. I had burrito bowl #3,878 today."*

I inquired of Murphy Fraser, community manager at Skillshare, if organizational values ever enter into her purchasing decisions: *"Oh goodness—so many! Both from a values perspective and an identity perspective. What I value & who I am go hand in hand... so I'll always be more inclined to support businesses that are a reflection of me."*

There are few people who know as much about the "why" behind purchasing decisions as Mary Drumond, the CMO of Worthix and recognized CX thought leader. I asked her to weigh in:

"When it comes to emotions driving customers' purchase decisions, most believe that 'happy' or 'sad' are the main emotions that affect the experience. However, our research has found that this is not entirely accurate. The emotions behind social proof and brand identification have a much stronger correlation with customers' decisions to pick one brand over the other."

“Social proof is the idea that we look to friends and family to validate our decisions. How we're socially perceived based on the brands we buy from and what they stand for is a strong indicator of where we'll spend our money. Brand identification is how we connect with the ideals and moral stance of a brand and its value proposition. A brand's decision to deviate from these standards can be a make-or-break. In the past, companies have shied away from firm positions on socio-politics, and picking a side has previously been associated with corporate suicide. But the winds of change have brought about a mindset shift—brands now deliberately position themselves with their audiences in mind. Think Nike with Kaepernick, Ben & Jerry's with BLM, Hobby Lobby and Chick Fil 'A with their strong Christian values. They all understand what their customers VALUE, and get behind that message loud and clear. When done properly, with detailed research and a brave executive board, the decision tends to pay off.”

“What doesn't seem to pay off is an inauthentic, wishy-washy ticking-off of corporate boxes. Customers tend to view this as dishonest manipulation, and this can quickly invalidate their brand identification and social proof, causing a mass exodus of customers to competitors who empathize with their values on a deeper level.”

This is hard for most companies to reconcile, because it means that not everyone is “your customer.” There will be demographics of people who are turned off by the stance you take—and they will leave. The hope and goal is that these will be replaced by others who are drawn to you like a magnet and will become loyal ambassadors for your company.

Action Plan: 4 Steps

A nice idea, but how can you help your organization to practice mission-driven CX? These four steps will help.



Step One: Establish and Foster Company Identity

It all starts with who you are. Not you specifically, but your organization as a whole. Have you had the courage to form your own unique identity together? This is a required exercise. Wrestle through the big questions of who you are and what you really believe in. What specific mentalities and behaviors flow out of these beliefs? They must be clearly defined.

Your leaders have to live this new identity first and model it authentically for the organization. There is no room for leaders who are backstabbing one another and trying to create their own cultural fiefdoms. The organization must have the fortitude to remove these individuals, or they will inevitably sabotage the transformation initiative. As discussed in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni, the leadership team must be unified and bound together by trust. This is the soil required for any cultural seeds to take root.



Step Two: Break the CX Silos

Marketing and CX must be connected at the hip. Marketing is daily forming an impression about who your company is, generating a host of expectations. CX must be ready to deliver. If these two groups are not evolving together, you have a brand that is “unrelatable.” These organizations behave one way in part of the customer journey and act completely different in another part of the journey. This is not a company with whom we can develop a strong relationship.

Anyone who follows my work knows I'm a huge proponent of the Kotter “Leading Change” model and the establishment of a strong cross-functional CX change coalition. Experience management cannot be done in isolation. The world’s most customer-centric companies are those that are speaking a common language of CX and making it a universal priority.

It’s also critical to break the “dome light” mentality that plagues so many organizations. Many leaders are driving around with a spotlight on themselves, oblivious and blind to the outside world. As John Pompei says, “Too many times CX leaders think they know what

their customers want without experiencing what they have. We need to take the guesswork out of experience design by bridging the gap between our leaders and our customers.”



Step Three: *Start Inside of the House*

Authentic CX always begins at the same place: your employee experience. You’ve now established a unique company identity, and leadership is modeling the behaviors. Is the identity concretely known inside of the company and actively lived out by your employees? Does it foster pride in them and bring the group closer together than ever before?

This is how *employee ambassadors* are born, and employee ambassadors are the most effective CX resource in the known universe. Leads developed through employee social marketing **convert seven times** more frequently than other leads according to [Fast Company](#). The vast majority of purchasing decisions are not being made due to any form of corporate marketing, but rather from the interactions and social postings of real-life ambassadors. Yet [Hinge](#) informs us that 80 percent of employers have not yet implemented a comprehensive employee advocacy initiative! It’s time to get with the program, folks.



Step Four: Light the Beacon for “Your Customers”

I believe that every company has a group of customers that belongs to them. Our goal is simply to find them and bring them to us. Gone are the days of trying to be all things to all people. This realization comes with an enhanced sense of purpose and freedom. All you’ve got to do is to be you. Be unapologetically you in everything from marketing, to service delivery, to corporate culture and product development. The power of this consistency is enough to awaken your tribe and attract a loyal following.

“The fact is, we cannot love a logo, a jingle, or a piece of branded content. But we can love a person.”

— Dan Schaffer

Are you a part of a “lovable” company?

Welcome to a world where people buy because of who they are and how this aligns with who you are. To recognize this will be your greatest strength. To ignore it will be your downfall.

[Download the Mission-Driven CX infographic here!](#)