Customer Experience Matters

It isn't often that you get a chance to see a whole new field emerge out of thin air, but that's what happened to me with customer experience, or CX as we call it these days. My involvement in the area started in 2001. At the time, I was working as a speech pathologist, using computer speech recognition to help people meet their communication needs. Then I met a guy at a party, and he offered me a job on the spot. His company was trying to help their clients do more business over the phone, and they needed people with skills like mine to make it happen.

Cost-cutting came before customers

At that stage, nobody talked about improving customer experience. All the emphasis was on reducing the cost of doing business by channelling customers toward call centres. My focus was on developing ways of making customers feel comfortable about interacting over the phone. I'd stress the importance of showing empathy, providing information in a meaningful way, paraphrasing what someone was saying.

I knew that people couldn't handle a lot of information presented verbally, especially over the phone, where they couldn't get extra clues from looking at a person's face or reading information presented to them. If a touch tone phone application offered a customer a menu when they called an organisation, it couldn't have 20 options (or five options with several sub-options), because people would get confused and choose the wrong options, or simply hang up.

Customers have the power of choice

Businesses must now operate in a highly contested global marketplace where customers demand a personalised experience across multiple channels. Customer experience has also evolved rapidly as digital technology has advanced. Today, customers have far more choice of channels and providers, loyalty is no longer a given – it must be won.

These are many of the reasons why I find customer experience fascinating because it makes sense of so many different issues and therefore creates opportunities. There's nothing like being able to work with organisations to improve their customer experience, develop their staff skills and strengthen their brands. It's a win-win situation, because improving performance in one area has positive impacts, not just to the bottom line.

We're now living in "the Age of the Customer". Customers have more choice than ever before, and they're using the power of online media to make their opinions heard. They want to be able to choose how they make contact – by landline, mobile or online – and they're much less inclined to be loyal unless organisations are prepared to treat them really well across the full range of channels.

That's where people like me come in.

Starting out on my own

After almost twelve years working in large organisations, in 2011 I decided to strike out on my own and establish a consultancy with a customer experience focus. I changed my profile on LinkedIn, and my phone started ringing before I even had a business card.

Organisations that take customer experience seriously have also found that they need to invest in their customer-facing staff. In what used to be known as call centres, now called contact centres, teams deal with customers across multiple channels – and sometimes across several at once. This requires staff who are adaptable and technologically savvy – the kind of people who are worth an employer's investment.

When I work at a client's site, I can tell if the organisation has a positive culture as soon as I walk in, you can sense the 'vibe'. The employees will be smiling and focused, and everything just flows. On the flip side, if there are problems with staff morale, you can bet that there will be problems with customer experience as well. There is usually a lot of unplanned absence and a high attrition rate too. All this destabilises a brand and has a negative impact on revenue.

About Your Guest Blogger: Isabella Villani has outlined her experience with a range of organisations in my book, *Good to Great CX – Customer Experience Strategy to Execution*(www.goodtogreatcx.com*)*. My idea in writing the book was to offer practical advice, case studies and templates to give organisations a head start in designing, implementing and sustaining a 'wow' customer experience. I wanted to develop a 'how-to' guide that leveraged industry data and insights to help organisations build new approaches to transform their CX from good to great.

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