THE EXPERIENCE EQUATION

Using customer experience to turn great brands into good business

Great customer experience (CX) has never been more essential to brand success. It's what sets today's best brands apart. Yet great CX is easier said than done in today's complex, disruptive world, where customers have more choice than ever before—and even higher expectations for exceptional experiences.

The most successful CX initiatives are the ones that solve for customer, brand, and business goals—and then actually get implemented. So how can brands get from identified needs to real results?

Here are four ways to get started.

By 2020, customer experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator.[1]

HOW'S IT DONE?

Brand is earned

At Sullivan, we believe that brand is earned one moment at a time. Today more than ever, a brand's success is measured by how well it delivers on its promise at each interaction across the customer experience. True brand value is created when that experience translates into business outcomes like increased revenue and customer acquisition and retention.

1.
create a customer-centric culture

The first step to creating a great experience for your customers actually doesn't involve the customer at all—it starts internally.

The key is fostering customer-centricity as a culture and a way of doing business, not just a project.

That means aligning executives, business groups, and employees around a common goal, the customer. This can be challenging for companies siloed into separate teams that control different parts of the experience. But that also makes it all the more important. After all, customers don't see a brand's internal structure. They just want a great experience.

Becoming customer-centric doesn't happen overnight. But brands can begin by taking manageable steps, over time, so everyone in the organization is working in the best interest of customers. How do you make that happen? Involve stakeholders early and often in your CX initiatives.

Customer-centric companies are 60% more profitable than companies that are not focused on the customer.[2]

HOW'S IT DONE?

Involve stakeholders

For Teach for America, a national nonprofit looking to align 50+ regional branches around a single brand promise and CX vision, we involved executive stakeholders from across the organization early and often. We included them in insight-gathering, needs assessment, planning sessions—and mapping the customer journey (see page 5). Getting them invested in the process and the results paved the way for their endorsement of our CX recommendations and, later, for establishing a dedicated, organization-wide CX steering committee.
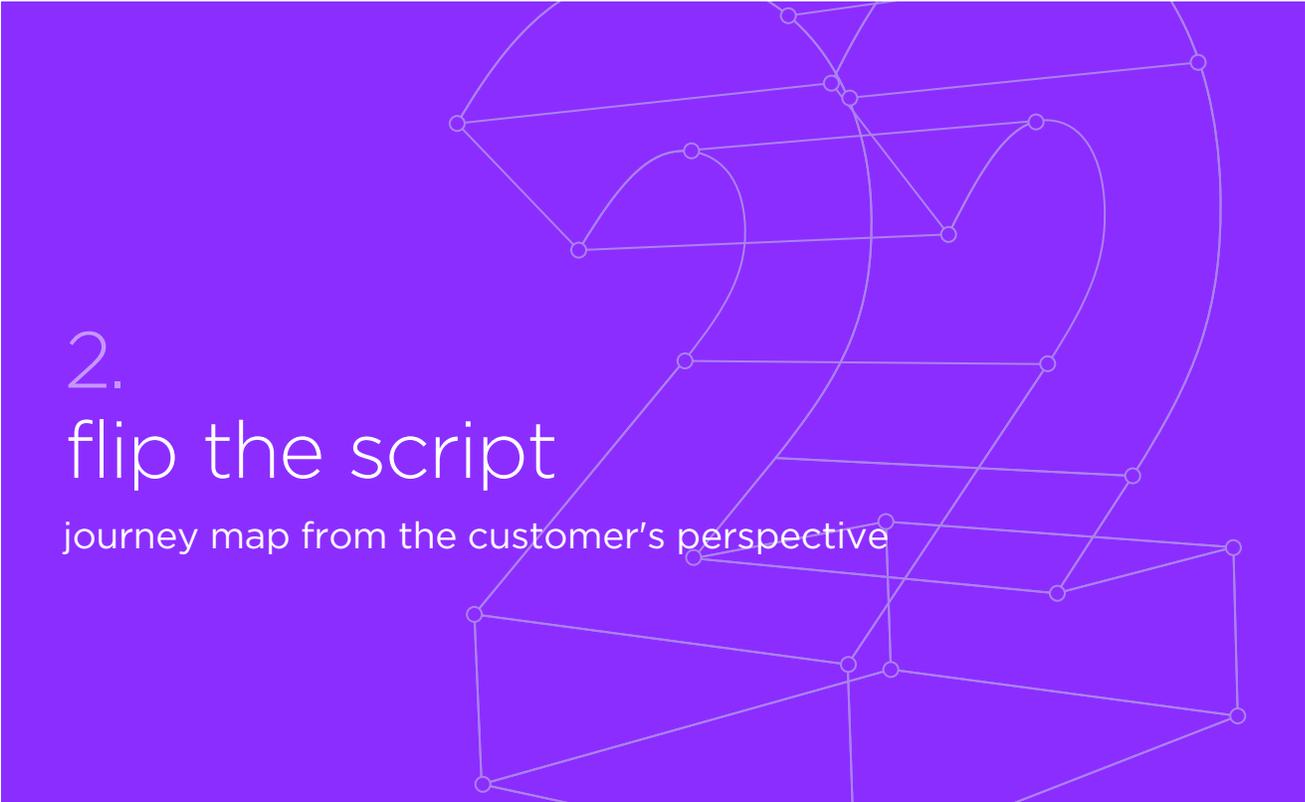
2.

flip the script

journey map from the customer's perspective

While many organizations use the marketing or sales funnel as an underlying model, brands can uncover new opportunities when they map the journey according to the customer's perspective. Think of this as insurance against finding the right solution to the wrong problem. For a complete perspective, it's important to capture customer actions, mindset, and context. While actions speak volumes, the psychological dimension of the customer journey is critical, too.

Make sure to consider different types of interactions a customer has with your brand: marketing communications, products, employees, and even processes. You'll soon build a 360° view with gaps, pain points, and milestones in the experience that can benefit from your brand's attention. Mapping the journey from the customer perspective is the best way to reveal unknown behaviors, challenges, and opportunities that impact the customer, brand, and business.

Step into the customer's shoes

A Fortune 500 financial institution whose brand promised clarity and confidence had an attrition problem with their new digital platform. They thought the solution was a series of emails during onboarding. By focusing our journey map on this stage (see page 5), we revealed that customers were already being bombarded by 17 communications from 3 different teams. Our solution was to streamline communications and improve the initial platform experience to deliver on the brand promise. The result? 58% fewer phone calls and 50% fewer emails from customers seeking support.

88% of marketers say their growth depends on personalizing the customer's experience and understanding the customer's journey.[3]

customer journey maps:
two models

THE PAYOFF TO INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS

When mapping the customer journey for **Teach for America**, we involved executive stakeholders from across the organization.

Getting them invested in the process and the results paved the way for their endorsement of our CX recommendations, which included future-state interactions, shown here.
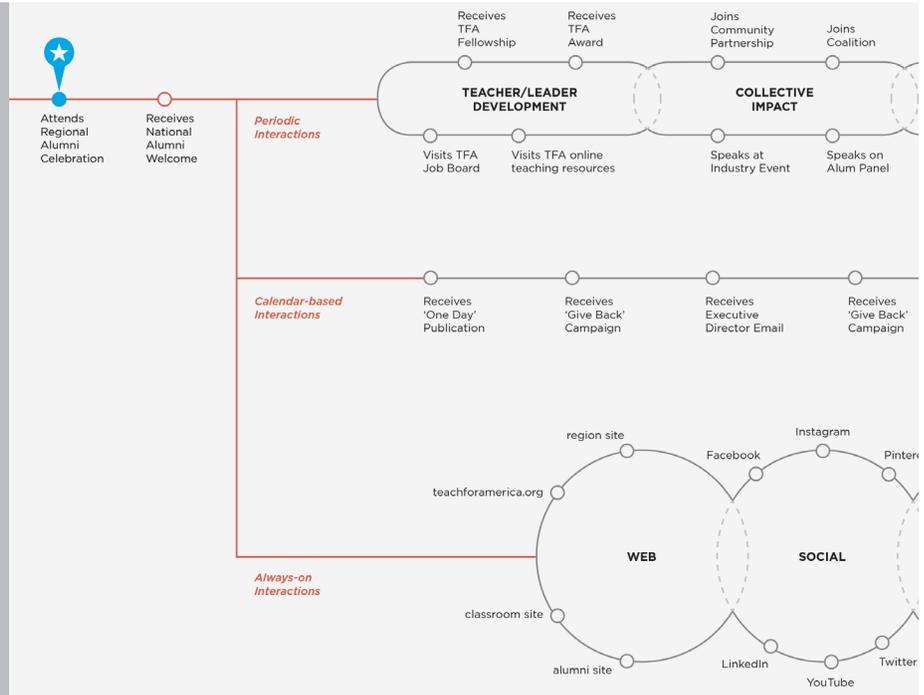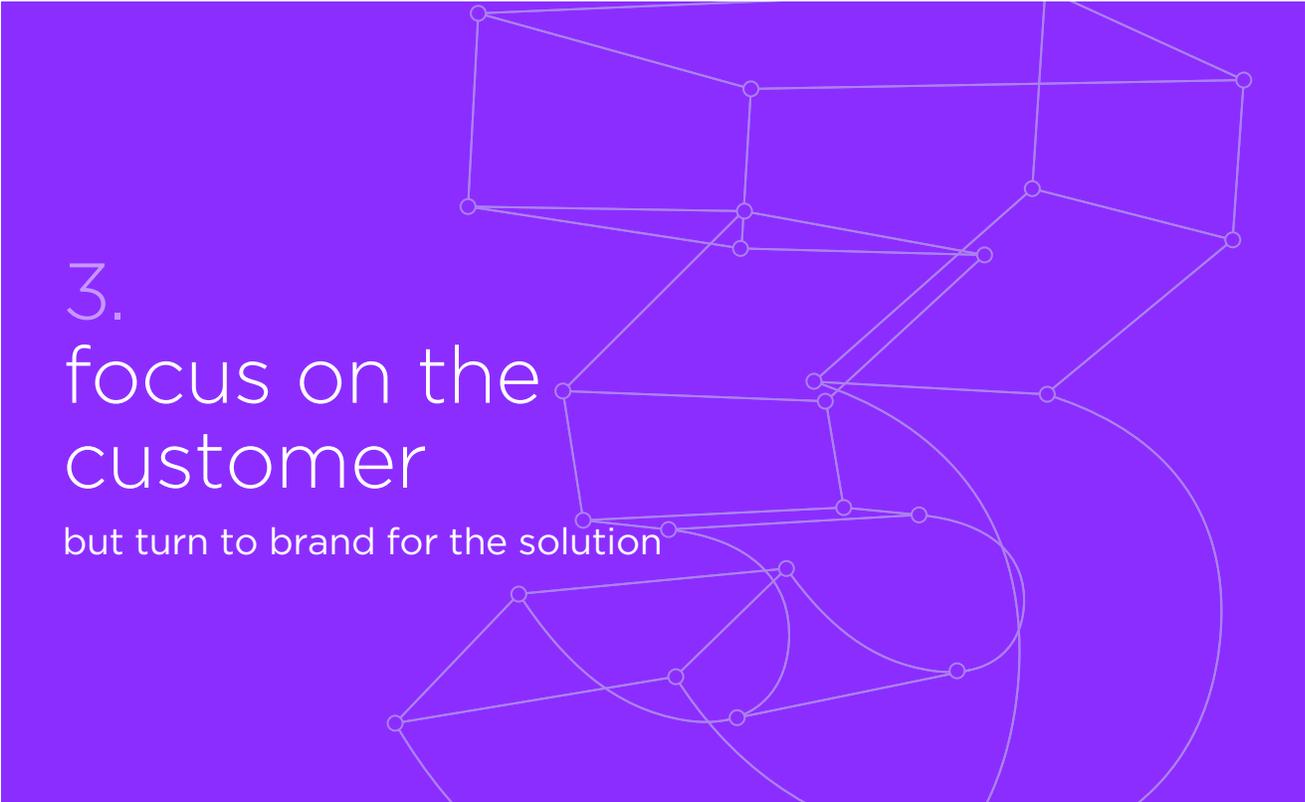

OPTIMIZING THE ONBOARDING JOURNEY

By mapping the onboarding journey for **a Fortune 500**, we uncovered what was happening from the customer's perspective, as well as with operations, marketing, and communications.

This helped reveal why customers were overwhelmed—and were not using the new digital platform.
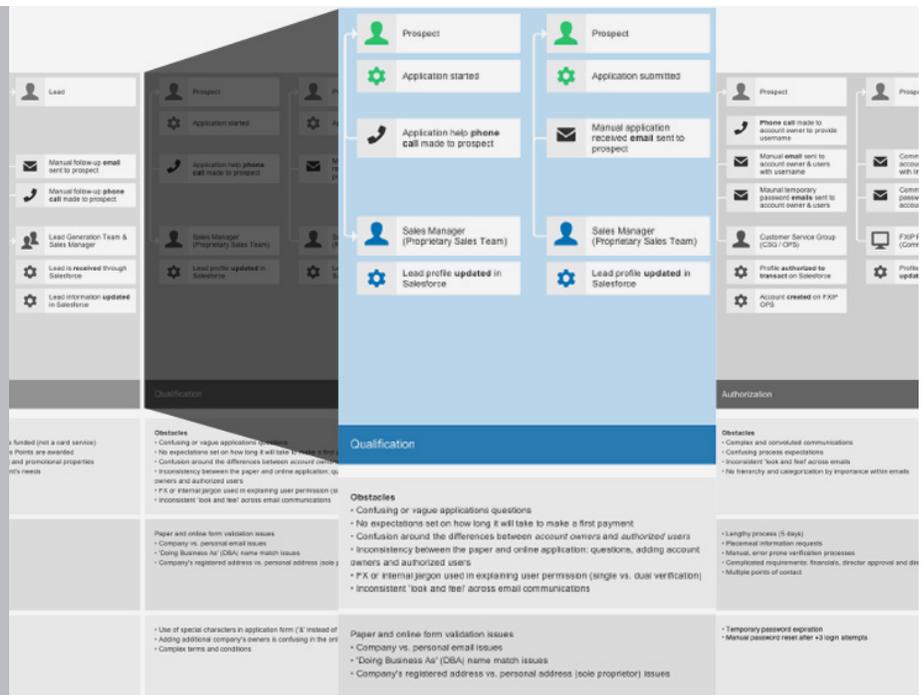
3.
focus on the customer
but turn to brand for the solution

Great CX isn't just about giving your customer the best possible experience. It's about doing so in a way that is authentic to your brand and reinforces its uniqueness. And if a brand is built piece by piece over every customer interaction, no moment is too small to create a differentiated experience.

With so many moments to consider, that can be easier said than done. But let your brand promise lead the way, and follow suit with consistent visual and verbal expression.

Keep this in mind when making improvements to the experience. Fixing the functional and tech issues is important—but make sure that when you do, you also deliver on your core brand promise.

89% of customers say they have switched brands because of a bad experience.[4]

Deliver on the brand promise

For a fintech company struggling to compete for top-tier tech talent, we dug deep into the candidate journey and found that campus recruiting wasn't attracting premier candidates—or living up to the brand. We focused on creating a differentiated on-campus career fair experience. From an interactive iPad quiz that captured contact information to an immersive virtual reality (VR) experience explaining the company's brand story, we signaled their commitment to cutting-edge tech. The result? A 45% increase in applications, unprecedented social media buzz, and six-digit cost savings from reducing printed materials.
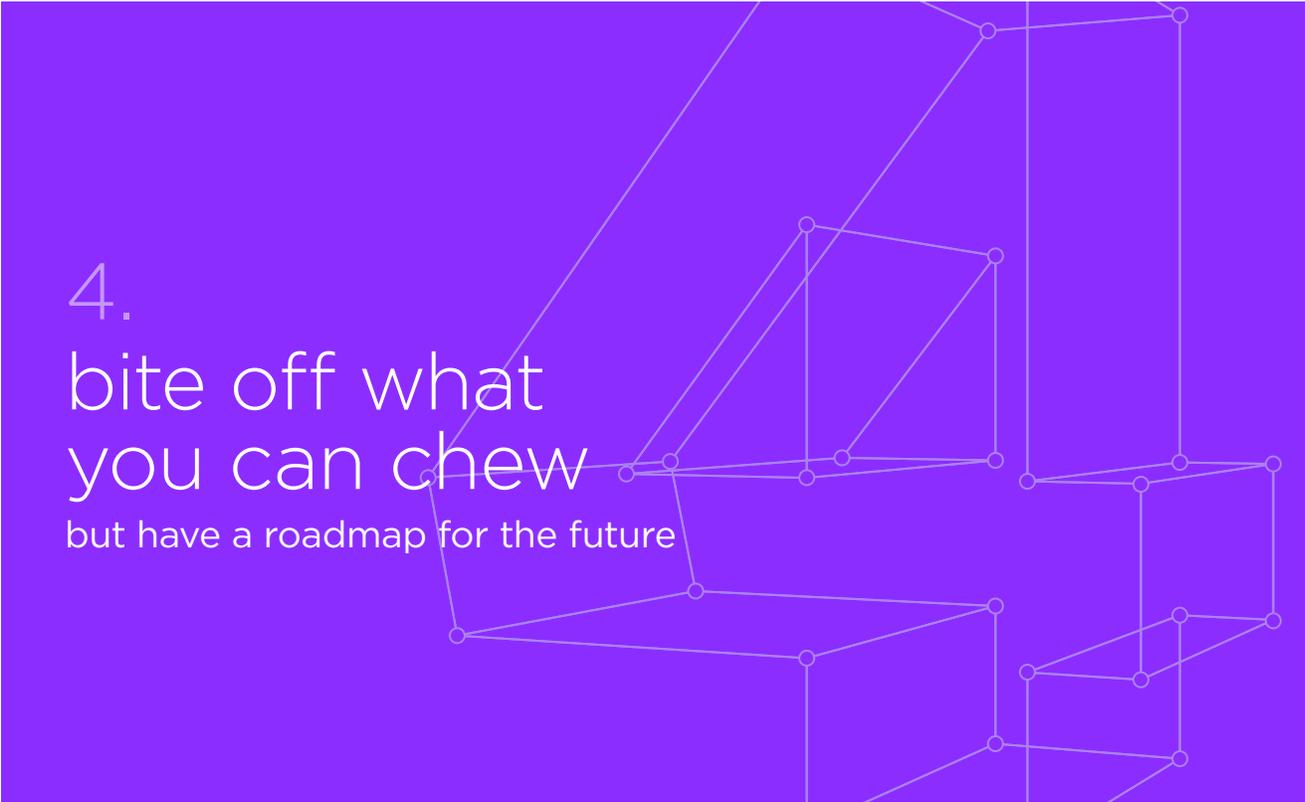
4.
bite off what you can chew
but have a roadmap for the future

The most successful CX initiatives are the ones that get implemented. So how do brands decide where to begin? Start with a strategic plan. Identify areas of opportunity and examine how these intersect with brand and business goals. Next, develop recommendations and prioritize.

It can be tempting to only go after the low-hanging fruit at first. But take a step back and assess for the short and long term. Weigh cost, ease of implementation, team capacity, and impact. Then create a roadmap for tackling what makes sense for your team and organization, now and in the future.

Bottom line, you don't have to solve the entire experience at once. By focusing on one stage of the journey, one product, or one customer segment to start, it becomes easier to make decisions, pilot change, and apply solutions to other parts of the experience. Keep in mind, CX strategy is part art, part science. And it's not one initiative—it's a way of doing business.

HOW'S IT DONE?

Create a strategic roadmap
An international insurance company was looking to strengthen their relationship with broker intermediaries to drive sales. After mapping broker and consumer journeys to identify opportunities, we considered brand goals and organizational initiatives already underway. We included all recommendations in our strategic plan, so when improvements with a heavier technology or operational lift were earmarked for later, they were not forgotten. The result? A shortlist of priority marketing communications, like broker and end-consumer fact sheets, that was created and put into action right away.

91% of organizations say they aspire to be among the customer experience leaders in their industry, yet only 20% consider their initiatives to be advanced.[5]
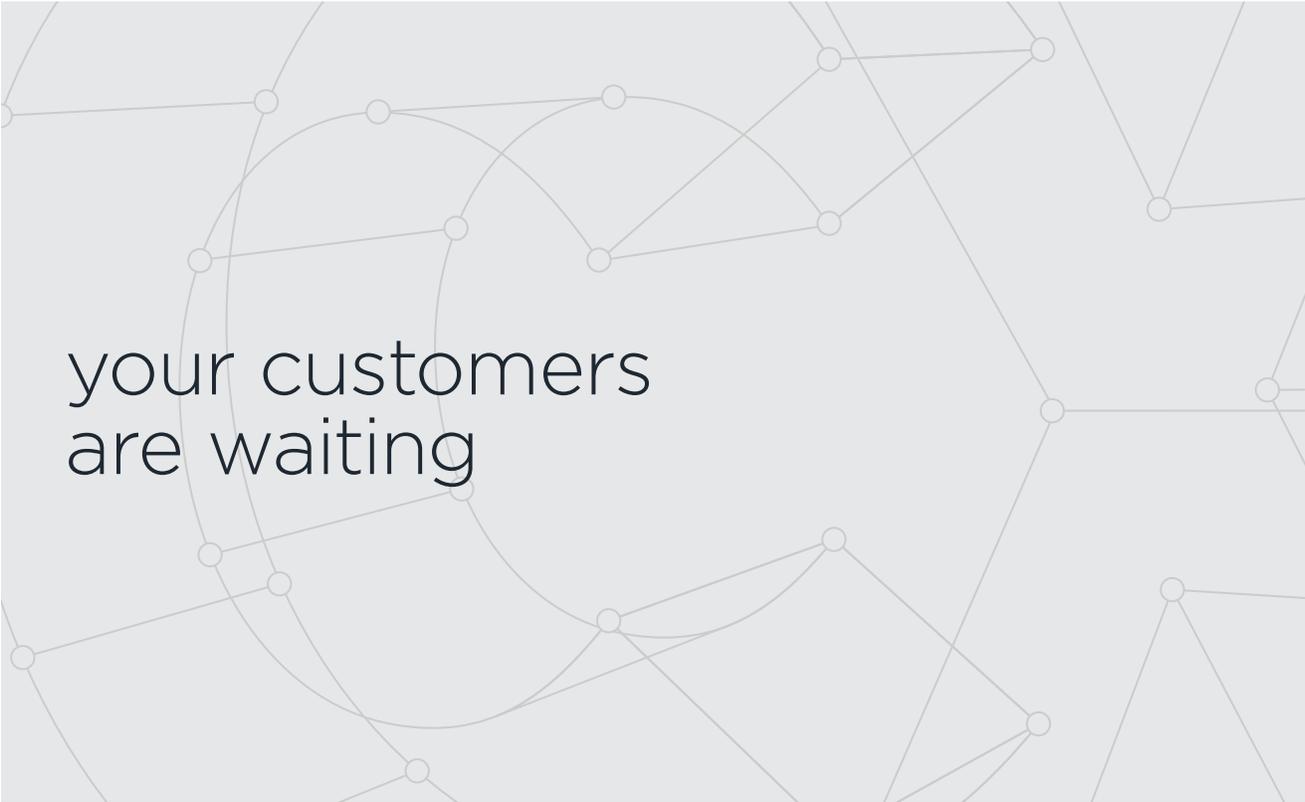
your customers
are waiting

Whether you're considering your first CX initiative or spearheading an organization-wide transformation, great customer experience is essential to brand and business success.

The equation is simple. Companies grow when they are able to create a great customer experience that also benefits the business—and when they can do so in a memorable and differentiated way that delivers on their core brand promise.

86% of consumers are willing to pay more for a better customer experience.[6]

Footnotes:
1. Customers 2020. Walker: 2013.
2. Customer-centricity: Embedding it into your organisation's DNA. Deloitte: 2014.
3. Listening to the Customer: 7 Key Customer Experience Trends. IBM and Econsultancy: 2015.
4. 2011 Customer Experience Impact (CEI) Report. Oracle Corporation: 2012.
5. Global Insights on Succeeding in the Customer Experience Era. Oracle Corporation: 2013.
6. 2011 Customer Experience Impact (CEI) Report. Oracle Corporation: 2012.

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ABOUT SULLIVAN

Sullivan is an independent brand engagement firm. We build brands and connect them to their audiences at key moments in the customer experience through integrated marketing programs and digital experiences.

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