



CX of the future: talking empathy & technology with Isabella Villani

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We spoke to [Isabella Villani](#), CEO of [Exceed Global](#), about the need to deliver an intuitive and personalised customer experience through a strong people strategy and data-driven approach.

Isabella is an industry expert in customer experience, business transformation and omni-channel strategy. She is Founder and Director of Exceed Global, a leading professional services, recruitment and consulting firm.

Q: How can customer and employee engagement be improved by putting people at the centre of the customer experience?

A: There is definitely a correlation between the customer experience and employee engagement. Customer experience is very much leader-led and comes from the top, but it's delivered by all employees.

That's why it's important to have a strong people strategy in place for your business. The most successful companies are those where the senior leadership team are 100% behind both the customer and employee experience, and have a very good understanding that the two are interlinked.

Q: Should businesses try to better understand the impact of human emotion on the customer experience?



emotional state – for example, with a customer it's important to think about the following: Why they are contacting you? What are the emotional drivers behind the call?

If someone is ringing because their house burnt down and they need to speak to someone about insurance, that's obviously a very different call to someone who is excited because they've got pre-approval for a loan and have purchased their first home.

Q: How can businesses achieve more personalised interactions for their customers across the customer experience journey?

A: In order to provide a personalised interaction, the first thing you need to do is understand who your customer is, regardless of where they are in their journey and the channel they are using to interact with you.

To achieve this, you need to leverage the data you already have about that person and tailor the customer experience accordingly. It could be the number they're calling from, or what they've been doing when they were logged into your website before they clicked to chat with you.

Leverage whatever information you've got available to understand your customer – who they are and why they are calling – to improve the customer experience.

Q: To what extent should businesses try to replace the human customer experience with a digital one?

A: I'm not sure if we should be looking to replace so much as to augment or provide an alternative to the human customer experience. The key is to provide customers with a choice.

Sometimes digital platforms like chatbots work well, but at other times customers actually want to speak to a person and have that human interaction via online chat, over the phone or in person.

So, the challenge for organisations is to make a digital channel easy and straightforward for customers and to see digital as a separate channel, rather than a replacement for the human customer experience.

Q: What do you think will be the biggest influence on customer experience behaviours for businesses in the next two years?

A: The advance of digital technology and data will continue to be a big influencer upon the customer experience. We have a lot more data available about our customers and



personalise the customer experience, but also to eliminate white noise.

Q: What do you believe customers want from organisations in 2017?

A: What customers want is ease of doing business. They want organisations to make their lives less complicated, so any organisation that prioritises this is likely to keep customers happy and drive customer retention.

My advice to leaders is to remove barriers for the customer, allowing them to interact in a manner and channel that suits them rather than the business. Make sure information is consistent and easy for customers to understand, because they want to make informed decisions.

The other element of a great customer experience is to “wow” the customer. Show them that you really care – that you really understand who they are and the value they add to your business.

Overall, what customers are expecting in 2017 is for organisations to become more genuine and personal – and less transactional – in their customer service offerings.

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