A 99-Page Executive Action Guide

So You Want To Be
Customer
Centric?

8 Steps to Profitable Customer Relations

ALAIN THYS

So You Want To Be Customer-Centric?

8 Steps To Profitable Customer Relations

By: Alain Thys

Twitter: @AlainThys_

2.

Table of Contents

The Need for Customer Centricity

"80% of CEOs think that their companies offer a superior customer experience, but only 8% of their customers agree." [1]

Bain & Company.

Despite proclaiming the contrary, most businesses don't really care about their customers. Sure, when asked, every executive team will swear that the customer is at the heart of all they do. They even believe it. But when you look at the behaviour of their business, it is clear that their real priorities lie elsewhere.

This is quite understandable. After all, we run businesses to make money, and no one has ever seen a P&L with a budget line for happy customers. Last time I checked, Wall Street analysts didn't give bonus points for smiley faces either.

So in many businesses, customer centricity lives in the land of apple pie, healthy food and saving the whales. It's something you aim for. You may even take actual steps towards it. But it never really hits the top of your 'to do' list.

In fact, true customer centricity only makes the agenda when there's time and money to spare. For the rest, daily life is geared towards capturing as much customer cash as you can, and giving as little as possible in return.

---

[1] John Blasberg, Vijay Vishwanath and James Allen: *Turning your consumers into die-hard fans*, Bain & Co, 2007.

6.

In the past, executives could be forgiven for letting this duality exist. With the unprecedented growth rates we've known since the Industrial Revolution, the *real* profits were made by having ever larger factories, ever more efficient supply chains and ever more specialised technology.

If a few customers were disappointed in the process, this was of course unfortunate. But looking at the bigger picture of corporate profits, it was perfectly acceptable.

Today, the world looks different. In more mature economies, growth rates have slowed and show no sign of speeding back up any time soon. Financial crisis upon crisis makes customers insecure and any type of company growth will be hard earned.

What's more, in markets like China, Brazil, Turkey or Mexico, double-digit growth is still possible but even there, customers are starting to display the savviness of their Western counterparts. A century of consumerism, combined with the rise of the Internet, has left them more demanding, better informed and less loyal than any previous generation.

To create sustainable growth, companies cannot 'burn' customers any longer. They need to build lasting relationships with a known set of customers who will provide them with fresh revenues over and over again.

That is why businesses need to move beyond the rhetoric. Rather than merely *say* customers are important, they need to prove it in their behaviours.

Not because it is morally right, but because it's how they will make more money. Today, and in the years to come.

From a distance, customer centricity is seductively simple. All you have to do is figure out what your customers need and re-organise your business so this can deliver it in a profitable and sustainable manner. Some would even argue that this is the essence of business itself.

Reality, however, is different. Replacing an industrial produce-and-push mindset with one that is focused on the customer is not easily done. Come to think of it, it is one of the most rewarding, but also challenging objectives for any executive.

The benefits are undeniable. Financial performance improves. The business becomes more competitive. People rediscover the fun of connecting to customers again.

But it is tough. The moment you start, you notice that life isn't the way it should be. You want to listen, but the customer's voice is distorted. Processes, budget constraints and KPIs get in the way of doing the right thing. Some colleagues may even be less than helpful. They may prefer the power balance and bonus structures of the status quo.

In other words, the mere decision to become customer-centric sends ripples through every part of the company. Like in any organisation, some groups will respond positively, but part of the business will do anything it can to comfortably keep things the way they are.

To succeed in any customer-centricity effort, you therefore need to consider the strategic, operational and people aspects of anything you propose. Good intentions described in a PowerPoint may get you applause. But on their own, they won't get you the result you seek.

THAT'S WHERE THIS BOOK COMES IN

Take a look on Google and you'll find hundreds of books, articles and presentations on the theory of customer centricity. You'll find research, models, academic frameworks and aspirational cases – usually referring to Apple, Zappos, Southwest Airlines and Virgin.

But you'll find very little about the practice of getting a business to become customer-centric. You'll find very little on how to:

- convince executives who believe that investments in customer happiness are a 'nice to have' and achieve nothing but reduce profitability;

- set up a customer listening mechanism which calls people to action rather than produces reams of meaningless reports;

- get your people and external stakeholders to be actively cooperative in reshaping the business, rather than be passive or obstructive;

- act as a leader who brings real change to your organisation, without becoming the face of yet another customer programme.

When I first moved into the realm of customer centricity, I didn't even know enough to ask these questions. But I've learned their importance the hard way. I want to help you avoid some of the challenges I've had to face.

So that's why I wrote this book. Not as an academic treatise on customer centricity, but as a set of practical suggestions from a guy who's been in your shoes.

I hope you find them useful.

AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT YOU'LL FIND

This book contains eight chapters. Each represents a step in the journey to customer centricity. The steps may be sequenced differently in your business, but at some point every company needs to consider them all.

In summary, the eight steps focus on:

1. <u>Showing the business the money</u>. How to build a business case for customer centricity that senior executives cannot refute.

2. <u>Listening to the customer's voice</u> in a way that is truly representative of reality and doesn't make your audience fall asleep.

3. <u>Making the customer voice actionable</u> so the feedback you receive doesn't just gather dust on a hard drive.

4. <u>Thinking beyond the process</u> to ensure your customer centricity efforts don't become a 'tick-the-box' exercise without passion.

5. <u>Involving distribution partners</u> without alienating them and building trans-channel experiences.

6. <u>Considering everyone as a touchpoint</u> and ensuring your business does the right thing in the physical world and in the social media world.

7. <u>Building a movement</u> which encourages individuals across all functions to take the initiative in bringing the business closer to the customer.

8. <u>Walking the talk</u>. Which key behaviours you can adopt to facilitate wider change and avoid becoming your company's next 'customer martyr'.

In addition to my own thoughts, each chapter includes the ideas and experiences of remarkable people I have met while compiling this book. Some of them have even been willing to contribute, which has allowed me to include mini-cases on C&A, ING, Lexus Europe, l'Oréal Group, Orange Business Services, Philips, Sanoma Magazines International, and the World Economic Forum.

Each chapter concludes with some additional resources you can explore, as well as a number of key actions you may want to consider on your business' journey towards customer centricity.

#1 Show Me the Money

*"You can't argue with two very successful CEOs that tell you
they can't live without this (customer-centric) approach."*

Isabelle Conner, Global Head of Marketing, ING Group.

Many customer centricity programmes begin life as a moral
debate. "We need to take care of our customers", someone
may say. "Yes!" another believer agrees, "They pay our
salaries, so we owe it to them to be diligent and service-
oriented." More evolved versions of this conversation even
consider the impact of social media and the risks of
diminishing the brand's reputation through negative word-of-
mouth.

While the benefits of doing the right thing for the customer are
obvious to those that 'believe', they aren't always clear to the
rest of the world. Making a customer's life easy may sound
admirable, but what often rings louder are the implications of
added cost, complexity and the headache that comes from
organisational change.

In this debate, some customer advocates are quick to blame the
business for not getting it. But over the years I've learned that
communication is a two-way street. Some people are indeed
slow to grasp new ideas; but much of the customer satisfaction
spiel is useless in a boardroom anyway. Just consider the
following dilemma.

THE CEO DILEMMA

Imagine you're the highly dedicated CEO of a medium-sized or large company. Like any good leader, you understand the value of a balanced approach. You know that your customers are important. But you also know that you need to weigh their needs against those of your shareholders, your people, and the many KPIs in your business. In short, you know that to succeed, you must make the most of the limited resources you have available.

Imagine that you have € 1,000,000 to invest. Two proposals come to the table. As each would require the entire available budget, you must choose.

The first proposal is for a new piece of machinery, which reduces the manual labour component in your production and would allow your factory to make demonstrable efficiency gains in excess of € 2,000,000 in the next 12 months. The second is a customer project. This will increase the happiness of your already quite satisfied customer base.

If you're honest, you'll see the dilemma. In your gut you know that customer satisfaction is important. But it is also hard to pass up the opportunity of triple-digit ROI. Particularly if the customer satisfaction initiative is hard to quantify in a business context which only really listens to euros and cents.

So without exception, every executive I have presented with this choice ends up choosing the savings programme.

After all, it's measurable, it fits accepted wisdom and it sounds great in the boardroom.

The CEO dilemma illustrates that no customer evangelist can ignore the financial realities of business. Without a clear return on customer satisfaction, companies will systematically opt for other options that appear to be more profitable.

A century of management science hasn't yet been able to solve this issue, for reasons that are both painful and obvious: 'return on customer satisfaction' may simply be too small to measure – if it exists at all.

Some time ago, a European Internet service provider reviewed the satisfaction data of customers who had cancelled their subscriptions. They were in for a shock: 80% of defectors had described themselves as satisfied or very satisfied in the 12 months before they left.[2]

Similar numbers can be found in categories from grocery shopping to classical music concerts, where churn rates of 55% are not uncommon despite standing ovations for artists who gave their very best.[3]

The reason for this seemingly inconsistent behaviour is simple: <u>customers pay to be satisfied</u>. Dissatisfying them is definitely not smart, but satisfying their needs offers no guarantee for their future loyalty or business. It just means you've done what they paid you to do; it doesn't earn you any favours.

It certainly doesn't earn you triple-digit ROI.

---

[2] M. Kon: *Customer Churn: Stop it before it starts*. Mercer Management Journal #17, p.54 , 2004.
[3] 90% of all first-time concert goers never return. Looking at the whole concert-going population, year-to-year churn rates of 55% are not uncommon. Martin Kon: *Turning First-Timers into Life-Timers: Addressing the true drivers of churn*, Oliver Wyman, 2008.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

In December 2003, loyalty expert Fred Reichheld published an article in the Harvard Business Review[4] that provided the breakthrough customer advocates needed. With the support of Satmetrix and his colleagues at Bain, he found that you needed to ask customers not just whether they were satisfied: it was much more economically relevant to ask them "How likely they were to recommend your business to a friend, colleague or family member?"

Scoring responses on a 0 to 10 scale, Reichheld uncovered three customer types:

- <u>'Promoters'.</u> Giving a score of 9 or 10, they are clear advocates for your business. They are the most loyal, purchase the highest volumes, negotiate the least and are easiest to cross- or up-sell.

- <u>'Passively satisfied' customers.</u> They give you a score of 7 or 8 and are satisfied but indifferent. They will buy from you if it makes sense, but will abandon you as soon as the next best thing comes along.

- <u>Finally, there are 'Detractors'.</u> With a score of 0 to 6, they dislike or even hate your business. Not only will they leave you at the first opportunity, but while they are with you, they will buy as little as they can, drive the hardest possible bargain and tell all their friends to stay away from you.

Being able to identify these three groups through a single question was important. It created a framework for estimating the value of each customer type. This made it possible to

---

[4] Frederick F. Reichheld: *The One Number You Need to Grow.* Harvard Business Review, December 2003.

calculate the amount of money a business could make from shifting a customer from being a detractor to being passively satisfied (these days known as a 'passive') or even becoming a promoter for the company.

In other words, from now on, customer advocates could do more than rely on rethoric to make their case. They could substantiate their initiatives with a solid business case that 'showed the money'.

REVISITING THE CEO DILEMMA

To our CEO in the previous dilemma, this would be good news. He would no longer need to rely on average satisfaction data. Instead, his people could prepare a case in which they showed, for example, that a detractor had a value of € 2,000 to the business, a passive € 20,000 and a promoter € 50,000.[5]

A plan to make 100 passive customers so happy that they'd become promoters would therefore generate € 3,000,000 in additional company value. This number would make the customer initiative quite a serious competitor to the factory investments which would 'only' generate € 2,000,000.[6]

Whatever his final decision, the CEO now has the numbers available to make an informed choice. To the rest of the business, customer investments can now follow the same financial logic as any other proposal that comes to the table.

---

[5] These numbers are imaginary, yet are representative of the value differentials that I have seen between detractors, passives and promoters.
[6] This is an oversimplified example to illustrate the process. When applying this in practice, a full ROI can only be calculated by taking into account all costs as well as the relevant financial discounts and prudency rules.

Since the original publication of Fred Reichheld's article, a lot has happened. The Net Promoter Score[7]™, usually referred to as NPS®, has attracted a wide variety of supporters like Philips, Aviva, Virgin, PayPal, ING, Sony, Experian, Orange Business Services, Symantec, Dell and many others.

While actual customer values are a closely guarded secret, the numbers that do surface from time to time are telling. For example, at Allianz Insurance, detractors are known to be 2.7 times more likely to cancel their policy than promoters. They also pay almost 20% less in annual premiums.[8] Plus, according to Bain & Company, the best scoring company in an industry grows at 2.5 times the category average.[9] I myself have seen value differentials between promoters and detractors of 14:1.

These numbers – and many more – have made the Net Promoter system one of the most promising techniques for putting a value on customer happiness. It is probably the one you want to consider when looking to prove a return on your customer initiatives.

It also means that when you ask a customer 'why' he gave you a certain score, he provides you with an instant action list for improving the workings of your company.

But you can read more about that in Chapter 3.

---

[7] Net Promoter, NPS, and Net Promoter Score are trademarks of Satmetrix Systems, Inc., Bain & Company, and Fred Reichheld.
[8] Source: The Customer Focus Initiative, Allianz, 2006.
[9] Anushi Shadran, *Ad advocacy-driving sales through word of mouth, bloggers* – June 2006.

One of the pioneers of Net Promoter thinking in the financial services sector, is Isabelle Conner, Global Head of Marketing at ING Group. I met up with her to learn how her company had found the path to customer centricity.

It started quite promisingly. "We knew from our research that our customers wanted us to remove complexity." ING set up *EASIER* – a global programme to make things simpler for the customer.

The programme aimed to give customers a clear overview of their financial situation, offer objective investment advice, be transparent about products and services, be fast and efficient, be easy to contact.

But about six months into the programme, ING found itself in the midst of the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression. The group's stock plummeted, thousands of jobs were cut, the CEO left and ING needed billions of government euros to survive the crisis.

This wasn't the best of times for anyone to talk about customer centricity: "It was a really difficult time to be driving a transformation process when markets were panicking [...] We were losing traction."

"It's such a basic story", Isabelle explains. "Promoters versus detractors. People get this. And with consumer distrust at a record high, overnight, positive word of mouth became the most important driver of growth across our industry."

But in the world of finance, a good customer-centricity story isn't enough. "People started wondering. How much will it cost? Do we really need it?"

Isabelle joined forces with the CEOs of ING's units in Belgium and Poland. Together, they tasked Satmetrix – the company that co-developed NPS – to survey tens of thousands of customers. A team of business analysts then turned the data into practical recommendations and operational suggestions for the Belgian and Polish CEOs.

This was new. "Country heads were used to customer satisfaction surveys, but they were always an average of an average of an average and mostly anonymous. They were hard to action and countries struggled with what was truly driving loyalty and how to prioritise their work."

Interestingly, this work didn't always require more money. "Consumers are quite reasonable. Clients didn't expect delivery of their credit card overnight, but were willing to wait up to six days. So instead of investing our money to try and beat the clock, we could put it elsewhere."

The diligence of the local teams in acting on the customer's voice paid off. "We went to the board with our pilot results and the two country CEOs did all the talking. You can't really argue with two very successful CEOs who are bringing in business and telling you that they can't live without this approach anymore."

As with any board, financials resonated strongly, and ING approved the roll out of NPS to all Retail Banking and Insurance units worldwide.

So for Isabelle the verdict is simple: with *EASIER* the ING teams were already on the right path, but "Net Promoter helped quantify and professionalise what we were doing. Each percentage point of improvement delivered on the Net Promoter scale, has a positive impact on profits."

In my view, it doesn't get any clearer than that.

If you want to (better) 'show your business the money' in being customer-centric, you may want to consider the following:

1. Update your knowledge. The few pages in this book only scratch the surface of the Net Promoter framework. Before you put it on your company's agenda, make sure you know what you are talking about. Read the books. Talk to the experts. Upgrade your expertise.

2. Get help from friends in high places. When talking money, you want a CEO, CFO or country/line leader on your side. Everyone knows they will only put their name to projects that make money, so when they echo your message on financial returns, people will listen more closely.

3. Start with a pilot. The value differential between detractors, passives and promoters can vary widely from one industry to the next. Before getting too excited, get your facts straight in one or two markets. Prove beyond doubt that customer efforts actually improve your bottom line.

4. Prepare to strike hard. Once the business case for customer centricity is made, ask senior or even board level supporters to aggressively duplicate your efforts throughout the business. Each day's delay is a missed opportunity to create value.

5. Don't forget your beliefs. With all the talk of financial return, the customer conversation may become abstract and mechanical. Don't forget your own reasons for starting this journey. They will keep you motivated when the going gets tough.

20.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

To expand your Net Promoter knowledge and learn about building the financial case for customer centricity, I happily recommend the following resources:

- The Ultimate Question by Fred Reichheld. This is the book that started it all. In it, Fred Reichheld explains the principles behind the Net Promoter Score, as well as the ways in which happy customers are more profitable. Harvard Business Press, 2006 (ISBN-10: 1591397839).

- Answering the Ultimate Question by Richard Owen and Laura Brooks builds on Reichheld's book to focus on the execution of a Net Promoter programme. Jossey-Bass, 2008 (ISBN-10: 0470260696).

- Net Promoter Customer Loyalty Certification. Organised by Satmetrix, the co-developers of NPS, this 3-day course gives you a deep immersion in the theory and practice of implementing Net Promoter in your business. You can find more information on this URL: **http://tinyurl.com/383djhe**.

- The Net Promoter Communities. There are a variety of Net Promoter community websites where you can connect and discuss with other people that have an interest in Net Promoter work. You can find many of them on LinkedIn via **http://tinyurl.com/2v3ru3d**. There is also a (largely German) community on Xing: **http://tinyurl.com/2f9d8zc** as well as the official **www.netpromoter.com**.

Note: all the URLs above are accurate at the time of going to press. If something has changed since publication, please use your favourite search engine.

#2 Listen to the Customer's Voice

"Executives are used to seeing numbers and executive dashboards, but when you use a customer quote, it's much more convincing."

Marc Anné, VP Customer Insight & Advocacy, Orange Business Services.

Once you've made the business case for being more customer-centric, you need to turn your Excel sheets into euros and cents. This starts by really listening to your customers and capturing their voice in a way that your people can act on.

Here many companies struggle. Sure, they may continuously run market surveys, deploy CRM systems and run focus groups. They may even employ hundreds of call-centre employees. But that doesn't mean that they listen.

Too often, customer statements go into detailed reports which end up gathering dust on a shelf. CRM data on decision-making units gets ignored. Call-centre activity gets reduced to a set of first-call-resolution metrics. In fact, depending on the channel that is used, 11% to 28% of companies in Benelux, France, Germany and the UK never answer questions that are put to their helpdesk.[10] If you want to be customer-centric, your business needs to start listening for real.

---

[10] In 2010, Insites Consulting surveyed 500 senior marketers in the Benelux, France, Germany and Great Britain on the way they dealt with customer queries. 11% admitted that the questions that are put to their helpdesk, never get answered. More info: http://tinyurl.com/3xncltl.

HOW THE CUSTOMER'S VOICE GOT LOST

For millennia, buyers and sellers have interacted with each other in a fairly consistent manner. Initially, someone would come to an artisan's atelier or visit a farm and selected the products they liked. Over time, a travelling salesman would drop by to display his wares. Later still, he would have become a shopkeeper.

In each of these situations the relationship between the customer and the seller was direct and unfiltered. Customers were individuals. If they didn't like what you sold them, you had to face them at your next encounter. If you failed to deal with the problem in the right way, they would think less of you. Doing this too often, could even affect your reputation across an entire village.

Today, decades of management practice have severed the direct contact between buyers and sellers. To streamline our businesses we have grouped customers into segments. We muffle their individual voices with third-party administered satisfaction reports, KPIs and quality management theories.

As a result, those people who are now employed to respond to the customer's voice often have as little influence as customers themselves. The decision makers that should be doing the listening, never hear what the customer has to say.

If your company is showing these symptoms, you have to start paying attention. Faced with indifference, customers may be voting with their wallets, or worse, their mouths, without you even noticing.

For your business to be customer-centric, you need to ensure that listening to the customer's voice is key capability of every single department and function.

A simple way to kick off this process, is to further explore the Net Promoter system discussed in the previous chapter.

Once customers give you their score, ask them open questions about why they would or wouldn't recommend your business. What you should do to improve? The answers you'll get will be as frank and clear as the feedback that was given to the artisan 300 years ago.

Customers that were satisfied but indifferent will give you short and simple answers. After all, they got what they paid for. Those that are promoters of your business (giving a score of 9 or 10) will provide you with constructive suggestions and criticism to become better. Your detractors, scoring you 6 or less, will give you a piece of their mind.

Systematically capturing these statements at every customer interaction, gives you a clear picture of your business' performance at every touchpoint:

- When you got it wrong, customers will tell you in their own words what you need to fix. Sometimes they'll even say how you can fix it.

- When you got it right, they will highlight how exactly you delighted them, so you can focus on doing more of it (or at least prevent certain activity from being cut in the next budget review).

In other words, asking 'why' allows you to re-establish that direct and unfiltered contact that has underpinned true customer loyalty for millennia.

Of course, getting the customer's voice only matters if the various parts of the business actually pay attention to what is being said. Here we face a challenge. Most of us have learned that listening to the customer's voice is usually quite boring and often irrelevant to our job.

Let's face it; few management teams get excited about a statistically relevant set of reasons why 4.8% of your customer base is dissatisfied. Not only are our brains numbed by this kind of data, it also means that 95.2% of customers are satisfied. Any teacher will tell you that this is a good score.

Moreover, many customer reports appear irrelevant. If you work in IT, you might be interested to hear that customers think your pricing structure is too complex, but you won't feel personally affected. After all, you deal in servers and software. The fact that your expertise could be part of the solution doesn't enter the equation.

So once you have collected the statements your customers make, you need to ensure that people in your business actually listen to them by presenting them in a format that is <u>interesting</u>, <u>relevant</u> and <u>actionable</u>.

Make it interesting

The worst mistake customer advocates can make is to present their colleagues with dry and abstract data. While pie charts have their place, the actual words of the 749 customers who told you that your business 'sucks', will have infinitely more impact. The same goes for the words of the 135 people who absolutely love you.

Using these raw customer statements will instantly light up the room. People start debating. Clarification is asked for. Initiatives are formulated.

This is quite normal. As humans we love being liked and find no joy in being disliked. It creates a chemical imbalance in our brain that we want to correct.[11] So to make your data more interesting, present it with a human voice.

Make it relevant

Customer statements don't usually fit neatly into one departmental box. This may make your colleagues agree that something should or could be done, but as it falls outside their departmental focus, they won't be the ones to do it.

You can resolve this by always making sure that all stakeholders affected by a customer topic are in the room when you present it. Individually, they may not feel affected or empowered to act. As a team, they will see that they can make a difference.

Make it actionable

Finally, present the customer's voice as a call to action. The people around you may be great at their job, but that doesn't mean they are skilled at interpreting customer data.

Translate what needs to happen into terms and challenges that connect to people's jobs, departments and KPIs. This will allow them to act on information, rather than spend time decoding it first.

---

[11] Negative feedback reduces the production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter which *makes us feel good.*

START A CUSTOMER CONVERSATION

Once you've presented your facts in a compelling manner, the real work can begin: infusing every company conversation with your customer's point of view.

The corporate way to do this is to hold weekly reviews of customer feedback at every level in the organisation. But you can make things more interesting:

- <u>Bring the customer into the company</u>. Organise days where employees can participate in or observe "real customer" conversations.

- <u>Put your people out there</u>. Get your people out of their comfort zone and into actually meeting customers. Put senior executives into call centres. Let logistics teams meet with their customer peers. Get product managers to work in retail stores. Truly become a part of the customer's life.

- <u>Buy a set of extra chairs</u>.[12] Furnish every meeting room with a spare and permanently unoccupied chair that is mentally reserved for the customer. Rhetorically ask his or her opinion at the end of each meeting (i.e. "what would our customers think of what we just decided"). Initially, this will feel awkward, but the chair will quickly become a constant reminder of the customer's voice.

The customer's voice is a living organism. Only when it becomes part of the conversations in your business, can you truly say that you listen to it.

---

[12] Special thanks to Marc Anné of Orange Business Services for this suggestion.

When it comes to listening to the customer voice in B2B, Orange Business Services (OBS) is probably one of the world's more advanced players. But when I met Marc Anné, Vice President of Customer Insight & Advocacy, he clearly remembers that it wasn't always like this. "When I took this role in 2006, no one was listening to customers in a structured, systematic way."

Marc's team set to work to change this. Their innovative practices gave them record-breaking survey response rates which regularly reached 45%.

To identify the individual stakeholders (from decision makers to operational staff) to be surveyed within each of OBS' strategic customers, the company has started to validate the quality of its contact lists with the customer's most senior executives as a best practice.

Before acting on them, customer survey results are presented back to these Sr. executives for validation and (re)prioritisation of improvement actions.

Strategic customers can also sponsor or co-sponsor key improvement projects within OBS. CIOs and their teams are invited to cooperate on improvement programmes and co-construct, so OBS can get it 'just right'.

When I point out to Marc that this approach is remarkable, he says it's the only way customer surveys truly make sense: "Customers who take the time to give you their opinion and see no change or follow-up, will feel more dissatisfied than they did before."

It also matters internally. This form of customer dialogue is the only way to ensure that your colleagues will accept the data

you collect. "If you get your facts wrong, or they are incomplete, your voice will quickly lose credibility in the business. There's no point making reports that gather dust in a drawer."

At OBS, dusty files are clearly not part of the equation. On a corporate level, much of the collected data feeds into a general Customer Loyalty Index. This clearly correlates the customer's readiness to recommend OBS to the future lead-flow of the company.

But more importantly, the detailed feedback underlying the 'score' travels directly to the people that can act on it. The continuous, formal and disciplined link between customer feedback and action is a major differentiator for OBS. It is embedded into the DNA of all extended customer teams, processes and functions.

Marc gives an example: "Some time ago multiple customers indicated we had a billing issue. We used to set up special work-streams and project teams for this. But we now shared the customer's pain directly with the billing experts. Together with the account managers they listened and fixed it." OBS has found this approach to be faster, more customer-focused and more cost-effective.

But when going down this path you need to take into account that not everyone may want to play along. Marc is clear: "You can be the customer advocate and the pioneer who works to identify the issues, but you don't want to be the lone pianist in the saloon that gets caught in the cross-fire. Present your results to the highest level you can so they sponsor the cross-functional improvements you propose (and in the process shield you from any pot-shots silo owners may take at you)."

Judging by the success which Marc and Orange Business Services have had with the company's move to customer-centricity, this is advice worth taking.

You cannot force people to listen to the customer's voice, but taking the following steps, you can make this voice as interesting, relevant and actionable as possible:

1. <u>Make sure the right questions are asked</u>. Ask customers at every touchpoint whether they would be willing to recommend you. Give them the room to express in their own words 'why?' they would or wouldn't recommend you and 'what should you do to improve?'. Ensure your systems, processes and people are capable of dealing with the volume of feedback you will receive.

2. <u>Turn statistics into human-interest stories</u>. Resist the temptation to summarise customer feedback into endless reports, metrics and statistics. Instead, complement robust research data with a human touch. Don't just present numbers, but tell stories in which the customer's voice appears unedited. Translate your findings into terms and KPI's that are relevant for each of your internal audiences. Issue calls to action allowing various departments to collectively respond to the customer's voice.

3. <u>Make the customer's voice part of internal conversations</u>. Establish a process that continuously reviews customer voice data at every level in the organisation. But also use your creativity to facilitate direct customer interactions, especially for those who typically never meet customers.

4. <u>End every meeting with the question</u> "We just made these decisions, what value do they add to our customer?" In addition to your research, this ensures the customer is always in the room.

30.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

For more information on clarifying the real voice of your customer and amplifying it through your business, you may find the following resources relevant:

- The Leader's Guide to Storytelling, Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative by Stephen Denning. This book is one of the standard works on the use of storytelling in a business context. While the book focuses on a much wider area, you will find the principles on which it is based very useful when presenting the customer's voice in your company Jossey-Bass, 2005 (ISBN-10: 078797675X).

- The "One Right Way" to Gather the Voice of the Customer is an article by Gerald M. Katz, EVP of Applied Marketing Science. In it, he describes the various ways in which companies can go about capturing the true voice of the customer. While his conclusion is that there is no 'one right way', he presents the pros and cons which may help you identify a pragmatic route which your business can take. (http://tinyurl.com/66dn7q9).

- Information is Beautiful is a blog by David McCandless in which he shows remarkable ways to present research data that make it more interesting, engaging, and even beautiful. If you want to check it out, it can be found at **http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/**.

Note: all the URLs above are accurate at the time of going to press. If something has changed since publication, please use your favourite search engine.

#3 Build a Platform for Aligned Action

"Introducing a centrally fixed process to act on customer feedback only leads to 'tick the box' behaviour."

Laura Ann Murphy, Sr. Director Customer Experience, Philips International.

At its core, the recipe for customer centricity is really quite simple. Excel at the things your customer cares about the most; eliminate those that don't matter.

Unfortunately this is easier said than done. Regardless of the method you use to listen to your customer's voice, you will invariably find that it doesn't fit the corporate silos your company has spent years nurturing. If anything, customers seem to have the uncanny ability to point out exactly those spots where your business is disconnected.

As a result, customer feedback often ends up on the pile of things you should be doing, but never <u>really</u> get round to. Everyone agrees that action is important. But no one has the authority, resources or time within the confines of their own department to answer the customer's call.

If you're really unlucky, people may even be incentivised to do exactly the opposite.

Most operational improvement programmes are internally focused. They try to make processes faster, cheaper or in consultancy language leaner. If the customer's voice is included, it's only as an afterthought.

This is not necessarily bad. A streamlined business is a good business. But let's be honest. The silo-based approach means that quite a few companies are hyper efficient at doing the wrong thing. Some examples:

- Sales teams use less than 50% of the materials marketing creates for them. To compensate, they spend 40% of their time preparing materials themselves,[13] resulting in sloppy work, needlessly lost sales and wasted funds.

- 58% of companies do not compensate their people on customer loyalty, or satisfaction improvements.[14] Why should individual departments pay attention to the customer, if they are not rewarded for doing so?

- The majority of new product launches fail. When doing a post-mortem, these failures can typically be assigned to insufficient customer focus or organisational misalignment. In other words, if everyone is not shooting at the same target, the chances of hitting it are rather slim.

Every time departmental silos have different customer objectives, your profit gets destroyed and your business wastes time and focus.

---

[13] *The Profit Maximisation Paradox: Cracking the Marketing/Sales Alignment Code*, Glen S. Petersen, Booksurge Publishing, 2008.
[14] *Giving Customer Voice More Volume, CMO Council*, January 2009.

To break through silo barriers, a cross-functional approach is needed. Teams from different departments and business functions must regularly take the time to sit down for a cup of coffee and discuss the customer.

Today, this doesn't always happen. Sure, departments meet all the time. But workloads and tight budgets only leave time to talk about internal matters. As everyone chases their own targets and bonuses, organisational tolerance for what are deemed inefficient customer conversations can be very low.

So the challenge is to give people the space they need to break through the departmental walls. People need freedom to make things happen for the customer. Once this space is created, you then have to make clear that you expect this freedom to be actively used.

To achieve this, you will need three things:

- A customer champion with an indisputable mandate to get the business to do what is right.

- A meeting process to formally bring together stakeholders from all departments around customer issues and opportunities.

- A do-it-yourself (DIY) support programme, which allows the people in your business to self-organise around customer-centric projects.

The next few pages will look at each of these in more detail.

A CUSTOMER CHAMPION

Along your path to customer centricity 'someone' will need to lead the way. Many businesses recognise this and appoint an experienced Chief Customer Officer (CCO) or more junior customer advocates to transform the business.

Unfortunately, the people who eagerly fill these positions often find themselves en route to frustration and failure. Without real (P&L) authority, they have no power to make things happen. They can be seen as a nuisance because they constantly talk about the customer while real business needs to get done. In one case, I've even seen executives use the appointment of a CCO as an excuse <u>not</u> to worry about the customer any more. After all, someone is on that job now.

To get the right customer leader with the right mandate:

- <u>Make it serious</u>. Ensure that the person in charge of the customer is someone with solid business experience, actively supported by the CEO, the CFO or the Head of Sales/Marketing. This will give the signal to your organisation that this is not 'another project'.

- <u>Make it measurable</u>. Introduce customer metrics (NPS) as an impartial measure of your performance. By making the customer the judge, your customer leader can overcome interdepartmental politics and inertia.

- <u>Make it about the people</u>. Customer leadership is not about holding people's hands. Your Customer Chief should focus on inspiring the organisation to act and giving them the tools to get results. Customer centricity is a way of life, not a project to complete.

It may sound overly formal, but until the customer becomes a natural part of your company's conversation, you need to force the issue. Do this by organising quarterly workshops where senior executives in your business define actions to address customer issues and related opportunities.

Getting <u>every</u> stakeholder to attend these meetings will be a challenge. After all, our personal performance targets mean we have better things to do. But for decisions to be made, you need to make sure everyone attends.[15] When they show up, you need to get results. These only come if you:

- <u>Don't move until your data is rock solid</u>. While everyone will initially nod along with the idea of becoming customer-centric, only a small group of people will be openly supportive. Others will be sceptical, disinterested or even hostile. Any flaws in your case will be used against you.

- <u>Script everything</u>. You cannot afford these high-stakes sessions to end without results. Script your meetings so participants feel they achieved something and can demonstrate quick and structural results.

- <u>Think beyond the workshop</u>. We've all been at sessions where we ended world hunger, but forgot about it when we returned to our desks. Make sure your customer champion is empowered to assist, but also to enforce agreements made in the meeting if and when this is required.

---

[15] A good method is to tell people that they are free not to attend if they mandate the group to make decisions on their behalf (without limitation). Alternatively, you can consider an executive order telling them to be there.

A DO-IT-YOURSELF SUPPORT PROGRAMME

A structured meeting and action process is a good way to get everyone focused and aligned at the senior level but the real work on customer centricity needs to happen by the people who actually talk to and service customers.

This will take more than executive agreement and the willingness to allocate some time or budget. It calls for a structure that allows cross-functional teams to come together and act as one.

This structure doesn't need to be as formal as it does at a senior level. While a few workshops to kick-start things make sense, corporate reality usually prevents you from closing down the company for a day every month.

It is much more effective to give your people the opportunity to self-organise. Encourage them to come up with their own structures for listening to the customer's voice and, more importantly, doing something about it.

To help them in this process, you can set up a team of well-trained customer change agents who come armed with an immense amount of enthusiasm, but also DIY toolkits, meeting templates, best practices, etc.

Having a mix of tools and people, not only allows you to provide support when things go wrong but when things go right, it means you can just step out of the way. Once people take ownership for customer centricity, things will start moving by themselves.

Ever since former Philips CMO Geert Van Kuyck introduced me to the company's customer-centricity efforts, the brand has been one of my greatest influences on the topic. So when meeting with Laura Ann Murphy and Arne van de Wijdeven – respectively Senior Director and Director Customer Experience – I was keen to discuss how Philips gets its people to act on the customer's voice.

"To make things happen", Laura explains, "you need to make the data come to life for every single employee. Managers need to maximize their direct customer contact. Non-customer facing teams need to listen to audio or video files with the unfiltered voice of the customer, both positive and negative." By discussing the meaning of these customer comments, actions and ideas automatically emerge. "It's simple, it doesn't require much money, and it <u>really</u> gets people engaged."

To facilitate this process, Philips relies on a network of NPS Change Agents. These customer specialists advise markets and businesses in their decision-making. Rather than setting up a 'customer silo', Arne explains that Philips has chosen to embed this team deeply into the organisation: "It should never be a case of 'us versus them'. Customer-centricity is about working together across departments to become outright customer leaders wherever we compete."

This sensitivity to local empowerment and relevance is evident in the training toolkit which Philips developed to help local teams act on customer feedback, in a way that works for them. Laura says "Introducing a centrally fixed process to act on customer feedback only leads to 'tick the box' behaviour. So we created a toolkit from which local leaders can pick and choose what they consider most relevant for their business.

That way, it becomes <u>their</u> process, rather than something which is imposed top-down."

To ensure local best practices spread globally, Philips actively encourages the NPS Change Agents to exchange information and know-how. Arne explains: "in addition to the usual international conference calls and reporting, we want them to talk to each other all the time." To facilitate this, the company set up an online community and introduced a buddy system in which more experienced Change Agents are paired with newer ones.

The informality of this approach allows Philips to scale good ideas without the complexity that usually affects large organisations. Laura illustrates: "Brazil started a call-back programme to address a consumer issue, with positive results. Benelux leveraged the idea to reach out to customers who were not completely satisfied. They too found that customers appreciated the effort."

While these actions have made Philips a global best practice in customer-centric transformation, Laura and Arne are already thinking ahead. While the customer data is solid and customer-centricity is taking root in the corporate DNA, the business now wants to move beyond the NPS-inspired "fix what's wrong" mind-set. Part of this is their NPS e-learning programme, in which more than 10,000 employees have already participated.

But the vision for the future is bigger. Laura is looking even further ahead when she says: "We need to reward our sometimes extremely large bases of promoters with an ever more delightful experience. We need to prove to them that we deserve their loyalty for the next 10-15 years."

A beautiful challenge indeed.

YOUR KEY ACTIONS

To get your business to <u>act</u> on the customer's voice, you need to build a platform that allows it to break through silo-based inertia. You should:

1. <u>Get the facts</u>. Beyond the business case and customer data, find practical – and ideally outrageous – examples of how your business is burning money by acting in a disjointed way.

2. <u>Appoint the right customer champion</u>. Make sure a senior executive backs this champion. If you aim to take up the mantle yourself, make sure your business pedigree and political experience have equipped you to make things happen across functional silos.

3. <u>Set up a senior executive customer meeting process</u>. Do whatever it takes to get the key executives to come together every quarter to listen to and act on the customer's voice. Gain their active support by talking their language. Keep momentum by building in sufficient quick wins.

4. <u>Set up a 'do-it-yourself' programme</u>. Get your teams to self-organise around the topic of customer centricity. Kick off with a workshop; provide day-to-day support through customer change agents who come armed with templates, techniques and lots of positive energy.

5. <u>Don't try to reinvent the wheel</u>. Whether it comes to executive workshops, setting up action systems or developing DIY kits, there are people out there who have done it before. Get advisors to share their best practices with you, so you and your people can focus on what really matters: making your company responsive to your customers.

40.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

There isn't a lot of literature that focuses on how to get companies to act on customer feedback, but the following resources do stand out:

- Chief Customer Officer: Getting Past Lip Service to Passionate Action by Jeanne Bliss was published by Jossey-Bass in 2006 (ISBN-10: 0787980943). The book provides a candid and practical perspective on what it takes to be a Chief Customer Officer and how to drive change in organisations.

- Customer Data Integration: Reaching a Single Version of the Truth by Jill Dyché and Evan Levy, published by J.Wiley in 2006 (ISBN-10: 0471916978) this book provides a more advanced set of insights in the integration of various pieces of customer information into one robust view. While you will not need to follow every piece of advice in this book to begin aligning your people, it does contain some interesting pointers.

- Aligning the Organisation with the Market by George S. Day. Published in the MIT Sloan Management Review of Fall 2006, p.41-49, this article explores the degree to which organisations should or shouldn't align with their customers/markets.

- The Active Manager's Toolkit: 45 Reproducible Tools for Leading and Improving your Employees' Performance by Mel Silberman. Published by McGraw-Hill in 2003 (ISBN: 0-07-140945-9) this practical book contains a chapter on the topic of aligning your team. It also covers how to set an alignment agenda, and looks at the questions your team should ask itself when it gets started.

#4 Manage the Customer Experience

"We found that those retailers who really focused on the customer experience didn't suffer from the automotive crisis at all."

Ann Buekers, Project Leader for the Lexus Customer Experience programme development and Pan-European implementation, Lexus Europe.

A solid system for listening to and acting on the customer's voice is crucial to the success of any business. But slavishly acting on customer feedback can also lull a company to sleep. Once the box is ticked, the business is happy. After all, we've done everything the customer asked us to do.

To really connect to your customers, you need to do more than react to what they say. You need to anticipate their needs and act on what they are <u>not</u> saying in the surveys, focus groups and sales conversations.

To achieve this, you need to get under your customer's skin and look at the overall experience your company offers. How do you provide information? How complex is your billing process? How do you make customers feel? How does this extend to your own people or your suppliers?

Rather than just react to what customers tell you, you need to think ahead to each interaction they have with your business and plan to behave in a way that noticeably sets you apart from the competition.

Many executives get nervous when people start to talk about customer experience. It sounds fluffy, abstract, emotive, and above all expensive. It's the domain of dinner-speakers with good stories who tell you your company is like a theatre, and your employees are actors. No serious mention is made of processes, frameworks, KPIs or even profit.

But without a method for proactively managing the customer experience, executives are rolling the dice at every customer interaction. They're leaving the outcome up to the unguided best intentions of the individual employees that happen to be in the front line.

Customers notice. 62% of US/UK consumers believe that the quality of service they get largely depends on whoever is serving them. But only 22% of companies acknowledge this fact.[16] As corporate blind spots go, this one can count.

This is a dangerous game. If you happen to be able to hire the right people all the time – those that can make things happen – everything is fine.

But every time you make a recruitment error, or good people make honest mistakes, it goes wrong. You create room for competitors to move in, for customers to give up and for value to be destroyed. In short, not having a customer experience plan can get very expensive and cost your business a lot of valuable reputation points.

---

[16] In the *Q1 Beyond Philosophy Customer Experience Trend Tracker*, 1000 businesses and consumers were polled across the US and UK. 61.48% of consumers agreed with the statement that "different people approach the handling of issues when something goes wrong differently and/or there is no consistency across the organisation". Only 21.7% of businesses admitted to that statement. Beyond Philosophy, February 2010.

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MAP

Before getting into the mechanics of this, we need to get one thing straight. Customer experience management is <u>not</u> about turning your company into Disneyland. Neither is it about doing everything a customer asks of you.

It <u>is</u> about implementing a process that manages every interaction with your customer from the first thought he gives to a specific need, to the last moment he remembers you fulfilling it.

This process gets documented in a 'Customer Experience Map'. A simple, graphic-based document which:

- helps your people understand the customer's mind before, during and after every interaction with a part of your business;

- shows them how they should engage their customers in a way that maximises customer happiness <u>and</u> business revenues/results;

- gives them room to improvise when your standard processes fall short.

By clearly describing the way your business behaves at each touchpoint, you not only bring consistency to your customer experience, you can also make more money.

After all, market research has shown that a substantial proportion of customers may be willing to pay a premium if they get a superior customer experience in return.[17]

---

[17] In a recent survey, 85% of US respondents stated that they were willing to pay up to 25% more to ensure a superior customer experience. Source: *The Customer Experience Impact Report 2010*, RightNow Technologies. October 2010.

TAKE A WALK IN YOUR CUSTOMER'S SHOES

To draw a customer-experience map for your business, forget everything you think you know and look at life through your customer's eyes.

This can offer you a remarkable perspective. I once worked with a travel company where we identified 15 stages the average leisure traveller goes through as part of his or her holiday experience. Even today, the typical travel company only proactively manages four to six of these stages. All the others are left to chance.

But knowing which steps to manage is not enough. You also need to know what customers need from each of them. This means you need to collect:

- The rational and emotional insights. In other words, what makes your customer tick at any given step of their journey? Do they make decisions alone, or with others? What are their rational and emotional needs?

- Choice drivers. What are the motivations for customers to further commit to your business at every step of their customer journey? What should you say or do to encourage them to make this commitment? What should you definitely avoid?

- Recommendation drivers. How can you make such a good impression, that people speak well of you regardless of whether they buy from you or not? How do you get them to bring their friends?

Bringing all this information together into a simple single-page map, gives you the framework you need to proactively manage the customer experience.

Having your customer map on the wall is nice, but you want action. For every step in the customer's journey with your business, you want your people to know what they should do. Which processes to rely on. How to behave.

The best way to define these rules is to sit down with the people in your company that already get it. Every business has them. They are the people who seem to delight customers every time they touch them. Who keep coming up with proposals for improvement. Who bend the rules and cut corners to satisfy customers.

Show these people the customer reality you have uncovered and let them describe their ideal response. If you've done your job well, this should be easy. Your customer experience map will reflect a reality they intuitively recognise. Finding the right thing to do, is just a matter of following their instincts.

But then it gets tricky. To make the ideas you've formulated scalable and consistent, many companies start structuring them into process manuals, computer systems and KPIs. Best practices become standards and soon a detailed programme to build customer relationships emerges.

By doing so, these companies ignore one thing. Customer relationships are built by and between people. While some structure is required, these people don't always fit into process boxes. They have emotions, moods and changing requirements and what they need isn't always found on page 197 of the operations manual.

This doesn't mean you should turn your company into a customer free for all. But it does mean that you need to look at your people as more than robots following a script. You need to empower them to think beyond the process.

46.

A good way to achieve this, is to create simple behavioural guidelines. These are rules of engagement that come into play for every customer interaction. They apply even when the manual falls short, or offers contradictory directions.

Starbucks achieves this with the mantra: 'Connect – Discover – Respond'. Within the first 30 seconds of training, each employee knows they should build a personal connection with their customers, discover what they are really looking for and respond in a way that gives them what they were looking for.

Nordstrom has taken this idea of empowerment even further by stating that all employees should adhere to only one rule: to use their best judgment in all situations. There would be no need for further rules.

So while you need some structure and core processes to ensure the important things get done, don't take this too far. Truly remarkable customer experiences are created by people that adapt to unique situations. You need to give your people the freedom to do just that.

Once they're doing this, your job is merely to support them. When they get it wrong, but have acted for the right reasons, you back them up. When processes get in the way, you rewire them. When you see the opportunity to make a difference yourself, set the example.

Your people will notice. So will your customers.

From a traditionalist's perspective, the automotive industry is fairly simple. Once every four or five years customers go looking for a new car, they buy it, and then return for an occasional service or repair job 'because they have to'. In the end – because all car dealers and salesmen look the same – it's all about the product.

Not so at Lexus. The company takes great pride in its Lexus Customer Experience (LCE). To learn more about this, I met up with Daniel Haas, Head of Brand Experience & Strategic Planning and Ann Buekers, Project Leader for the Lexus Customer Experience program development and Pan-European implementation.

It immediately becomes clear that for Lexus, the customer experience is no marketing folly. Daniel starts: "Lexus is built on two key differentiators. We are leaders in hybrid technology. But we also offer our customers a truly personalised experience that consistently exceeds their expectations."

To deliver on this promise in every market, in 2009, Lexus embarked on a large-scale initiative to let go of the known truths in the industry and map the way automotive customers really experienced buying and owning a car.

Daniel Haas remembers it clearly: "Traditionally, the automotive industry looks at customers from a dealer point of view, with key focus on the purchase itself and after-sales business. At Lexus, we looked at life through our customers' eyes. We found 10 steps in the customer journey which truly mattered to them. These were a clear guide of where we needed to deliver on our brand promise."

Armed with this map, Lexus wanted to enable each of its dealers to <u>act</u> on this knowledge. This would take more than putting up a poster with survey results.

As a Disney and Starbucks alumnus, Ann Buekers knew how to make this transition. "To ensure maximum buy-in from the outset, we made a few of our top-performing retailers, and their staff, part of the design process. We wanted our dealers to understand that this was not an ivory tower HQ-programme, but that it combined our research with their knowledge and best practices."

The end result incorporates guidelines, best practices, stories and tools across the 10-step customer journey, but also a set of clear KPI's and metrics to help the (dealer) management measure the business impact of the implemented actions.

Ann elaborates: "The key to the success of this type of programme is a dealer principal who is a true believer in 'experience' thinking. He needs to be able to lead by example and tailor the programme to his own unique environment. But as an entrepreneur, he also needs to see how it generates tangible business value."

What is truly remarkable to me, is that a lot of the Lexus Customer Experience work was done during an economic crisis that nearly destroyed many automotive brands.

For Ann, this is no surprise: "We found that those retailers who <u>really</u> focused on the customer experience didn't suffer from the automotive crisis at all. That strengthened us in our belief that we were on the right path."

So while Ann made a special point that the LCE continues to be improved, I'd say that's the best business case for customer-centricity I've ever heard.

To allow your people to map, understand and manage your customer experience, you may want to:

1. <u>Learn about decision-making</u>. Decision-making in most industries is largely emotional, yet many businesses take a highly rational approach. Get comfortable with the softer side of the business, so you are well prepared to argue your case if you're faced with scepticism or criticism.

2. <u>Draft a customer experience map</u>. Mapping a customer journey is typically a 'one-off' specialist event and you will probably want to call in consultants. But don't leave all the work to them, walk with them along at each step of the journey. Live your customers' needs.

3. <u>Make it actionable</u>. Bring together the most customer-oriented people in your business. Let them look at the customer experience map you have developed and dive into their experience to formulate responses at each step of your customer's journey. Take note of everything they say.

4. <u>Make room to think beyond the process</u>. Once all the maps and processes are written, provide your people with simple behavioural guidelines that override process manuals and KPIs. Allow them to use their best judgment when needed. Support them in their decisions and initiatives, even when they make well-intentioned mistakes.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

To dive deeper into the topics of customer experience planning, you may appreciate the following resources:

- Experience Is the Product. Written by Peter Merholz in 2006, it is still one of the most compelling presentations on how customers judge products as experiences. You can view it on Slideshare: http://tinyurl.com/2xeeoj.

- Customer Experience Design. Idris Mootee offers a slightly different, but very valuable perspective on the design of great customer experiences. Also on Slideshare: http://tinyurl.com/64zjfw.

- Creating the Lexus Customer Experience. This is an interview I did with David Brimson, who at the time was General Manager, Strategy & Brand Experience at Lexus. You can read it on the website of Management Centre Europe on http://tinyurl.com/257hy3a.

- Building Great Customer Experiences by Colin Shaw and John Ivens is probably one of the most thorough reviews of the ways you can structure customer experiences in a manageable way. It is published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2004 (ISBN-10: 1403939497).

- Joseph A. Michelli must-reads are: The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary, McGraw-Hill, 2006 (ISBN-10: 0-07-147784-5) and The New Gold Standard: 5 Leadership Principles for Creating a Legendary Customer Experience Courtesy of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, McGraw-Hill 2008 (ISBN - 978-0-07-154833-5).

#5 Future-proof Your Distribution

"You need to shop your own product. Only by looking at life through your customer's eyes, you see how to make a difference."

Georges-Edouard Dias, Senior Vice President, Digital Business, L'Oréal Group.

Particularly in consumer markets, there is a growing disconnect between the way products are sold, and the way people actually buy them.

A century of marketing experience has taught us that distribution channels are 'a chain of intermediaries, each passing the product down the chain to the next organisation, before it finally reaches the consumer or end-user' (Wikipedia).

The problem with this view is that customers don't really see things that sequentially any more. Empowered by technology, people now research products online. Then they try them in a store. Compare prices on their mobile. Buy them on eBay. Of course, when something goes wrong, they still expect to have access to a physical service point as part of the warranty.

To the despair of one executive I met, some customers are so good at this game that they seem to know more about the products than the staff on the shop floor!

Digital tools have created a buying reality which is radically different from the way many retail and distribution channels have organised themselves.

Most of the challenges we face in retail and channel strategy, come from a simple premise. Technology has made markets transparent, but the underlying distribution structures and methods we use come from an age where businesses and channel partners had control.

As an example, I clearly remember the days when I priced the same product 20% more expensive in one country than in another. Or when I blocked discounters from buying our products so the channel would 'stay clean'.

To protect margins, I allocated products to some markets, but chose to make them 'unavailable' in others. And so on.

Today, these profit maximisation methods don't work anymore. Price and quality are easily compared. If a vendor around the corner doesn't stock the product, a competitor in Munich, Milan or Warsaw is just a click away. That is, if the excess inventory you sold to that Moldavian distributor doesn't show up on eBay first.

While we all know about these changes, our distribution habits still assume that customers are obedient subjects who will shop where and how we tell them.

National organisations are still the norm. Marketing & sales are separate departments. Selective distribution contracts lock buyers and sellers into behaviours and business models that have gradually stopped making sense.

As a result, margins are wasted. Sales opportunities are lost. Customers switch to brands, retailers and vendors that offer them the transparency and multi-channel service they seek.

The impact of the Internet isn't the only factor. Sure, online developments of the past two decades have strongly affected the way channels are managed. But the best is still to come:

- <u>Mobile devices</u> and machine-to-machine (M2M) communication allow us to take the Internet everywhere we go. Price transparency, special offers and customer reviews will soon be available to any shopper, instantly.

- <u>Mass-customisation and technology for single item production</u> will bring manufacturing processes ever closer to, or even right onto the high street. Just like music and books, many physical products will become digitised. Today, you can already produce candlesticks, wedding rings and iPhone covers at the push of a button. In the not-so-distant future, this will extend to personalised medicine, car parts, furniture and customised shampoo.

- <u>Environmental and biotechnology</u> will start affecting the way we transport ourselves, the way we eat, shop and generally live our lives.

As a result, not only will price control mechanisms and selective distribution models crumble; entire supply chains will need to be rewired and production facilities will need to be redesigned.

The only way to truly capture customer loyalty is to build a relationship which goes way beyond your product or your distribution setup. The experience you offer <u>across</u> channels will in fact become your product.

54.

CHALLENGE YOUR DISTRIBUTION REALITY

There is no need to panic. While the changes around us are real, they are also slow enough to allow most businesses to adapt to them.

But to do so, you need to shift your focus away from building better distribution mousetraps for your industry and instead consider getting a cat. For this you can revert to the work you have done on customer experience mapping, possibly supplemented with some trend research. Use these insights to:

- <u>Identify the ways your customers would ideally like to shop</u>. People may only go to your stores or distributors because it's the only option you give them. They may prefer completely different ways of dealing with you. Look beyond the traditional focus groups and surveys to find out what they are.

- <u>Evaluate your current channel structure against this</u>. Does it connect to your customers' needs? Could it be challenged by someone who uses a different approach? Could it crumble in the face of future trends, technologies or market developments?

- <u>Create a 5-year vision of where you should be</u>. Use the knowledge from your analysis to establish a balanced, yet radically customer-centric picture of the way your distribution should look in the future.

If this picture is similar to the distribution structure you have today, stick with it. If you need to make structural changes, thinking ahead will give you the time you need to transform your distribution for the better.

CUSTOMER OWNERSHIP WILL BE SHARED

When you look at your multi-channel future, you'll probably conclude that you need to own your customers more than you do today.

You will need to keep in touch with customers at an individual rather than a channel level. You will need to map and connect to the influencers that affect their decisions. Every touchpoint must be ready to instantly recognise each customer and engage them in a way that builds loyalty, advocacy and trust.

Whether you like this or not, this reality may intensify the tug of war which has always existed between channel partners around customer ownership.

To be able to create long-term loyalty, brands, wholesalers and manufacturers need to know their customers and be able to connect to them. Distributors and retailers will want to prevent this, as better knowledge of the customer gives them the negotiating edge.

But both should be careful of carrying their old habits into this new distribution reality for two reasons:

- <u>Blind self-interest makes the whole channel vulnerable</u>. Just like iTunes wiped out traditional music retail and Kindle is having a go at bookstores, new entrants will use technology to challenge existing distribution models. Wasting time debating customer ownership, instead of looking at ways to jointly add value to this customer, only plays into the hands of the challengers.

- <u>More importantly, the customer will not stand for it</u>. Customers will want seamless experiences and services across all channels. Only those commercial ecosystems that are able to give them the experience they seek, will gain their favour over the ones that stand divided.

To rise to this challenge, retailers, channel partners, brands, wholesalers and manufacturers have to work together on gradually and pragmatically re-structuring the distribution chain around the customer.

These conversations will not be easy. Any discussion of future trading relationships raises questions about the way things are set up today. Also, models for sharing different parts of a customer's identity and loyalty still need to be invented. Along the way, other challenges will crop up.

But in the end there is no option. Your customers will want a seamless trans-channel experience. If you don't deliver it to them, someone else will.

So it's time to pick up the phone and initiate this conversation with your channel partners. Do it slowly, by introducing facts and scenarios. Give people the time to get used to the idea. Set up joint inspiration and brainstorm sessions with progressive partners who will not turn everything you say into a negotiation. Jointly formulate first actions. Then start by taking baby steps.

If you find that none of your business partners are willing or able to change according to the needs of the customer, be ready to draw your own conclusions. Move pragmatically but boldly in the direction your customers are going. For whether you move or not, they will keep going.

To better understand the way digital technology affects the channel strategy of global FMCG brands, I talked to Georges-Edouard Dias, Senior Vice President, Digital Business at L'Oréal's headquarters in Clichy, on the outskirts of Paris.

While his title might indicate the opposite, Georges-Edouard isn't about to turn L'Oréal into a massive e-commerce machine.

In fact, he believes that online trade is getting too much attention compared to regular retail. "We must not forget", he explains, "that only 7% of products are sold online. After years of e-commerce hype, the rest are still distributed via regular retail channels."

Without belittling the importance of e-commerce, the biggest business gains lie in using technology to improve the usability of these brick & mortar environments.

"Many stores today aren't really user-friendly. You need to drive there and park far away from the entrance. When you get inside, it's hard to find the information you're looking for. There are too many products to get a clear picture, and the staff aren't always much help either. Not to mention that even if you know exactly which product you want to buy, it may not be in stock."

This is where digital comes in. People make most of their decisions in store, and they want to have information. They want to compare offers, see product reviews. Fully understand all features. Technology can help stores provide this information and improve the overall retail experience.

"For example, 80% of the products I buy are the same from week to week. I can't understand why supermarkets can't use this information to make sure that when I come to their store

80% of my shopping is already done. For them, this allows much more efficient inventory management, while it frees up my time to enjoy browsing for the 20% of products I truly consider to be special".

Georges-Edouard fully admits that L'Oréal is in the early stages of this thinking itself. But progress is being made. Recently the group cooperated with French retailer Carrefour on a project to 're-enchant' the beauty section of its supermarkets.

"We took a series of initiatives. Some worked better than others. One project we introduced was a make-up kiosk where customers can see how different products look on them, but also receive tailored advice based on their purchasing behaviour and skin-type. In the future, their joint L'Oréal/Carrefour digital profile could even be used to tailor product advice and promotions exactly to their needs."

When asked, L'Oréal's head of Digital Business agrees that this approach will require a mindset shift across the beauty business.

Both retailers and brands need to let go of their antagonistic negotiation model and instead focus on working together to maximise retail floor sales and profits. But as both stand to gain from this approach, the incentive to do so is pretty large.

Meanwhile, Georges-Edouard has one piece of advice to all those running a brand. "You need to shop your own product. Only by looking at life through the eyes of your customers can you see how to make a difference."

Reflecting on this statement, I think it's probably one of the most powerful pieces of advice in this book. After all, how often do we really take the time to step outside of our busy world of KPI's and proceses and act like a customer to our own businesses? Everything else flows from there.

To engage your channel and make it future-proof, you may want to consider the following steps:

1. Shop your own product. Understand your distribution process through the eyes of your customers. Do this via the research you have, visit websites but also physically go to shops and outlets. Take off your business glasses and map reality exactly as customers would like to see it.

2. Understand the impact of technology. Even if you think you know your own trade, look at technologies in adjacent fields or even other industries. Consider how they can be used to shake up your channel. If you can imagine it, someone will probably do it someday. If you can't imagine it, try getting a third party opinion. A fresh pair of eyes might be just what you need.

3. Create a 5-year vision of where you should be. Changing channel relationships needs to be done with forethought. Take the time to think through the various scenarios that face your industry and formulate a radically customer-centric vision of how your channels should operate.

4. Engage your partners. Once you have formed a picture in your mind, start sharing it with your various channel partners. Be mindful of the various sensitivities that may emerge, but keep pushing forward on the topics that need to be addressed. And if you are faced with a channel that is unwilling or unable to evolve, be prepared to go it alone.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

To further explore the future of multi-channel and distribution, you may like:

- The Future of Retail (2011) by PSFK is an excellent overview of how technology is shaping shopping today and in the not-so-distant future. You can purchase it on: **http://www.psfk.com/future-of-retail**.

- Shapeways is an online retailer which demonstrates how physical products like jewellery and iPhone covers can be digitised and personalised with 3D printing technology. **http://www.shapeways.com**.

- Multi-channel Me: Chasing After the Multi-Channel User. This presentation by Gianluca Brugnoli offers inspiration on the digital side of multi-channel shopping. You can explore his thinking on Slideshare: **http://tinyurl.com/5vxfejs**.

- The Retail Social Media Model by Mark Smiciklas is a blogpost/model outlining the organisational challenges around store operations, geographic dispersion and departmental silos that can threaten the success of social media initiatives. Find it on social media explorer: **http://tinyurl.com/68vcchq**.

- The Distillery, Published by the people of Bricks + Mobile, the Centre for retail mobile commerce, this is an interesting blog with articles on the way mobile and NRF technology affect retail. Find it on the Remodista website: **http://tinyurl.com/6hd2u4u**.

Note: all the URLs above are accurate at the time of going to press. If something has changed since publication, please use your favourite search engine.

#6 In Social Media, Everyone is a Touchpoint

> *"Everyone who works for the World Economic Forum and is openly using social networks is – de facto – a spokesperson for the organisation."*

> *Matthias Lüfkens, Head of Digital Media, World Economic Forum.*

No action guide on customer centricity is complete without a chapter on social media. They're all around us. The chatter on networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn or VKontakte. The images and movies on Flickr or YouTube. The ratings on review sites. The comments. The tweets. The check-ins.

Most businesses struggle with the rapid and unruly way social media tend to rise. A 2010 European survey found that 28% of all questions that reach helpdesks through social media, never get answered.[18] The speed at which things happen, make many executives despair that "by the time we figured out how to deal with one service, the next one has already popped up!"

But then again, the social media frenzy is real, so as a customer-centric business, you have to get to grips with it.

---

[18] In 2010, Insites Consulting surveyed 500 senior marketers in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Great Britain about the way they dealt with customer queries. 11% admitted that questions put to their helpdesk, never get answered. More info: www.slideshare.net/stevenvanbelleghem/stop-the-paradox.

YOU CAN (SORT OF) CONTROL THE CONVERSATION

To some, social media is the latest gospel. Others, in spite of all the evidence, still maintain that it's a phase which will pass. Both are wrong.

Social media have been with us as long as mankind has existed. Twenty thousand years ago one of our ancestors surely sat round the campfire complaining about the lousy craftsmanship of the guy that made his axe. One of his fellow hunters would probably recommend that next time he should go to the bald guy by the river, as he made the finest edges ever seen.

The big difference between then and now is that information technology has ensured that more people can overhear and amplify this campfire conversation; it has exploded from half a dozen, to millions. Also, the infinite memory banks of Google or Baidu ensure that the content of these conversations remains available for reference long after the initial event.

But while these technological developments add a few challenging twists to the social media plot, your four basic options to 'control' this conversation remain the same as for our Stone Age axe-maker. These are to:

- <u>make good axes</u>, so there's nothing bad to say about you at the campfire;

- <u>actively appease dissatisfied customers</u>, so they judge mildly and help you solve the problem;

- <u>encourage happy customers</u> to talk about the great axes that you make, so they bring new customers, and drown out any negativity;

- <u>pull up a chair at the campfire</u>, so you can tell your side of the story and build a direct customer connection that transcends your one-off transaction.

In other words, what is said about your brand or business merely reflects the way you treat the people you touch (customers, staff and other stakeholders). Treat people well, and people will sing your (axes') praises high and low. Treat them badly, and you may find the next sub-standard axe you sell forcefully aimed at your head.

But the key message is that – to a large extent – you CAN control the conversations customers have about you. Just like your trading ancestors have been able to do for millennia, you can do it today.

SIX WAYS TO KEEP YOUR BASES COVERED

All this doesn't mean that you should come to the campfire unprepared. Successful companies actively monitor and participate in conversations as they happen. To make sure your company is capable of joining in, you have to keep all your digital bases covered:

1. <u>Become a user</u>. It is impossible to come up with a call-centre structure if you don't know what it is to answer a customer call yourself. The same applies to social media. You cannot really know Facebook, Twitter or Foursquare if you don't invest time in understanding how they work and how people behave on them. So block out a few hours in your weekly calendar to go online and experience these services. While you're at it, listen to what people say about your business and maybe even talk to a few.

2. <u>Set up digital embassies</u>. Be present on <u>all</u> of the social media platforms that matter to your customers and the media they read. For most businesses this will involve setting up pages on Facebook or launching @company Twitter accounts, but also consider the forums, exchanges and communities that are relevant to your customer niche.

3. <u>Adequately resource them</u>. Social media conversations happen in real time and your embassies need to be staffed and resourced to keep up. At a basic level this means being able to answer any message you receive within a reasonable span of time – hours or even minutes. Structurally, it means having the resources to track conversations as they happen and jump in when appropriate.

4. <u>Empower your people</u>. Resources aren't everything. The people who man your embassies also need the authority to move quickly and decisively whenever an issue or an opportunity presents itself. When this authority runs out, they need a direct hotline to whichever executive can make things happen.

5. <u>Get to know key influencers</u>. Just like in real world politics, your social media ambassadors need direct lines of communication with key influencers in your specific market. These are not necessarily the people with most followers or fans. They are the ones whose voice matters most when they speak at the campfire. Make sure your ambassadors approach them and build relationships which could be useful at a later date.

6. <u>Keep looking on the bright side</u>. Social media isn't all about making defensive moves in case things go wrong. Never forget the key role of any embassy is to create a positive vibe. So focus on the people that 'like' the axes you make. Build your reputation by amplifying their voice.

The above may create the impression that by following a simple checklist you can control your social media presence. There is a catch. Many of your customers, as well as your own people, will not stick to the rules of engagement you map out for them.

Just as your employees will discuss your company over Christmas dinner, your staff, distributors and suppliers are equally likely to be having digital conversations about your business. These will be happening in private, but also publicly, on Twitter or Facebook.

Trying to silence these conversations doesn't usually work. You cannot be everywhere all the time. Apart from the small matter of free speech which is still upheld in quite a few countries.

It is much more effective to work with this social reality and turn the people that work for you into becoming a force for good. This is not achieved by telling them what to write, say and think, but by:

- Making sure they have good things to say about you. At the campfire, your people can be the greatest advocates. But many companies are in for a shock when they ask their employees 'how likely they would be to recommend their company or its products to a friend or family member'. I have seen cases where the majority of employees and even executives did exactly the opposite.

  Start by understanding the situation in your business and help your people to truly believe that your business is worth speaking well of. Even when they are not on duty anymore.

66.

- <u>Creating awareness about the impact of social media</u>. Even with the best of intentions, things can go wrong. Someone had a bad day and said something they shouldn't have. Someone may have underestimated the impact of leaving tweets or comments online. Either way, in a short span of time, a lot of damage can be done to your reputation.

  Pre-empt this by outlining a solid social media policy for your business. Communicate it through company-wide awareness and training programmes that explain how individual actions can affect the company's reputation. Provide guidelines as to which behaviour is encouraged, and which activities or statements are deemed inappropriate.

- <u>Helping them engage</u>. Finally, help your people become the force for good they can be. Provide them with direct contact details to alert your social media team when something is going right or wrong online.

  Offer them assistance in developing their online profile on LinkedIn or Facebook. Encourage them to get involved in user communities or even write articles about their area of expertise.

The more your people, as well as those of your vendors and distributors positively engage on behalf of your business, the more positive conversations will happen online and offline.

This will grow the reputation of your company and lead more and more people to come to you for their axes.

When I started this book, there were few places I considered to be more at odds with the openness of social media, than the World Economic Forum (WEF). If anything, I thought of their hyper-secure Davos conferences as the epitome of a closed and restrictive environment.

But when I met Matthias Lüfkens, the Forum's Head of Digital Media, that view was in for an overhaul. By the time I left its beautiful offices overlooking Lake Geneva, it was clear to me that the Forum is an example we can all learn from in our social media efforts.

It didn't happen overnight at the Forum. Matthias remembers it quite clearly: "In the beginning, I was alone and people considered social media as something slightly odd. But then we got started. First by putting our videos on YouTube. Then there were the photos on Flickr."

Gradually the Forum moved from one medium to the next. Each time finding that the more open it was about its content, the more it could connect to the people it was trying to reach.

This was also to the benefit of the conference delegates at the Forum's prestigious events. Matthias wants to offer them information and inspiration on how social media affects their organisations and themselves as individuals.

"As a public figure, you used to be able to somewhat control access. Reporters made appointments and you could usually spot a TV camera from a distance. Today, this is different. Every mobile phone you pass can instantly broadcast your words and actions quicker than you or your own staff have time to react."

So every year, at Davos, the Forum highlights the one platform the organisation feels executives should know about. In 2009, this was Facebook. In 2010, Twitter. In 2011, Foursquare came into the picture.

Especially the introduction of Twitter Matthias remembers fondly "It was really amazing. We had this big wall on which the tweets of all the delegates with Twitter accounts could be seen. So you had @QueenRania saluting @BillGates and CEOs sharing their point of view on things that were said on the stage."

But what I found most remarkable about the Forum, is the way in which it treats every employee as a touchpoint to the world. Matthias' point of view on this is simple: "Everyone who works for the World Economic Forum and is openly using social networks is – de facto – a spokesperson for the organisation."

This statement isn't an excuse for tight control. The Forum wants its people to go online and blog, tweet or update to their heart's delight.

Matthias even arranges support for those who might have interesting things to say, but are challenged for time, or lack the skills to adequately put their thoughts into words.

The only rule of the game is that when people express their opinions online, it is done with the understanding that every statement made online is 'on the record'.

To assist in understanding what this means, every employee, from the CEO to the cleaning staff, is trained in the implications of social media and the standards set by the business.

But once these rules have been made clear, the Forum does all it can to light the digital fire and get out of the way.

YOUR KEY ACTIONS

To extend the concept of customer centricity into the social domain, you may want to take the following steps:

1. <u>Accept that you CAN control the conversation</u>. The best way to make sure that you have a good online reputation is to treat your customers in such a way that they want to speak well of you. This isn't easy. In fact, it uncomfortably extends the role of social media well beyond the silo-based boundaries of any department. But it clearly frames your online reputation as something the whole business should care about.

2. <u>Cover your bases</u>. Set up digital embassies on all social media platforms of relevance. Make sure they are resourced and empowered enough to proactively connect with key influencers and act with force and focus when the situation calls for it.

3. <u>Consider everyone as a touchpoint</u>. Make sure your own people want to say good things about your business, not just because you tell them to, but because they believe it. Then train them in social media. Provide them with support and guidelines. Once you have lit the social media fire, get out of their way.

4. <u>Get started</u>. Don't let a lack of knowledge or experience hold you back from engaging in online conversations. They are happening whether you participate or not. The sooner you start, the sooner your business will learn how to get it right.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

When looking at the field of social media, it's worth checking out some of the following resources:

- The Conversity Model by Clo Willaerts. Targeted at a marketing community trying to monetise social relationships, this book provides a great overview of the various media and tools out there. Lannoo Campus, 2011 (ISBN 978 90 209 9572 5).

- Social Media is Dead. Long Live Common Sense by David Armano. This presentation nicely summarises some of the misconceptions around social media. View it on Slideshare at: **http://tinyurl.com/y8a879w**.

- The Online Database of Social Media Policies. Compiled by Social Media Governance, the database holds 150+ social media policy templates from the likes of BBC, Dell, Microsoft, Roche. See: **http://tinyurl.com/m4k2t2**.

- I Am the Media. Written by myself in 2006, this Slideshare presentation is a little dated, but it contains thoughts I still consider valid today. You can watch or download it on **http://tinyurl.com/q7uf5l**.

- Your own social media experience. Seriously, to really come to grips with the way social media can benefit your business, you need to use it. So venture out to all the platforms you haven't used yet. While you're at it, make sure you engage that occasional customer that you come across ☺.

Note: all the URLs above are accurate at the time of going to press. If something has changed since publication, please use your favourite search engine.

#7 Build a Customer Movement

"We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that by writing a paper the business is going to change."

Arno Laeven, Strategy Director, Sanoma Magazines International.

In all my years, I have never met anyone who got out of bed with the deliberate intention of annoying customers. But we have all experienced those surreal moments where store-clerks, call-centre operators or administration managers turn our lives into a living hell. Do these people suffer from Jekyll & Hyde syndrome? Or are they essentially good people badly managed?

The truth is that every business wants to do what is right for its customers. But as strategies are implemented, they evolve. Like in a game of Chinese Whispers, a message changes as it travels through the organisation. When it finally reaches the person that has to act on it, it sounds nothing like the original.

The end result is a world where 95% of employees don't really understand the company strategy[19] and most executives are unable to clearly articulate it.[20]

---

[19] Robert S. Kaplan, David P. Norton, *The Strategy-Focused Organisation: How Balanced Scorecard Companies Thrive in the New Business Environment*, Harvard Business Press, September 2000.
[20] David J. Collins, Michael G. Rukstad. *Can You Say What Your Strategy Is?* Harvard Business Review, April 2008.

In their desire to remedy this, many companies reach for the methods that have helped them become more productive, quality-driven and lean.

They start by loudly announcing programmes in which managers call for people to focus on the customer. HR prints posters with smiley faces that start appearing in every corridor. Workshops on customer connectivity mushroom through the organisation. Process mapping sessions capture every movement by every customer and every employee.

But after a year or two, the programme goes flat. The manager who launched the initiative moves on to another position. Old corporate hands chalk up the efforts that were made as just another customer programme. Things go back to normal. What remains are burned budgets and disillusionment among those who participated.

This loss of momentum usually happens when companies have treated customer centricity as another project to complete. Just like the business had to become lean or quality-driven, it now had to be capable of doing this 'customer thing'.

But in contrast to technical process improvements, customer centricity is not something you can entirely script. It's driven by relationships and emotions. If you ignore this people reality, the changes you achieve will be only skin-deep. They will dissipate at the first challenge.

However, if you patiently make sure that the people in your company are willing, skilled and able to be customer-centric, you can create an unstoppable force that transforms the very nature of your business.

Under their veil of positivism, most change management programmes are founded on the notion that people are doing something wrong today, which they need work on getting right tomorrow.

The implicit message is that if they don't do this, the company, and their jobs will suffer. If they do, the shareholders will make lots of money and continue to invest in the business.

Any cardiologist with more than five years on the job can tell you this stick-and-carrot approach doesn't work in real life. In fact, scientific research[21] has shown that even when they're risking a premature death, 90% of heart patients do not change their eating and exercise habits. As humans, we just aren't wired that way.

What does work is to play on our ability as social copying machines. Children, and adults, learn by imitating those behaviours which bring social success to members of their peer group. If enough members in the peer group adopt them, these behaviours become the social norm. Those members that do not adapt are either pressured into doing so, or excluded from the group.

So rather than trying to 'improve' those people that are getting it wrong, we need to encourage those that are getting it right. By telling the story of their success, we incentivise others to copy their behaviour.

Instead of starting a 'focus on the customer' initiative, we need to start a self-propelling movement that focuses on the customer, because it likes doing so.

---

[21] Change or Die by Alan Deutschman, Fast Company, May 1 2005.

THREE STEPS TO START A MOVEMENT

For most of us, starting or joining a movement is a scary thing. It requires us to step outside the herd and behave in a way that deviates from the organisational norm. You open yourself to criticism, ridicule and even potential risk to your career and your reputation.

That is why you need to structure your movement for customer-centricity, you need to structure it for maximum success. History, politics and even religion has taught us this is best done in three recurring steps:

STEP 1: Start with a small group of 'believers'.

Every company has people that believe in customer-centricity, even if this type of thinking is not in the corporate DNA. Most of them are easy to spot.

They passionately talk about customer issues. They bend rules so the business gets it right in spite of its processes. Given the choice, they're out in the marketplace, rather than sitting glued to their desk.

As you identify them, start your movement by inviting these people to low-stakes information exchanges, online networks or meetings to discuss the latest customer data.

Get them involved in think-tanks, workshops or customer days and allow them to evolve from a group of loose individuals to a small club that wants to make and drive the case for your business to become customer-centric.

Once you have reached this point, you are ready for action.

STEP 2: Pursue small wins with a vengeance.

Talking about the customer will create some initial cohesion in your group, yet to really get things going, you need results. Use customer data to help group members identify quick and easy wins in their department.

If a larger, cross-functional opportunity presents itself, consider this as well. But don't be too ambitious. It is the quick wins that will motivate the most.

Once you find your champions, give them all the organisational, financial and political support you can muster. Roll up your sleeves and make things happen with them. Their early initiatives MUST succeed, if you want more to follow.

STEP 3: Publicly celebrate success.

When the first successes come in, celebrate them as loud as you can. Talk to your internal communications and HR team. Get them to spotlight those people who succeeded. Congratulate those who failed in corporate terms, but did the right thing for the customer. Stubbornly ignore those that avoid participating in your movement, or sit on the fence.

If all goes well, the successes and attention the first members of your movement receive, should encourage new people to approach you. Welcome them with open arms and encourage the existing members of your movement to support them in any way they can.

Repeating this cycle of recruitment, success and attention, will put in motion a virtuous circle that eventually drives behaviour across the whole company.

ABOUT FENCE-SITTERS AND BAD APPLES

Not everyone will embrace your efforts to start a customer movement. In fact, the majority of people will sit on the fence until your movement reaches a critical mass which convinces them that the direction you propose to take has a clear chance of success.

As today's fence-sitters are tomorrow's members, you need to give them every opportunity and encouragement you can when it comes to joining. Two ways are very effective:

- <u>Go to their side of the fence</u>. Rather than trying to convert people to the customer cause, highlight the benefits of customer-centricity from their perspective. If your fence-sitters work in finance, talk about how customer data creates better forecasts. If they work in sales, show them how it can indicate the next sales prospects, etcetera.

- <u>Keep inviting them</u>. If people don't engage first time round, don't insist. Do go back when the next successes have been achieved and invite them again with the promise that they too could enjoy the corporate limelight. Never stop inviting them with the same enthusiasm until they eventually participate. When they do, make sure they are appropriately welcomed and supported.

With a clear fence-sitter strategy, this only leaves the bad apples to be dealt with. The people who will sabotage your efforts for their own objectives. Usually these saboteurs only represent a small proportion, but every organisation has them. With them, there is only one way. Initially ignore or silence them. When you get the chance, eliminate them.

In the last decade, magazine publishing hasn't had it easy. Media consumption patterns changed. Advertisers shifted their money to digital channels. Not to mention the introduction of the iPad. In short, the customer profile that existed only a decade ago, has all but disappeared.

At Sanoma Magazines International (SMI), they know all about this change. As a market-leading publisher with a large portfolio of magazines and other media, changing customer demands are driving the company to rapidly transform itself away from its analogue heritage towards a digital reality.

To understand how Sanoma's executive team goes about this – in a group that still publishes the oldest printed magazine in the world – I went to see Koos Guis and Arno Laeven, the respective CEO and Strategy Director of SMI.

Their perspective was both nuanced and innovative. "We shouldn't forget", Koos starts the conversation, "that media have always been in a state of transformation. Radio, television, Internet, have all added layers to a total media experience. Because of this, magazines continuously evolve both their editorial approach and even format."

The message of the CEO is clear: while the changes in today's market are profound, they are no cause for panic.

But the group's pragmatism doesn't mean it lacks ambition. In 2009, the company formulated its Vision 2020, through which it redefines its business from being a traditional magazine publisher with some online activities to a group that is fundamentally digital and able to provide its customers with the content and context they want, whenever and wherever they want it.

Even though he is one of the authors of the Vision 2020 document, Arno immediately plays down its importance: "We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that by writing a paper the business is going to change. The key to this transformation lies with our people. They need to make things happen".

So while it would have been tempting to call in a large team of change managers to 'teach the organisation how digital was done', SMI went the other way. It encouraged employees in each of its companies to formulate digital and cross-media initiatives to get closer to the changing customer.

Each of these initiatives was assigned a champion; a volunteer who was willing to be held accountable for its completion. Arno elaborates: "It's easy to come up with ideas for exciting projects, but unless someone actually takes the lead in its completion, it never goes further than being a good idea".

Through their behaviour, these champions set an example to their colleagues. By allowing for and supporting 'smart failure', SMI leaders create an atmosphere that allows experimentation and innovation. With first results due soon, momentum for action is being built and more people will get motivated to move into the customer's direction.

By creating a grassroots movement for digital innovation, SMI is adapting to the changing needs of its customers and getting ready for the challenges ahead.

Even if these challenges come Apple-shaped.

Anyone who is truly committed can build a customer movement. To maximise your chance of success, you may want to start with the following steps:

1. <u>Adjust your expectations</u>. No matter what the timeframe you have in mind for your movement to take shape, double, or even triple it. Particularly in large organisations, change can take years.

2. <u>Unite those who already 'believe'</u>. Don't write endless PowerPoint presentations; just go out find those people who already think in a customer-centric way. Bring them together in online communities or at customer events. Get them talking so they are no longer isolated.

3. <u>Help them be successful</u>. As you find customer champions, help them formulate their own initiatives. Then do everything you can to make them successful. If necessary, reframe every failure as a learning point.

4. <u>Turn on the spotlights</u>. As early achievements are made, highlight them to the rest of the business. Target the corporate grapevine with success stories. Make sure those people who did 'the right thing' for the customer do not go unnoticed. Their stories are your recruitment ground for more people to join the movement.

5. <u>Deal with fence-sitters and bad apples</u>. Don't engage fence-sitters in big debates. Instead, make it as easy as possible for them to join your movement and, when they do, celebrate it. And if there are really bad apples out there, you can initially ignore them, but eventually they need to be eliminated.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

To empower your people and help them form a movement, you will need to apply some principles that are not always taught at business school. You may find inspiration in the following resources:

- <u>How to Start a Movement</u> by Derek Sivers is a 6-minute TED video/speech which is the best tutorial I've ever seen on how to start a movement in your business. Find it on: http://tinyurl.com/25q929m.

- <u>The Ultimate Question 2.0</u> by Fred Reichheld and Rob Markey not only deepens the case for NPS made earlier in this book, yet clearly connects customer performance to employee engagement. Harvard Business Review Press, 2011 (ISBN-13 978-1422173350).

- <u>The Culting of Brands: When Customers Become True Believers</u> by Douglas Atkin discusses the development of cult-like movements among customers of iconic brands. Though often controversial, many of the book's principles can also be applied to the development of employee and corporate movements. Portfolio Hardcover, 2005 (ISBN-10: 1591840279).

- <u>Your people</u>. Most people don't get out of bed with the intent of annoying customers. They want to do the right thing and often know exactly what needs to happen in the business to make this possible.

  So go out and talk to them. Listen to what they have to say. Learn.

#8 Walk the Customer Talk

"You can come up with as many plans as you like. If you don't change your behaviour, it ain't gonna happen."

Richard Percival, Strategic Change Leader, C&A.

In a major customer centricity programme I ran a few years ago, we interviewed over 100 people at all levels of the organisation. We wanted to understand how customer-centric they considered themselves to be and compare these findings with the behaviour of the whole business.

The results were staggering: a straight 100% of people scored themselves good to very good on the topic of customer centricity. Everyone we met was truly convinced that they understood what customers wanted and that they acted accordingly. They also all knew the corporate mission statement placing the customer 'at the heart of every decision'.

As the company's customers painted a different picture, we dug deeper and a more nuanced view emerged. People still considered themselves to be customer-focused, but their bosses, well that was a different matter. So we moved up the food chain and ended up at the company's board of directors.

In spite of the customer rethoric, reality became clear when quarterly numbers were due. Hit the targets, no matter what the commercial consequences might be. Burning the occasional customer was acceptable collateral damage, as long as it meant bonuses were safe. In other words: people talked about customers, but the business wasn't walking the talk.

IT'S ALL ABOUT SETTING THE EXAMPLE

If you want to guide your business in a customer-centric direction it is all about the behaviour you and other leaders in the business display.

This starts at the top. In fact, no organisation can ever become truly customer-centric unless the CEO and the most senior team actively embrace this concept in the way they allocate resources, take decisions and conduct themselves in general.

If people see them getting business results by standing up for the customer and going the extra mile, they will quickly emulate this behaviour. If they see a group that talks a great game, but cuts corners to secure their year-end bonus, the real message that is given will be clear too.

So as the final step on your journey to customer centricity, you need to make sure that the leadership behaviours in your organisation reflect the customer values you put forward. Failing here, is a major setback.

This may be challenging. Like anyone else, your most senior leaders may want to be customer-centric but they may not be used to the role. They may have risen through the ranks via finance or production. Some may not have spoken to a customer for years.

So while the financial case for customer centricity may be loud and clear, you need to offer them the time and tools to change themselves, and particularly to manage the behaviour they display in public.

When it comes to behaviours, things get tricky. Most companies have a mission statement, a vision and some values which reside in nicely bound employee manuals. But when it comes to behaviours, people, including senior executives, are generally left to their own devices.

Even beyond the area of customer centricity, this can be a source of confusion. I would assume that your company calls for your employees and leaders to be 'professional'.

But I dare you to ask 10 people to describe the behaviours that represent professionalism. You'll be lucky to get fewer than 10 different definitions. Some will talk about being prepared to work all night to get the job done. Others will put the bar at 'cleaning up their desk at 5PM'.

Reality is that without clear guidance and standards, 'being professional' means something different to everyone in your business. So even with the best of intentions, everyone ends up doing something else.

To get your leaders to walk the talk on customer-centricity, you thus need to help them codify, as a group, the behaviours they associate with this concept.

What is it specifically that they will <u>do</u> on a daily basis to connect with customers? Which questions will they ask of their people? How will they allow themselves to be held accountable?

Only when these behaviours have been described in detail, people can actually start living them, or even be held accountable for upholding them.

8 BEHAVIOURS OF CUSTOMER CHAMPIONS

To provide a more tangible illustration of customer-centric behaviours I have listed eight behaviours below. I've heard these being formulated by senior teams embarking on a journey towards customer-centricity. Each sentence typically starts with 'I commit to':

- spend at least a day a month personally talking to customers to better understand their needs;

- after each decision made by my team, ask 'what's in this for our customers?', so that the team always considers the customer's voice;

- systematically include measurable customer objectives in performance reviews, starting with my own;

- enable and encourage my staff to engage with customers by giving them time and resources;

- call meetings to review customer feedback in my team at least once a month. I will invite other departments to these reviews;

- set the example in going online at least once a month to seek out customer comments and make a positive contribution to their conversations;

- seek to include customer lifetime value as a metric in all financial and investment decisions;

- make a formalised, quarterly effort to seek new ways of focusing on our customers.

If all leaders in your business make a similar pledge and are prepared to live by it, this will have more impact than any PowerPoint presentation you can produce.

Getting the senior team to define its own set of behaviours is a crucial step, but it is only the start. The principle then needs to cascade down through the organisation.

This means making sure that the people in the organisation are willing, skilled and able to do what is asked of them:

1. <u>Willing</u>. You cannot force people to embrace customer centricity. They need to willingly adopt a set of behaviours which they feel reflect their own values, as well as those of the organisation. To achieve this, you need to organise a series of meetings and workshops that allow them to reflect on the values of the business and translate these values into personal behaviours to which they can commit.

2. <u>Skilled</u>. Behaving in a customer-centric manner sounds good, but it often means that people need to acquire new skills. HR teams need to make sure that the required training and development programmes plus the resources to implement them are available to those people willing to make the switch.

3. <u>Able</u>. As we saw earlier, people often want to be customer centric, but their boss or the organisation gets in the way. To cross this final bridge, you need to remove the roadblocks. You need to ensure that the performance reviews, reward mechanisms and organisational processes in your company are aligned to the behaviours your people are expected to display. Otherwise, they'll just grow frustrated and revert to what the business is implicitly telling them to do.

BUT REMEMBER, IT ALL STARTS WITH YOU

All the leadership talk earlier in this chapter may have given you the impression that – unless you're the CEO – the responsibility for customer centricity lies elsewhere. Nothing could be further from the truth.

By picking up this book you have shown yourself to be someone who wants to make customer centricity happen in your business. This makes you a leader too.

So even if you don't have anyone you can talk to, you have no budget and your CEO won't give you an appointment, you can start by shaping your own behaviours into an example for the colleagues you are trying to influence.

After all, every successful movement began with an individual taking a stance. This one might as well begin with you.

JUST ONE FINAL WORD OF WARNING

Some businesses won't be able to change. In spite of all your efforts, you may not get sufficient mass for your movement. In spite of the data, you may not be able to convince senior leaders to change their ways.

Don't give up too fast. But if it's really not going anywhere, move on to a place that does appreciate your customer-centric commitment, enthusiasm and talent.

After all, there is no value or fun in becoming the customer martyr of your company.

Richard Percival is probably the person who has had the greatest influence on me when it comes to leadership behaviour and customer-centricity. So I was happy to discuss his experiences as Strategic Change Leader at C&A.

Established in 1841, this international apparel retailer has clothed the whole family; through the Great Depression, multiple wars and every economic up and downturn imaginable. C&A is a robust, well-oiled machine that designs, produces and retails garments like no other.

However, being well-oiled also carries the risk of becoming internally focused. That's why C&A recently decided to reaffirm its commitment to customers with an updated positioning and brand promise. This promise is still confidential at the time of going to press, but believe me when I say it is inspiring.

While most companies would announce such a move with big advertising campaigns, C&A is taking a different path, starting with its people.

Richard explains "You can't disconnect the branding of your company from the way your people behave. You can go to your customer and say: 'We're the greatest thing since sliced bread' or 'We care about you'. But if the behaviour of your people doesn't reflect this, the customer will not believe you."

To make this happen, it is the company's leaders who need to provide the example. Through their behaviour they must show that people will be supported and rewarded for 'doing the right thing' by the customer.

In Richard's mind the matter is clear: "If you want to better connect your business to the customer, your top team needs to set the example through their actions. This is where it all starts.

You can come up with as many plans as you like but if you don't change your behaviour, it ain't gonna happen."

With this in mind, C&A's senior leadership team sat down to translate the content of its updated brand promise into a set of values with measurable behaviours for which they were willing to be held accountable.

These commitments were then cascaded down throughout the organisation. First, the top tier leadership were invited to help shape the company's direction. The next 600 leaders were then invited to do the same. Eventually, seminars and events were organised in every local market all the way up to the front line.

Events alone are not enough. "Once you have defined your promise, your values and your behaviours, the real work begins. You need to make sure that your performance review and training processes reflect this. You need to identify role models to act as champions to your cause and you need to make sure they are supported. You need to keep the behavioural message alive, every single day."

Today, C&A is actively implementing its renewed and revitalised customer-centric positioning across Europe. Not just with words on advertisements, but via the behaviour of its people at each one of its 1500 branches.

Every customer interaction is designed to contribute to the overall position of the business and ultimately to the customer bond generated by the brand.

To get the leaders in your organisation to 'walk the talk' you might want to consider the following steps:

1. <u>Start with yourself</u>. You cannot ask anyone to do that which you are not prepared to do yourself. Start by defining what it means to behave in a customer-centric manner and start living by these principles every day.

2. <u>Get senior level buy-in</u>. Follow the politically correct path, but make sure that eventually you are being heard by your CEO, CFO and/or Head of Sales. Use the business case for customer centricity to get their buy-in and agreement to pursue the behavioural route.

3. <u>Define customer-centric behaviours</u>. Bring all senior leaders together into a group to jointly define what it means to be customer-centric. Capture their thoughts in a behavioural charter for which they are willing to be held accountable, even in terms of their bonus.

4. <u>Gradually extend the scope</u>. As senior leaders start behaving in a customer-centric manner, extend the scope of the programme to involve all leaders in the business. Make sure they understand that actions speak louder than words.

5. <u>Help people behave in the right way</u>. Existing KPIs, processes or reward mechanisms will get in the way of the right behaviours. Engage your HR teams to ensure that the environment is shaped so people are willing, skilled and able to behave in a customer-centric manner every day.

RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

There are few sources that describe the ways in which customer-centric leadership behaviours can be defined and institutionalised. The following resources may inspire you:

- <u>Leading by Example (Lessons Learned).</u> Compiled by the Harvard Business School press, this booklet contains insightful essays by top leaders at KPMG, Virgin Galactic, Philips, Coca Cola Company and other firms. (ISBN-10 9781422118597).

- <u>Colleagues at other companies.</u> In a way, all those who work on customer-centricity feel part of the same brother/sisterhood. So they gladly share their experiences with others, especially across industries. Seek them out at conferences or simply pick up the phone to propose a chat. You'd be amazed at what you can learn from their experience.

- <u>Who Moved My Cheese</u> by Dr. Spencer Johnson. In a way it's slightly off-topic, but the book gives great allegorical insights on the reasons why people struggle to change their behaviour, and what you can do about it. Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1998 (ISBN-10 9780399144462).

- <u>How to Start a Movement</u> by Derek Sivers. I already highlighted this 6-minute TED video in the previous chapter, but I can recommend that you watch it again. Like the dancer in the movie, your job as a leader is to show your people 'how it's done'. Find it on: **http://tinyurl.com/25q929m**.

Note: all the URLs above are accurate at the time of going to press. If something has changed since publication, please use your favourite search engine.

Data Management and the New Rules of CRM

"I do think a carpenter needs a good hammer to bang in the nail."

Oliver Reed.

Some of you may wonder why I haven't dedicated at least a chapter on the software and systems to support your customer centricity efforts. After all, in our modern day and age Customer Relationship Management (CRM) requires all sorts of technologies and tools.

This was deliberate. I won't debate the fact that a well-designed CRM system can be extremely helpful to the success of any customer centricity programme.

But a good hammer doesn't make a good carpenter. I have seen businesses with state-of-the-art CRM systems that 'just don't get' customer centricity. I have seen other businesses, scratching it out with pen and paper that could serve as shining examples for the best of us.

Customer <u>Relationship</u> Management starts with the mindset your people and your organisation bring to the table. If their attitude to dealing with customers is one of genuinely wanting to build a long-term relationship, and a willingness to invest the time and effort this takes, you eventually will succeed.

If it isn't, the best software in the world can't help you turn your business into a customer-focused organization.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A GOOD CRM SYSTEM

Having said all the above, it is of course important to bring the right tools to the table. When managing tens or hundreds of thousands of customer relationships, you cannot overstate the importance of technology and professional data-management.

Still, the problem with many of the CRM systems I've seen is that too much attention goes into developing an all-encompassing package and process. Too little effort goes into making sure the data in the system is complete and actually gets used by the organisation. The end result is the equivalent of using a rocket ship engine to boil a kettle.

That is why I always advocate a 'less is more' approach. Rather than chase the latest features and functionality, make sure you have a core CRM system which allows you to do three things very, very well:

- <u>Recognise your customers when they connect to you</u>. You cannot build a relationship if every time you speak to a customer you have forgotten all about the relationship. Your CRM system needs to ensure that every touchpoint owner (or online system) in your business has all the relevant information to make your customers feel recognised and welcome. This includes seeing whether they are promoters of your business or actually rather annoyed with the way you've been treating them.

- <u>Engage them in a relevant and meaningful manner</u>. The biggest benefit of digital communication is that it can be tailored to the requirements of the person you're reaching out to. Make sure your CRM system is able to track your customers' communication preferences and allows you to act on them. At a basic level, this translates into giving them information whenever,

however and wherever they want it. If you think ahead, you could even consider including location-based or social parameters.

- <u>Turn them into loyal advocates of your business</u>. Along the customer journey, you will have identified those moments of truth which make a customer commit further to your business or recommend it to their friends or family. Your CRM system needs to support your organisation in getting each of these moments right, or intervene when it doesn't. From first contact to the last interaction, everything needs to run smoothly.

If, on top of this, your system allows you to run complicated analysis or boil the kettle, so much the better. If individual departments have special requirements, that's fine too. They can build their own 'apps'.

But do make sure that the core of your system is robust, before you move into the realms of fancy features.

DON'T FORGET THE PEOPLE

Even if your CRM system meets all the above parameters, you've achieved nothing if your people don't know how to use it and see the benefits of doing so.

Hundreds of millions of corporate euros have been wasted on CRM systems which do nothing more than gather proverbial dust in a server room.

If you want to provide your people with the greatest hammer on the planet, that's commendable. But first make sure they want to be carpenters and then show them how to use their new tool.

Conclusion

Having read the eight steps described in this book, you may think the journey to customer centricity is a tough one. Business cases need to be made. People need to be aligned. Processes need to be rearranged. Not to mention the sheer amount of money required to rewire your business.

But the truth is that you have no other option. Emerging markets aside, businesses cannot rely on market growth any more. And even where they can, customer loyalty is not a given. It has to be earned every day.

The only way to sustainably and organically grow your business over a number of years, is to build intimate customer relationships with a given set of customers and delight them to the point where your reputation precedes you when approaching new ones.

As we saw in the introduction of this book, customers are more demanding, better informed and less loyal than any previous generation. As competition increases, we need to adapt to this new reality. The alternative is irrelevance.

If all these business reasons don't convince you, let's not forget that delighting customers is actually quite good fun too.

So let's get to it …

A piece of shameless self-promotion

Let's Connect!

"The best way to get the business, is to ask for it."

My grandfather.

If you have made it this far into the book, it probably means that you are working on, or at least considering a customer centricity programme for your business. So it might be worth having a chat.

Together with associates across Europe, I can help you with every topic covered in this book, and a few more. For this we deploy a combination of advisory services, analysis, seminars, workshops and good old-fashioned 'roll up your sleeves' support. Feel free to get in touch for:

A CUSTOMERFIT PROGRAMME

Looking at each of the eight areas covered in this book, Customerfit reviews the degree in which your organisation is customer-centric and what you can do to improve its *fitness*.

The deliverable is a senior executive workshop which summarises your current state and helps you formulate an action plan to structurally improve your customer experience capabilities (and the profit related to it ☺).

CUSTOMER CENTRICITY PROGRAMMES

Whether you're looking to build a business case for customer centricity, improve your ability to act on the customer's voice, or start a movement in your business, it is worth a call.

I can be the Customer Experience/Centricity Architect who provides you with methods, tools and years of experience in tackling both the largest and smallest of customer challenges. And in case you're wondering, I tend to stick around until the house is built.

SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS AND SPEECHES

Finally, you can also call on me to break the ice on the topic of customer-centricity within your organisation. This can be done through an inspirational speech, a tailored presentation which looks at your specific company's situation or a broad-scale internal communications programme to start a customer movement in your business.

LET'S START A CONVERSATION

For more information on any of the above, come to www.alainthys.com or drop an email to ath@alainthys.com.

If you want to have a direct chat with me, I can best be reached either via Twitter (@AlainThys_) or on LinkedIn where you can find my personal and professional profile on **http://be.linkedin.com/in/alainthys**.

You can also join the readers-only *customercouncil.eu* group on Linkedin (see page 99).

Thank you for your attention

About The Author

*"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the
unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself.
Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man."*

George Bernard Shaw.

Alain Thys is a man on a mission to make the world a more customer-friendly place. With close to 30 years in the field, he has had the opportunity to impact the lives of >100 million customers and 250,000 employees in 137 countires.

Today, Alain is an author, speaker and independent customer experience (CX) architect who works behind the scenes with senior executives that want to formulate and implement strategies for organic growth in their business.

Through this book, Alain wants to contribute to what he considers the biggest challenge in modern business: the transformation from a Western-centric, industrialist mindset to a post-industrialist, global way of life.

Alain is very happily married, has a great son, and apart from his family he most enjoys cooking, the South of France and a good episode of Doctor Who.

Acknowledgements

"The only people with whom you should try to get even are those who have helped you."

John E. Southard.

At the risk of sounding like an Oscar winner, I would like to give a big thank you to the people who helped bring about this book. Especially to:

- Ann Buekers, Arne van de Wijdeven, Arno Laeven, Daniel Haas, Isabelle Conner, Geert Van Kuyck, Georges-Edouard Dias, Koos Guis, Laura Ann Murphy, Marc Anné, Matthias Lüfkens, Richard Percival and Suhail Khan for sharing their time and insights with me. Special thanks go to Isabelle for regularly reminding me that the point of writing a book is to finish it.

- Stefan Kolle, Marina Natanova and Ramona Patrascanu for their frank reviews (and trashing) of the first – 300 page – version of this book.

- Ros Gray for supporting my continuous changes of heart, and turning my ramblings into decent English.

- And last, but definitely not least, my wife Minke and my son Sasha. The first for accepting even more neglect than she normally expects from me. The latter for critically reviewing my book on the premise of "Dad, if I don't get it, it's too complicated."

Check Out the Companion Editions

Thank you for buying, and reading, the tablet version of 'So You Want to Be Customer-Centric?'

If you like it, or want to dive deeper into the topic of profitable customer-centricity, do check out the companion materials to this book.

They include:

- Access to the customercouncil.eu group on Linkedin where we explore the future of customer experience management. You can find it via the URL: **https://goo.gl/gDYh6I**.

- My newsletter Thoughts & Tidbits, to which you can subscribe via my website.

- In-company presentations, discussions or workshops on the opportunities and challenges of customer centricity at a location of your choice.

For more information on any of these companion publications, please come by on **www.alainthys.com** or get in touch on **ath@alainthys.com**.