

Developing a customer experience vision

By Brooke Boyarsky, Will Enger, and Ron Ritter

McKinsey Quarterly, Winter 2016

Almost every successful company recognizes that it is in the customer-experience business. But simply being aware that the organization is primarily in the customer service business is not enough to change the status quo. To build internal momentum for initiatives to develop a unique customer experience, a company must understand how that helps it perform distinctively in the market. The conviction and shared aspiration can not only inspire, align, and guide the organization but also bring a human face to what would otherwise just be strategy.

It is easy to err by aiming too low. Looking at historical performance and at whatever helped satisfy customers in the past can often make marginal tweaks seem good enough.

Understanding the fundamental wants and needs of customers must be the starting point in determining what a great experience for them should look like. For example, five years ago, a taxi company might have thought that decreasing the wait time would be sufficient. But some companies saw a competitive opportunity in addressing various customer needs simultaneously: more control, comfort, and safety, and lower costs.

Gathering and segmenting data are good starting points in understanding customers. But data is not enough. Successful customer-experience efforts apply a human filter to the collected data to ask overarching questions. Exactly who are our customers as individuals? What motivates them? What do they want to achieve? What are the fundamental drivers of satisfaction?

Great customer experience is not possible without employees who know about it, care about it, and are well positioned to deliver it. That in turn means taking good care of employees, training them and empowering them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.